

MERI – Mapping existing research and identifying knowledge gaps concerning the situation of older women in Europe



SUMMARY OF THE EUROPEAN SYNTHESIS REPORT

MERI objectives

A spectacular and unprecedented development in life expectancy has occurred over the last century, particularly for women, with approximately every fifth person in Europe now being a woman aged 50 years or more. They constitute 70 million of the 127.8 million people over 50 years of age in the 12 member states participating in the MERI project and make up 55% of this population. It is a remarkably heterogeneous category of women and yet research has indicated that scientific studies and official statistics tend to neglect them as an independent target group.¹ The MERI project is a response to demands made by scientists, representatives of associations and national governments attending a European conference on 'Equal Opportunities for Older Women' in 2001 with its main objective being to increase knowledge about the living conditions and problems of older women and thus improve the empirical basis for: social and public policy and work by national and European associations; encouraging future research work on older women while also raising the general public's awareness about the situation of older women.

The analysis method used was mapping existing knowledge and identifying 'blind spots' in the research landscape. The research areas and themes examined included: health, education and qualifications, paid and unpaid work, income, social inclusion, violence and interest representation, while also respecting issues of ethnicity. A further step was the collation and analysis of publicly accessible data from national statistics offices examining the degree of differentiation by age and gender. These results were presented in a European seminar and discussed with representatives of the European Commission, national governments as well as relevant European and national umbrella associations. The project findings were made accessible to the general public on websites concerned with the exchange of information on issues related to older women: www.sophia-net.org and www.own-europe.org.

Definition and Methods

For the purposes of this project 'older women' were defined as those aged 50+, thus allowing for the inclusion of research and data on labour market issues and permitting an understanding of the rapid social changes occurring in the different generations of older women.

National, regional and local level NGOs were consulted to obtain a preliminary overview on their interest and levels of awareness concerning older women and ensure the best possible

1 See Stiehr, Karin; Huth, Susanne (ed.): *Webwitches and other older women*, www.sophia-net.org: Exchanging information and discussing experience on the Internet, Findings of a project in Austria, France and Germany, Verlag Peter Wiehl, Stuttgart, Marburg, Erfurt 2001.

practical use of the project outcomes. Relevant international organisations including the European Forum on Population Ageing Research, Older Women's Network (OWN Europe), AGE Platform, EURAG, FERPA and the UN Sub-Committee on Older Women were also consulted.

Research studies undertaken 1993-2002 were collated at national level, using an agreed list of themes and sub-themes considered relevant. Where no research on older women existed, surveys on older persons in general were examined as to their relevance to the living conditions of older women. Empirical studies were analysed in detail, while purely theoretical papers were noted but not included in the databases. Local surveys were only used if no research at a more general level existed.

Subsequently, analysis was undertaken at national level of publicly available data on the situation of older women available in *official statistics*, using the same list of themes and sub-themes, and classifying results within these. Only recent statistics were of interest and there were no resources to work on time series. Difficulties with official data ranged from their unavailability to their being published by age but not gender or alternatively, gender without adequate age group differentiation. In the best case data were available by gender and differentiated in 10-year groupings, or better still in 5-year groups. Data availability differed considerably amongst the participating countries and since national data are usually more current than European statistics, and national statistical offices are the addressees for the findings on the availability and potential improvements of data concerning the living conditions of older women, they were the main reference. Eurostat sources were used centrally for basic demographic data.

The analysis of studies complemented by findings from official statistical sources formed the basis for *national articles* on the living conditions of older women in the participating countries.

An analysis at European level showed that approximately one third of all research findings concerned the areas of 'Health' or 'Social integration'; every tenth finding related to the area of 'Work' or 'Material situation' while of minor importance overall were the areas 'Interest representation' (4% of all findings), 'Education' (3%) and 'Crime and abuse' (2%).

Health

Research has tended to be technical, written for specialists and published in scientific journals while more qualitative approaches looking at the individual experiences of older women in terms of their health and well-being are seldom used, despite political rhetoric that people should become active and equal partners in their own health management. Holistic approaches in health research are still in their initial stages in most of the European countries. The most encouraging results in this respect originate from Finland and Sweden, where social science or gender approaches to older women's health in medical research is becoming more acknowledged.

From a European comparative perspective, outstanding results in the publication of *official statistics* are available for Finland, France, Portugal and Sweden. Deficits are apparent for Belgium, Germany, Italy, Spain and Greece. The theme 'Health' was one of the best covered areas, especially for sub-themes concerned with 'General health aspects', 'Physical disorders and disabilities' and 'Mental disorders and disabilities'. Information on 'Medical treatment and health care', 'Care in institutions' and 'Healthy lifestyles' was also assessed as useful though there were deficits for published statistics in the realm of 'Care at home'.

Indicative Findings. As with other issues, health is strongly related to factors such as the level of education, social class, income, status of co-habitation, urbanisation and ethnicity, determinants often not taken into account in existing studies. Thus in Finland, social class was a stronger determinant than urban settlement and marital status, as regards functional disability and health, and was even more important for women.

Though women enjoy a longer life they also suffer more than men from incapacitating illnesses and disability and are thus more dependent, and if disabled, more likely to live alone than older disabled men. In almost all MERI countries older women had generalised symptoms relating to pain, arthritis, visual impairments as well as osteoporosis and were more affected by disorders caused by injuries and falls. Thus there are reasons for older women's self-perception of health as being worse than that of older men's across all MERI countries.

Data suggests that older women report more psychological symptoms than men. Finnish and Swedish research reveals that burn-out symptoms are significantly higher in the age group of younger old women than in all other age groups of women and men. There are strong indications, though no research is available in Spain, Portugal and Greece, that older women across Europe are more likely to suffer from depression than older men. Finnish research concluded that male gender, being married, a high level of education and a good financial situation were protective against depression. In other countries, too, morbidity showed a clear correlation with frequent depressive symptoms as did loneliness and a lack of physical exercise - risk factors with a high prevalence in older women. Despite this, available data shows they are much less likely to commit suicide than older men. The higher prevalence of dementia in older women can be explained by their higher percentage in the very old population. Findings also show that men hide dementia symptoms better than women. More research seems to be needed in this field.

In all MERI countries, older women have more medical consultations and medical treatment than older men while there is some indication they are prescribed more medicine, particularly psychotropic medicine. In most of the MERI countries there was evidence that the medical treatment of menopause symptoms increased in recent decades; in some of the countries, however, this development has peaked.

With the exception of the UK and Germany, older women spend fewer nights in hospital than older men, which is surprising given their higher number in the population and their higher degree of morbidity, and needs further investigation. Worse access of older women than men to technical support equipment because of their worse financial situation was reported in France and Italy. For the UK, the Netherlands and Greece, older women from ethnic groups and other vulnerable older women appear to be at risk of worse medical treatment.

Due to the higher life expectancy of women and their lower average age at marriage, older men in need of care are more likely to be cared for by their spouses than vice versa. However, there are findings, too, against wide-spread stereotypes. In Sweden, older husbands spend more time caring for their wives than older wives care for their husbands. In the UK, women and men aged 50+ are equally likely to look after their spouses, but more women than men before the age of 70 care for their spouses with the pattern reversing after the age 70. Family members, disproportionately daughters and daughters-in-law, are an important source of support and care for older women all over Europe. However, many old women in need of care live alone and at some distance from their children. A European comparative study of older people receiving care comes to the conclusion that in southern European countries older women are given more care at home than older men though both sexes receive more care at home than in northern European countries.

This background helps explain why in countries for which data is available, domiciliary support services are used more frequently by older women than men. It also explains why the population in residential care is disproportionately female, very old, single or widowed across all MERI countries, with the exception of Greece where neither studies nor statistics on this issue exist. There are research indications that old women show a higher resistance than old men to giving up their independence and living in a residential home.

In the majority of MERI countries, older women are very aware of the issue of health and pay more attention to it than older men, e.g. in their consumption patterns of alcohol and cigarettes and healthy nutrition. In a European comparative perspective obesity is no more common among older women than men. Nevertheless, older men more often take part in physi-

cal activities and sport, though the number of older women doing physical exercise is increasing in many countries. In Finland widowed older women do more physical exercise than women of the same age living in a partnership. Generally, self-rated meaningfulness of life and better subjective health are also significantly related to regular and intensive physical exercise. Physical activity at a younger age is also strongly connected to maintaining a high level of physical activity in old age regardless of chronic conditions.

Education

The education of older women is rarely *researched*, again surprising since references to the importance of education for work and the material situation of older women is often stressed. The level of education of men and women is decisive in determining their status in the labour market, their chances for professional careers, their income from gainful employment and their financial situation in old age. In addition, education influences to a strong degree various additional life spheres, among others, participation in public life and representation of interests.

Aspects of the 'General Education' of older women are *statistically* well covered though the themes of 'Professional and vocational training' and 'Life-long learning' suffer from a severe lack of information in many countries.

For all sub-themes in the realm of education, examples of good practice in the publication of official statistics are found in Finland and Sweden.

Indicative Findings. Older people in general have a significantly lower education level than younger age groups, with older women being disproportionately disadvantaged, e.g. in the Netherlands, almost four in ten older women have only completed primary education. Illiteracy is also still to be found amongst older women in some Mediterranean countries, e.g. approximately two thirds of older women in Portugal have not finished elementary school, and older women are also disadvantaged in Spain and Greece. The very rare studies on older women from immigrant ethnic minorities, especially of non-European origin and non-industrialised countries, show that they also have very low levels of education. However education levels are improving; in 20 years more than two in ten older Dutch women will have a higher education background, and three in ten older men. The same tendency is shown by studies and surveys in most of the other countries.

The limited information available shows older employees are offered or make less use of professional and vocational training. The traditional investment in younger age groups seems still to be prevalent in most of the countries concerned. However, in the more northern countries like Finland, Sweden and the UK, older female employees' participation rate in available training is higher than that of older male employees, the reverse being true for Spain, Portugal and Greece. Where data is available, life long learning activities in Third Age Universities and similar institutions appears to be of special interest to older women including countries like Spain and Portugal.

The risk of a digital divide appears to be affected by low education and age combined with gender. Thus the ownership of mobile phones and computers as well as the use of the Internet are lowest amongst older women.

Work

Research on the issue of work and older women varies between European countries: In Germany, the UK and Spain, work is a thematic focus that examines not older women's employment but factors causing discontinuances in their employment career, including education and care work. The latter, characterised by great strains and low social recognition, often affects access to pensions and adequate incomes later in life. Being qualified and in continuous employment is regarded to be the best provision for old age both materially and psycho-

socially. The employment of older workers, an issue in the 1990s in the Netherlands, often misses a gender perspective.

In most MERI countries, older women's lower employment rate compared to older men's corresponds with a higher unemployment and non-activity rate, though this situation is changing for women currently entering the Third Age with an increase in their labour market participation rate in past years. The entry of better-educated older women in the future into the employment market may be one way of confronting problems arising from expected labour shortages.

Paid work, namely 'Labour market participation' and 'Working areas and working conditions', are all well represented in published *official statistics* though age categories are often not sufficiently differentiated to describe the situation of women in their later years of gainful employment. Official data on 'Attitudes towards older workers' are not available in most countries and there are deficits in published data on the situation of older women for the categories 'Exit from the labour market', 'Unpaid work in the family' and 'Unpaid work in social networks'. Publication practices in Austria, Italy and the Netherlands should be mentioned as providing good examples of statistics on informal labour. Little is known about the labour market participation patterns of older migrant women, though it is known that in Austria the labour market participation rate of older migrant women is higher than of older domestic women, while these rates differ only insignificantly in Germany.

Indicative Findings. Working areas and conditions for older women and attitudes towards older workers are often inadequately covered by research and official statistics. The limited findings from the MERI countries suggest that older women: are concentrated in typically female professions, are underrepresented in supervisory and intermediate positions; are more likely to work or have been working in low-paid jobs and/or part-time; have a higher probability of health risks or disability caused by poor working conditions, and are often restricted in their career development by care obligations within their families. Spanish research on women in universities showed that only one out of ten professors is a woman, amongst whom only one third were women of 50 years and over. Dutch studies on the career development of older workers found overall that women and ethnic minorities were at the highest risk of working in low paid jobs. Though employment in agriculture has declined, the proportion of older women in it has risen in Portugal and Greece. The founding of one's own enterprise can represent special strength but can also be a strategy for the self-creation of a working place when alternatives are lacking; thus for Germany, Italy and Greece, older women were more likely to be self-employed than younger women.

Attitudes towards older workers is a research issue in some countries; e.g. in Finland, women in the age group 55+ have the most experience of age discrimination involving poorer career and training possibilities, insufficient information and negative attitudes from other workers. Ageing women suffer from sex discrimination, e.g. in Austria, negative attitudes towards older female employees emerge since they often feel 'expected' to take early retirement because of their supposed ability to easily switch roles and become housewives or pensioners. Research in Sweden and the UK confirms that older women more often experience gender discrimination at their workplace than older men.

In all countries, the regular pension age has a decisive influence on exit from the labour market, as do other factors, including national schemes for early retirement or the accessibility of invalidity benefits. Data suggests that overall, women leave the labour market earlier than men. Women are more affected by a time gap between the end of professional life and the start of retirement with retirement more often than men's being preceded by periods of unemployment, early retirement or professional inactivity. Health problems and care obligations are other reasons for the more frequent early retirement of older women. The often-unfavourable working conditions of older women may also explain why older women in some countries feel less negative about their exit from the labour market.

For most countries, research leaves no doubt that older women spend more time than older men doing unpaid work in the family, including care giving for dependent persons. Yet in Finland domestic work declined most amongst women aged 45-54 and increased most among men in the oldest age group, an indication that the number of older women able or willing to care for children and older people will decline in the future in many member states with increasing labour market participation.

There is no research or official statistics on older women's involvement in unpaid work in social networks.

Material situation

The most frequent *research* topic is the income of older women and the effect of national social security systems on their material situation. Poverty remains an important issue for sections of older women. Consumer behaviour was rarely researched nor the financial support that older women give to family members.

'Sources and levels of income' as well as 'Social protection systems' effecting older women are all well covered issues in published *official statistics*. Deficits in published information are found in the 'Consumption of goods and services' and 'Housing conditions and equipment' mostly because the respective statistics are household surveys which in general give poor information on individuals. A complete lack of data – or at least gendered data – was stated across all countries for 'Financial support given to family members'. Published data on income is presented in detail in France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Sweden. Consumption issues are well covered in Finland and Sweden. Data on housing conditions and equipment of older women are found in the official statistics of Finland, Italy and Sweden.

Indicative Findings. The material situation of older people in Europe is strongly related to: gender, age, marital status, levels of previous salary, previous profession, duration of professional career and national pension schemes. Sections of the social protection systems in Europe (including welfare schemes and invalidity pensions) have negative effects on the material situation of older women – a statement for which there is evidence with a few national exceptions. The existence or non-existence of a universal basic pension system is found to play a crucial role in income, especially for older women.

Although the income of older people was observed to have increased in the last years (with cohorts of better-off women being expected to enter the age group 50+ in the next decade), at present the proportion of older women at risk of continuous poverty is still larger than that of older men. A general finding for all MERI countries is that older women have a much lower income than older men, a finding that is particularly the case for older women from ethnic minorities. The risk of poverty for older women is stronger in the southern countries and associated with the oldest age groups.

Nevertheless there are indications that the consumption patterns of younger and older people are becoming similar. In 1994, Finnish women aged 45+ spent more money on clothes, shoes, and spare time hobbies than earlier. Data on patterns of consumption of women 64+ living in one-person households show, with a few national exceptions, that compared to men of their age they spend less money on alcoholic beverages, tobacco, audio-visual and data processing equipment, recreational and cultural services, hotels, cafés and restaurants; and more money on medical products and appliances, and recreational equipment and items.

More older women than older men live in low-standard and inadequately equipped housing. Where the majority of older women are house owners, as in the UK, Spain and Greece, this helps their financial situation. In other countries with relevant data, e.g. Germany, the Netherlands and Austria, rental costs significantly burden the income of older female tenants living alone. The standard of housing tends to be lower for older women in most of the MERI countries with adequate data, e.g. 27% of older women residing in Vienna do not have their own bathroom as opposed to 18% of older men.

More research from a gender perspective is needed on the financial support given between family members and older women. In Portugal, research on exchanges between parents and adult children concluded that a significant section of people over 65 still help their children to subsist and function by providing economic support as well as practical aid. Financial support given to parents comes more from sons while daughters' help is more instrumental and emotional.

Social integration, participation and other social issues

Social integration was a theme where considerable *research* was reported. An extensive and heterogeneous theme, it covers issues such as marital status, kinship and social networks; intergenerational and partnership relations; leisure and cultural activities; socio-psychological aspects; sexuality; and volunteering.

In *official statistics*, 'Household structure and marital status' and 'Leisure and cultural activities' of older women are well reflected especially in Finland, France, Portugal and Sweden; and in Italy for 'Leisure and cultural activities'. Official data availability on 'Partnership relations', 'Intergenerational relations', 'Sexuality', 'Kinship networks', 'Friendship, neighbourhood and community networks', 'Mobility and accessibility' and 'Volunteering' varies strongly between countries and even if available is rarely gendered or sufficiently broken down by age. 'Socio-psychological aspects' are issues not covered in official statistics in any country.

Indicative Findings. The characteristics of older women including their higher life expectancy, their lower level of education, their worse income situation, especially in very old age, have a major influence on their chances of social integration, participation and other social issues. Thus more older women than older men live alone, with an increase in one-person-households composed of older women found in all countries. However, there are also cultural differences with a majority of women 65+ living alone in the 6 more northern countries of the MERI project, while the contrary is still true for the 6 more southern countries. Evidence from Germany and Austria suggests that living arrangements and household structures differ notably for older women from ethnic minorities.

Demographic factors ensure that widowhood is more common among older women than older men, that they have fewer living relatives, and that men are privileged in being able to find a new life companion in old age. Current rising life expectancy, particularly for men, is leading to increases in the numbers of married old couples, while growing individualism is also seeing an increase in divorce amongst older couples. Older women have more difficulties in finding new or regular sexual partners, though little research is found on this topic or their sexuality. Efforts were made in several countries to deconstruct the assumption that women's sexual ability and desire vanishes after the menopause. French research reported men's ideas about sex appeal of post-menopausal women largely contradicts women's fears that with menopause they become less attractive to men; the majority find women as appealing as before. However, in other research, e.g. in Finland, men conveyed negative stereotypes on post-menopausal women, evoking loss of femininity, acceleration of ageing, bad mood, and no sexual interest. For Italy, it was found that sexual activity and falling in love was considered one of the three most important elements in healthy living amongst older women.

Their lower average age at marriage and higher life expectancy means older women have a higher probability of becoming grandparents than men and play an important part in intergenerational relations. Although the contacts of older men and women do not seem to differ markedly in their intensity, mutual support networks are obviously stronger amongst older women as well as in inter-generational relationships.

Retirement modifies social networks profoundly, e.g. French findings show how older women compensate for this by a stronger development of family relations. Those who do not have descendants suffer mainly from social isolation at an advanced age; at younger ages, rela-

tions with friends, other relatives and contacts from sports, volunteering etc. compensate for this lack. Widows are often more socially integrated than older couples, even if they suffer more from loneliness and depression. Based on findings in several countries, neighbourhood networks appear important in situations of social vulnerability

The mobility of older women correlates with health status and the level of their income and many very old women face special problems. Finnish research results show that many older men use and drive their own cars, while older women are mainly passengers in other's vehicles or walk. Female mobility is thus more dependent on other persons, and older women have to develop strategies to maintain or improve their independence. In several countries there is a trend towards motorisation among older women, putting at a disadvantage those who don't drive a car and are dependant on public transport.

Leisure and cultural activity patterns are not only influenced by gender, but also by social status, education level and local contexts; e.g. older women spend more time reading books, listening to the radio, and are more engaged in church and religious activities, while older men prefer newspapers and TV, and are more likely to be members of a club or society.

For most of the MERI countries, empirical data indicated the continuing importance of ageism, e.g. in advertising, in many countries. In the UK, older migrant women feel more respected than non-migrant women, with many pointing out that there was respect for elders in their cultures. Mainly non-migrant women brought up the issue of invisibility and of being ignored or dismissed because of their perceived age. In many countries, there are indications that especially with new generations of women entering into Third Age the self-perception of old age is becoming more positive among women. Flemish research yields contradictory insights concerning the relationship between the changing body and the self-image of older women without a unanimously negative self-image. Men and women's subjective awareness of age does not fundamentally differ.

Crime and abuse

In all the countries, crime and abuse were rare subjects of *research* on older women and concerned the concept, nature and prevalence of 'elder abuse' or 'adult abuse' encompassing physical, sexual, emotional, financial and abuse through neglect.

Official published statistics on 'Crime and abuse in public environments' and 'Crime and abuse in families' are also rare and do not exist at all for 'Crime and abuse in health care and homes for the elderly' in any country.

Indicative Findings. In most MERI countries, some results were found on violence and all forms of abuse (including neglect) against older women often occurring in families or those close to them. Family cohabitation can bring aid, but may be accompanied by aggression and indifference towards older and vulnerable family members, e.g. in northern Sweden, findings concerning 65-80 year old people within close relationships showed 16% of women and 13% of men had been exposed to violence, neglect, harassment or injustice of some kind. Older women were more likely to use neglect of care against older men, while older men use physical power. In Germany, older women are more often victims of direct and indirect forms of violence and abuse in homes for the elderly than older men. Finnish findings show that younger women tend to seek help via informal channels, while 45-54 year old women are more likely than others to resort to official channels.

Interest representation

This is an infrequent topic *in research*, though the significance of gender for participation and empowerment in later life has been flagged in recent years, not least by feminists. Some empirical evidence exists that older women interests are not represented by women's organisations nor by seniors' organisations, yet no research findings confirmed this observa-

tion. The findings from the different countries show that both membership and levels of activity in organisations depends on factors such as level of education and professional status. E.g. in France, those women belonging to associations were also more interested in political life, in reading newspapers and/or in participating in elections.

Older women's 'Political participation' is the sub-theme within this area for which – at least in some countries – fairly good information is provided from *statistical offices*. Little is known or reported official statistics, with the exception of Sweden, with respect to 'Representation in interest or lobby groups'. For 'Participation in formal and informal decision-making processes' there is contrary evidence concerning older women's participation in elections: while they vote less in Italy, contrary findings exist for Finland; in Sweden, only women 75+ and in Germany, women 60+ participate less in elections. Detailed analysis shows variations by income and nationality, yet overall there are indications at national level that older women, compared with older men, are less interested in politics, vote more traditionally (though not necessarily more conservatively), are less frequently political candidates and tend to vote for male candidates. If they are members of interest or lobby groups, older women, with the exception of Finland and Sweden, seem to be more active than older men.

Identified needs for research on older women

- Health: care in institutions, healthy life-styles, self-care;
- interest representation and participation in formal and informal decision-making;
- vocational training and life-long learning;
- exit from the labour market in relation to employment sectors;
- the consumption of goods and services and its effects on their living conditions;
- on intergenerational relations, sexuality, friendship, neighbourhood and community networks, volunteering, ageism and other kinds of discrimination in the context of social integration, participation and other social issues;
- the living conditions of older migrant women.

Identified needs to improve official statistics concerning older women 50+

- Special statistical editions on women and/or on older persons;
- special periodic publications on older people's living conditions with gendered data;
- given increasing life expectancy, age categories should be in steps of 5 years and increased to cover those in the age group 85 years where numbers are adequate;
- since retirement will be increasingly flexible, labour market statistics should include older age groups beyond the traditional and current retirement ages;
- unpaid work, particularly care work, should be considered for inclusion in official statistics since it constitutes an economic contribution to society;
- regular monitoring of the health behaviour of older persons;
- continued international migration suggest that ethnicity – a subject needing considerable discussion – should be included in official statistics in addition to age and gender to reduce the current invisibility of ethnic minorities;
- inter/intra-generational help and support networks;
- life-long learning;
- ageism and other kinds of discrimination and attitudes towards older workers;
- attitudes of older persons;
- the time use of older persons, i.e. participation in social activities;
- crime, violence and abuse against older persons in formal and informal care settings,
- the interest representation of older persons;
- official statistics should be made fully and freely accessible on the Internet, thus facilitating their use and development by all those interested;

- official statistics are usually gathered for a purpose, including amongst others, political decision-making raising questions about cost-effectiveness and the need for conceptual revision.

Dissemination

The results of the MERI project were presented at a conference in Brussels in September 2004 and the invited seminar participants, representatives of governments, the EC and NGOs, made a number of interesting proposals and underlined the ways in which they could be used:

- Facts and figures talk – for the media and governments. Ministries, civil servants, regional politicians and NGOs can be sensitised to the issue through a judicious use of the media as well as through direct approaches. The national language summaries and full reports will aid the dissemination of the results.
- The official statistical offices need to be informed of this work.
- The European Anti-Poverty Network who monitor governments' work on the social exclusion programmes, will be interested in MERI results.
- The report should be presented to the European Parliament, and the Women's Rights Committee and the Group on Aging mobilized. The many new MEPs need to be informed. The European Parliament has, apart from the Scandinavian countries, the highest number of women politicians.
- The United Nations Subcommittee on Older Women is an opportunity for dissemination since governments have received a questionnaire on the advancement of women at the United Nations. The relevant government representative needs to be alerted to the results from the MERI project.
- There is poor data on the unpaid work of women as carers and the negative and positive consequences of such care are.
- More attention needs to be given to the financial contribution of older women as care givers, consumers, tax-payers.
- The health status of older women derives from a complex interplay of factors; trying to ensure reduced disability and dependency is in line with both their own wishes and those of governments. However which actions are most effective needs to be researched and then disseminated.

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