

An Overview of Active Aging Policies and their Dissemination Process in Türkiye



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Abstract

The rapidly increasing older population in the world and Türkiye has brought along the need for comprehensive health, social services, and economic policies. Active aging policies in Türkiye have developed since the 2000s and align with the World Health Organization and international action plans. Necessary steps were taken with the "Specialization Commissions on Aging" established during the 10th and 11th Development Plans. During the 12th Development Plan period, the "Report of the Specialization Commission on Active Aging" was prepared, the pandemic's effects were considered, and new policy priorities for active aging were determined. These policies cover multidimensional areas such as strengthening health services, increasing social participation, improving digital skills, and age-friendly living spaces. However, there are shortcomings in monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for policy implementation, such as adaptation to gender, age group, and regional differences. Therefore, data-based monitoring mechanisms should be strengthened to develop inclusive and sustainable ageing policies, and inter-institutional cooperation should be increased.

Keywords: Active Ageing; Demographic Transition; Ageing in Developing Countries; Ageing Policies in Türkiye; Policy Monitoring and Evaluation; Inter-institutional Cooperation

Introduction

The proportion of the older population is increasing worldwide, and the number of individuals aged 65 and over is rising rapidly. This trend is also evident in Türkiye, according to data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), the older population aged 65 and over increased by 20.7% in the last five years, from approximately 7 million 550 thousand in 2019 to 9 million 110 thousand in 2024. During this period, the share of older people in the total population increased from 9.1% to 10.6%. According to 2024 data, 55.4% of older people will be women and 44.6% will be men. According to population projections, the older population is expected to rise to 13.5% in 2030 and 17.9% in 2040 [1].

This demographic transformation has brought about new health, social services, and economic policy needs. In this framework, the active ageing approach defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) has gained importance in Türkiye. This approach is frequently included in national policy documents and reflected in policy development processes. At the international level, the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, which provides an opportunity to evaluate and develop Türkiye's ageing policies, is organized every five years, and each time, the current status of the ageing policies of the member states is discussed at this

conference. At the last UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, held in Rome in 2022, three key policy areas came to the fore:

- a) promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life
- b) ensuring access to long-term care and support for caregivers and families
- c) mainstreaming ageing to advance society for all age groups [2].

This mini-review aims to provide an overview of the development and mainstreaming of active ageing policies in Türkiye, analyze the current situation, and offer policy recommendations. It also seeks to provide a comparative perspective and guidance for future research in developing countries undergoing similar demographic transformations, using the example of Türkiye, whose population is aging rapidly.

Development Process of Active Ageing Policies in Türkiye

The concept of active ageing was first defined by the World Health Organization in 2002 in the document "Active Ageing: A Policy Framework" published by the World Health Organization in 2002, the concept was defined as maximizing opportunities for

health, participation and security, aiming to increase the quality of life and well-being of individuals in the aging process [3]. In this context, the United Nations recognized the concept internationally as being in line with the Madrid II International Plan of Action on Ageing [4].

Following the international acceptance of the concept of active ageing, work on ageing in Türkiye gained momentum based on the 2002 Madrid International Action Plan on Ageing. In this period, cooperation between the General Directorate of Social Sectors and the Coordination of the Undersecretariat of the State Planning Organization, the Social Services and Child Protection Agency, and the United Nations Population Fund played an important role. The National Action Plan on the Status of Older Persons and Ageing in Türkiye, prepared as a result of this cooperation, officially entered into force in 2007. This plan is based on the International Action Plan on Ageing, which was adopted at the United Nations meeting in Madrid in April 2002 to improve the quality of life of older people, ensuring their social integration and developing comprehensive policies. The Implementation Program of the National Action Plan on Ageing was prepared in 2013 to implement this plan and identify priorities on ageing. In this program, “older people and development”, “health and welfare”, and “supportive environments” were identified as priority areas [5].

Due to the demographic transformation in Türkiye, a “Specialized Commission on Aging” was established for the first time under the 10th Development Plan. In the report prepared by the Commission, the situation of the older population was addressed in a multidimensional manner. This report emphasized active aging, an older workforce, social participation, and intergenerational solidarity. MIPAA and the European Region Action Plan were also mentioned in the report. It was emphasized that active ageing policies are not limited to employment and that voluntary participation of older people in social life should also be supported [6].

Policy documents on aging have gained a more comprehensive and multidimensional perspective over time. In this framework, the “Report of the Specialization Commission on Aging”, prepared in line with the 11th Development Plan covering the period 2019-2023, addresses the phenomenon of aging from a broader perspective than the previous commission report. The report includes essential topics such as active aging, social inclusion, strengthening institutional capacity, data-based policy development and alternative care models [5]. This approach shows that aging policies in Türkiye are not only limited to care-based services, but also that a more inclusive policy approach that prioritizes the active participation of older individuals in social life and the strengthening of the institutional infrastructure to support this participation has started to be adopted.

The first comprehensive step towards setting strategic goals in active aging was taken under the coordination of the Presidency of the Republic of Türkiye’s Strategy and Budget Directorate. In

this context, the “Report of the Specialization Commission on Active Aging” was prepared within the framework of the 12th Development Plan. The report addressed the aging phenomenon in a multidimensional manner and emphasized that many practices proposed during the 11th Development Plan period were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In this framework, strengthening health services to support healthy aging, age-friendly housing and urban designs, and measures to protect against natural disasters have gained priority. In addition, policies and measures were adopted in areas such as culture, sports, volunteering, and digital skills development to increase the participation of older people in social life. Issues such as protecting the rights of older people and preventing discrimination were discussed in detail in the report [2].

Conclusion and Recommendations

The development of aging policies in Türkiye has gained significant momentum with the establishment of the “Specialization Commission on Aging” under the 10th Development Plan and its report. In this process, multidimensional policy areas such as active aging, older workforce, social participation, intergenerational solidarity, and strengthening institutional infrastructure were identified, and supporting older individuals as rights-based, participatory, and productive individuals was prioritized. During the 11th Development Plan period, this basic approach was expanded. New policy dimensions such as healthy aging, social inclusion, data-based policy development, and alternative care models were on the agenda. The 12th Development Plan paid special attention to active aging, and the “Active Aging Specialization Commission Report” was prepared. This report identified priorities in areas such as strengthening health services, age-friendly housing and urban designs, increasing social participation, and developing digital skills, considering the pandemic’s effects.

These developments show that Türkiye has evolved from limiting the aging phenomenon to care-based services to a comprehensive policy approach that aims to ensure the effective participation of older people in social life and strengthen institutional capacity. However, the lack of comprehensive and up-to-date data on policy implementation prevents a detailed assessment of the difficulties and delays encountered in the current process. There is also insufficient data-based information on the appropriateness of these policies for gender, age group, and regional differences. Therefore, policy implementation needs to be monitored and evaluated to increase effectiveness, and data collection mechanisms in this area should be strengthened. In this way, sustainable and inclusive strategies that consider the diversity of the older population can be developed.

The recommendations developed within the scope of this mini review are as follows:

- a) Inter-agency coordination and cooperation between public institutions, local administrations, and civil society

organizations should be strengthened in implementing active ageing policies.

b) Inclusive programs and services to increase the participation of older persons in social, cultural, economic, and digital areas should be expanded.

c) Data-based monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that consider gender, age, regional, and cultural differences should be developed to monitor the effectiveness of policy implementation regularly.

d) Infrastructure and investments for creating age-friendly physical and social environments should be increased, and accessible and safe living spaces should be provided.

e) Flexible and rapid response models should be developed to protect and support older persons in extraordinary circumstances such as pandemics, disasters, and other emergencies, and experiences gained in such situations should be integrated into policy-making processes.

f) Education, awareness-raising, and anti-discrimination activities should be planned to raise social awareness and reduce negative attitudes towards older persons.

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