

Developing the Silver Economy and Related Government Resources for Seniors

A Position Paper

Issued on September 19, 2022 by

[Global Network of Associations & Networks: Retirees Developing Silver Economy](#)

KEY WORDS:

longevity; aging population; active aging; seniors' use of eTechnologies, e-services; seniors 55+ eServices Guide; lifelong learning; digital literacy; e-learning; age-friendliness; senior centricity; minister of seniors; seniors' council; silver economy.

PROPOSED NETWORK

The precarious rights of senior citizens, especially those who are highly educated and who are expected to counsel and guide the younger generations, has stimulated the creation internationally of advocacy associations and opinion leader groups. The strength of these groups, however, varies from country to country. In some countries, they are supported and are the focus of intense interest; in others, they are practically ignored. For this is reason we believe that the creation of a network of all these associations is essential. The proposed network would act as a support for the already-existing policies of the United Nations' High Commission for Human Rights, of independent experts, and of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People. All three have long ago recommended the creation of a recognized instrument for uniting presently scattered efforts. The proposed network, therefore, will seek to promote the international exchange of relevant expertise, and it will reinforce the commitments and actions that single countries are currently taking to meet these objectives. For example, informative public events can be organised to promote particular support initiatives and to provide an opportunity for new members of the network to be presented. The network will promote health for senior citizens, disease prevention, senior mobility, safe free time for seniors, alimentary education, protection against new risks and dangers, as well as equity in the services necessary for seniors to adopt new information and communication technologies.

In the case of retired academic members, the network will promote equality with respect to continuing use of digital technologies (particularly email), continuing access to research libraries, and the guaranteed ability for seniors to fund their own research programs and to deliver free seminars.

THE SILVER ECONOMY

The concept of the “silver economy” covers a host of different but interlinked efforts. Together these can improve the quality of the lives of seniors, particularly the levels of their inclusion in society and their involvement in economic activity. These objectives can be met through the development of innovative policies, products, and services for meeting the needs of seniors. This, in turn, will bring more growth and jobs for the overall economy.

The silver economy concept seeks to look holistically at ageing and the opportunities it presents with respect to the future direction of a broad range of policies such as those on the built environment, 50+ employment, life-long learning, and preventive health care. Moreover, it seeks to embrace new technologies (e.g. health-monitoring, smart homes, driverless vehicles, care robots) in order to use them to lower the costs of ageing and to improve the lives of older citizens while, at the same time, boosting the economy.

The first paper of European Commission on the silver economy highlights the importance of this concept. Due to increasing longevity and low birth rates, the population of the EU is significantly ageing. The document, for example, predicts that EU will pass from in 2013 having four working age adults (15-64 years of age) for every person aged over 65 years to just two working age adults for each senior by 2060. Another reported statistic reveals the dramatic datum of one baby born for every five living seniors. Nevertheless, severe challenges often present unique opportunities. Weaknesses can be turned into strengths by reinforcing social networks and structure. First, there is the size of the silver economy. Some have calculated that if the community of adults over 50 were a state, the corresponding economy would be the third largest in the world, after the United States and China but ahead of Japan, Germany, and Great Britain. Second, the silver economy does not refer to a single segment of the national market but rather to an economy cutting across several major segments. Indeed, the contributions of the senior population impact every market and industry--including housing, transport, the food industry, insurance, robotics, health care, communication (including the internet), sports, leisure, and travel. The importance of this segment of the population must also be calculated by means of the size of its resources. In Italy, for example, a Confindustria report shows that citizens over the age of 75 now retain language skills and memory far better than past cohorts of the same age. As a result, they generally live in their own homes; have satisfying economic resources; spend free time enjoying holidays, hobbies and cultural events; and practice sports. Thus, they require goods and services and continue to circulate their money.

However, to ensure that their contributions continue as long as possible, society must make more investments in preventive care rather than solely in the treatment of disease. Society must also invest in sustainable mobility tools and equipment. Barriers to participation in social activities must be removed, and preferential access ways and safe delivery sites for food must be provided. Some of the needs of seniors can be addressed through technology. For instance, by means of the Internet of Things, older people can continue to live in their homes while their health is being monitored through a variety of connected sensors. Other possibilities include mobile health applications that assist with tracking the vital signs of seniors, new ICT products such as care robotics, and new food products developed to address the nutritional needs of older adults.

THE MINISTRY OF SENIORS

To meet the needs of the seniors' growing share of the population will require changes in some social and economic structures as well as in governmental organization. The silver economy will not come into being by itself. That is why we are proposing the establishment of a Minister of Seniors in every country in the network to help lead and organize change.

So far, only seven countries (Australia, Canada, Ireland, Malta, New Zealand, Scotland, Wales) have such a minister. The Minister of Seniors is the primary person responsible for creating and implementing policies that guarantee specific senior services, such as health and safety protections. In addition, he or she will represent seniors as a member of the Cabinet so that other ministers will be reminded to consider the specific needs of the elderly as they create and implement policies for their own ministries—ministries having the responsibility for areas such as health, social affairs, industry, environment, education, and transportation. In sum, seniors must have an equal voice at the table of government ministers.

The Minister of Seniors is specially tasked to support and promote the Silver Economy. He or she must look holistically at the ageing of the population and also at the opportunities and challenges it presents. One such challenge, for example, will be the establishment of permanent educational initiatives, which will ensure that elderly citizens make responsible choices on referendums and petitions, such as those affecting new available technologies and new sectors of market, as well as those regarding the percentage of the Gross Domestic Product dedicated to the Silver Economy. Other important issues for seniors will be those affecting preventative health initiatives and those impacting disability services.

THE SENIORS' COUNCIL

For the coordination of governmental activities at national and local levels related to the Silver Economy, an intergovernmental body (a *seniors' forum*) will also be needed to share information, discuss new and emerging issues related to seniors, and work collaboratively on key projects.

The Seniors Council is an advisory and consultative body attached to the Minister of Seniors or to the Parliament. Its goal is to support more participatory decision-making. At the local level, the council can support better informed local decision-making by helping to identify local needs, which will, in turn, contribute to a better allocation of scarce resources.

The main objectives of the Seniors Council are: the determination of the specific needs of senior citizens; promoting and implementing activities and projects conceived for the welfare of seniors; advising the government on matters relating to the welfare of seniors; maintaining effective governmental communication with seniors; and establishing and maintaining contacts with organizations engaged in similar activities in the country.

The influence of Senior Councils is likely to grow over the coming years, given the ageing of the population and the increasing importance of older citizens in the electorate. The councils are an organizational tool for providing guidelines for the development of the silver economy in accordance with the needs and wishes of seniors. In short, they promote senior- centricity.

THE SIGNATORIES UNDERTAKE TO DO THE FOLLOWING IN THEIR OWN ENVIRONMENT:

- Disseminate this position paper among relevant local organizations.
- Participate in campaigns that contribute to the realization of our ideas and proposals.
- Encourage and engage in cross-border eCollaboration.
- Promote events that support to the activities of the Network as well as the growth of the number of the networked groups.
- Publish findings on actions to implement these ideas and suggest new actions based on the experience gained.