

THE ACTIVE AGEING POLICIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA AND MALDIVES: COMPARATIVE ASPECTS

Anastasia OCERETNÎI,
Moldova State University

Zeenath SOLIH,
Maldives National University, Republic of Maldives

Population ageing is an increasingly widespread phenomenon that raises important challenges for governments, civil society, and academia. Statistical data place the Republic of Moldova among countries with an ageing population, while the Maldives is currently undergoing demographic ageing. In this context, active ageing policies serve as key mechanisms for promoting the rights of older persons and fostering age-friendly environments. This article provides a comparative analysis of active ageing policies in the Republic of Moldova and the Maldives. The study is based on a qualitative review of national policy documents and relevant strategic frameworks. The findings show that the Republic of Moldova has over a decade of experience in developing and implementing active ageing policies, whereas the Maldives adopted its first policy document in this field in 2025, in response to emerging demographic trends. The comparative analysis highlights enabling factors, policy development pathways, and selected recent initiatives.

Keywords: *ageing, active ageing policy, older population.*

POLITICILE DE ÎMBĂTRÂNIRE ACTIVĂ ÎN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA ȘI MALDIVE: ASPECTE COMPARATIVE

Îmbătrânirea populației este un fenomen tot mai răspândit, care generează provocări importante pentru guverne, societatea civilă și mediul academic. Datele statistice plasează Republica Moldova în rândul țărilor cu o populație îmbătrânită, în timp ce Maldive se află în prezent în proces de îmbătrânire demografică. În acest context, politicile de îmbătrânire activă reprezintă mecanisme esențiale pentru promovarea drepturilor persoanelor în etate și pentru crearea unor medii prietenoase vârstei. Articolul oferă o analiză comparativă a politicilor de îmbătrânire activă din Republica Moldova și Maldive. Studiul se bazează pe o analiză calitativă a documentelor naționale de politici publice și a cadrelor strategice relevante. Rezultatele arată că Republica Moldova are peste un deceniu de experiență în elaborarea și implementarea politicilor de îmbătrânire activă, în timp ce Maldive a adoptat primul document de politică în acest domeniu în anul 2025, ca răspuns la tendințele demografice emergente. Analiza comparativă evidențiază factorii favorizanți, traiectoriile de dezvoltare a politicilor și inițiative recente relevante.

Cuvinte-cheie: *îmbătrânire, politici de îmbătrânire activă, populație în etate.*

Introduction

Population ageing is a global phenomenon, with most countries experiencing increases both in the absolute number and in the share of older persons within their populations. The WHO data shows the trends in increasing the older population: 1 in 6 persons will be aged 60 years or over, by 2030, and by 2050 the older population will be double [1].

Across the European Union, the share of the working-age population is declining while the proportion of retirees is increasing. As the post-war baby boom generation reaches retirement age, the number of older persons will rise, placing greater pressure on the working-age population to sustain the social costs and services required by an ageing society.

The population of the Republic of Moldova is also undergoing a rapid ageing process. The share of

persons aged over 65 in the total resident population has increased in recent years, from 11.4% in 2015 to 18,3% in 2025, surpassing countries such as Montenegro (17,2%) and Georgia (16,6%) [2]. During last decade, the population ageing coefficient also rose, reaching 25,9% in 2025, rural area registered a high rate (28,0% versus 23,2% in urban area) [3]. In the last 5 years the largest increases in the proportion of older persons were recorded in the Centre Region of the country. These data indicate that the Republic of Moldova is experiencing a pronounced and rapidly accelerating demographic ageing process. The urban-rural disparity suggests uneven demographic pressures and potentially greater challenges for service provision and social support in rural communities. Overall, the evidence points to an urgent need for targeted, region-specific public policies in social protection, healthcare, and community services to address the consequences of an ageing population, especially in rural and highly affected regions.

The Maldives also is in a process of ageing: in 2022 the share of persons 65 years or over were 4%. The population forecast shows an increase of ageing coefficient: 7% by 2030 and 14% by 2050 [4]. Based on these data, it can be mentioned that although the current share of persons aged 65+ in the Maldives is still relatively low, the country is clearly undergoing an accelerated process of demographic ageing. The projections indicate a rapid increase in the ageing coefficient - almost doubling by 2030 and tripling by 2050 - suggesting that, within a relatively short period of time, the Maldives will shift from a predominantly young demographic structure to one with a significant proportion of older persons. The situation analysis shows that the Maldives is projected to become an „ageing” society by 2031 and an „aged” society by 2044, being a country with the fastest demographic transitions in the Asia-Pacific region [8]. This trend highlights the need to anticipate and adapt public policies, particularly in the areas of social protection, health, employment, and community services, in order to respond in a timely manner to the emerging needs.

The situation in both countries highlights the urgent need for comprehensive and forward-looking public policies aimed at accelerating active ageing initiatives, by promoting longer participation in the labour market, improving access to health and social services, fostering social inclusion, and creating supportive community environments for older persons.

Methodology

The research conducted on active ageing policies in the Republic of Moldova and the Maldives was carried out using the documentary method, based on the analysis of open-access materials addressing this topic, as well as international and national statistical data. At the same time, policy documents were examined in order to identify relevant aspects related to the development and promotion of active ageing policies.

Results and discussions

Active ageing policies have been presented as a potential means of intervention, being necessary in the context of the growing proportion of the older population and the pressure placed on the economic system, social insurance, healthcare, and social protection. The concept of active aging entered the public discourse after World War II - in the 1960s in the United States - in discussions on successful ageing, which emerged as a response to the disengagement theory developed by Cumming E. and Henry W. (1961). According to these researchers, as people age, they gradually withdraw from social life and reduce their social roles. In this context, active aging emphasizes policies aimed at engaging older adults, marking a shift from a passive to an active approach toward these individuals.

In the 1980s, we witnessed a revival of the concept in the context of discussions on productive aging, with emphasis on the entire life cycle, not just the final stage of life (old age) [5, p. 8]. The new approach was considered narrow, focusing particularly on economic aspects, promoted also by UN. The first forum on aging was organized by the United Nations General Assembly in 1982 (July 26-August 6) in Vienna, during which the International Plan of Action was approved. The Plan of Action represents the first international instrument in this field, which stimulated the formulation and adoption of policies and programs related to ageing. The World Health Organization has played an important role in promoting active aging at the international level, proposing in 2002 a broader approach to aging that goes beyond the concept of productive aging. Active aging is seen as the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation, and

security in order to enhance people's quality of life as they grow older. Through active aging initiatives, continuous participation in social, economic, cultural, spiritual, and civic activities is ensured, without being limited to physical ability or labor market participation. The new approach represented a shift from a needs-based approach to one focused on rights and responsibilities, based on 3 pillars: health, participation and security.

Discussions on aging issues were further expanded during the Second United Nations Assembly on Aging, held in 2002 (April 8–12), when the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (MIPAA) was adopted. The Political Declaration and the International Plan of Action that were adopted prompted a re-thinking of how societies are organized so that they are age-friendly, by incorporating the needs of older people into public policies through the lens of three priority areas: older persons and development, ensuring the health and well-being of older persons, and creating supportive environments and conditions.

Active ageing policies in the Republic of Moldova

The Republic of Moldova adhered to MIPAA, supported in its efforts to institutionalize policies addressing ageing issues by development partners, particularly UNFPA. Consequently, the first policy document in the field of aging was approved: the Program for the Integration of Aging Issues into Policies, implemented through two action plans: the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Roadmap Guide for Integrating Aging Issues into Policies (2014–2016) (Government Decision No. 406/2014) and the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Active Aging Principle (2018-2021) (Government Decision No. 1147/2017). By approving these policy documents, the Republic of Moldova committed to ensuring an age-friendly society by promoting quality of life and active aging, while highlighting the contribution of older persons to the socioeconomic development of society.

An analysis of the implementation of the commitments assumed by the Republic of Moldova following its adherence to MIPAA, conducted in 2021, highlighted a number of gaps in the policies implemented up to that point. This indicated the need to revise public policies to fully address the needs of older persons, as well as the entire population, in order to contribute to the development of an environment that provides opportunities for healthy and active ageing. Despite the challenges in ensuring active aging, the Republic of Moldova has made progress in this regard, data on the Active Aging Index showing improvements in this regard. In 2020, it reached 28.7%, up from 27.1% in 2016, but still lower than the European average [14, p. 150-151].

As a result, a new program in the field was developed - the National Program for Healthy and Active Aging for 2023-2027, approved by Government Decision No. 434/2023 [6]. The objectives set out in the public policy document were formulated based on an analysis of the situation of older persons and in relation to the commitments undertaken: (a) expanding access for older persons to quality basic social services; (b) strengthening the policy and institutional framework to increase opportunities for healthy and active aging by creating age-friendly environments and integrating aging into all areas of social life; (c) increasing the number of older persons participating in programs, services, and community activities to empower them, and (d) increasing the number of older persons using information technologies. Thus, a set of targets was established in line with the objectives of the program (see Figure 1).

The new public policy document indicates the Government's concern for strengthening the field of active aging, but there is still a need to adjust policies to ensure conditions for active and healthy aging and change the approach to the aging phenomenon by highlighting opportunities.

In recent years, the Republic of Moldova has made significant progress in creating conditions for active and healthy ageing. Key achievements include the launch and implementation of volunteer programmes and digital literacy initiatives targeting older persons, as well as the establishment of a small grants programme in the field of active ageing for civil society organizations, with nine editions implemented to date. Efforts to promote civic engagement among older persons have been further supported through a national competition recognizing the most active older individuals. Educational opportunities have been expanded through the introduction of University of the Third Age programmes within higher education institutions across the North, Centre, and South regions of the country. In addition, training and capacity-building sessions have been organized for central and local public authorities to facilitate the integration of ageing issues into public policies. The calculation of the Active Ageing Index has strengthened evidence-based policymaking, while access to day-care and dedicated active ageing centres has been further expanded etc.

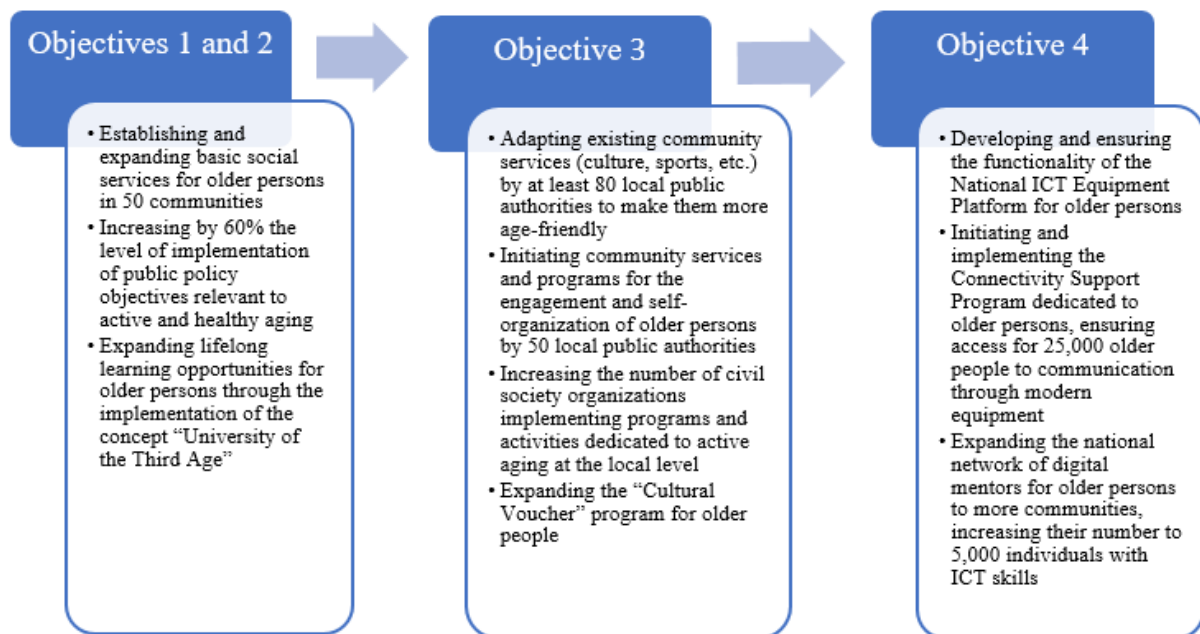


Figure 1. Main targets of the National Program for Healthy and Active Ageing for 2023-2027, the Republic of Moldova

The achievements of the Republic of Moldova in promoting and implementing active ageing policies can be attributed to several key factors, including: (i) the support of development partners for governmental initiatives, particularly UNFPA and UNDESA, including assistance in the development of policy documents and the implementation of planned activities; (ii) cooperation with civil society organizations actively engaged in promoting the rights of older persons and in implementing active ageing policies; (iii) increased awareness among local public authorities of the need to mainstream ageing issues into local policies; (iv) the participation of the Government of the Republic of Moldova in standing working groups on ageing, which facilitate the exchange and transfer of good practices; (v) the expansion of scientific and applied research highlighting the need for active ageing policies; and (vi) growing interest from the private sector in active ageing-related policies etc.

Conversely, the impact of these achievements could be further enhanced through adequate budgetary allocation for active ageing programmes and measures, greater political-level awareness of the need for integrated policy approaches in this field, and more intensive advocacy efforts by older persons and their representative organizations.

Active ageing policies in the Maldives

The Maldives is committed to implementing MIPAA, so the country aligns its national ageing policy with the MIPAA framework. The Government has developed a National Policy on Ageing and a National Action Plan on Ageing 2025-2028 that reflect the Maldives’ ongoing engagement with the framework. In September 2024, by the Ministry of Social and Family Development, 4 priorities of new ageing policy were launched, presented in the Figure 2.

But, the launched policy document on December, 2025, is focused on 16 goals, in areas such as: healthy ageing and preventive care; social inclusion and participation; long-term care and caregiver support; digital inclusion and access to services; community-based support systems and age-friendly infrastructure [7].

To promote active ageing, and with the support of government authorities, the social program „*Ufaaveri Raasthaa*” was implemented in 11 atolls of the Maldives, focusing on engaging older persons for better participation in community activities. The program aims to provide awareness sessions and interactive activities for the health and social integration of older persons, including simple daily exercises, nutritional guidance, and mental health support, in order to enhance their connection with the local community. Approximately 1,000 older persons have participated in the program [9].

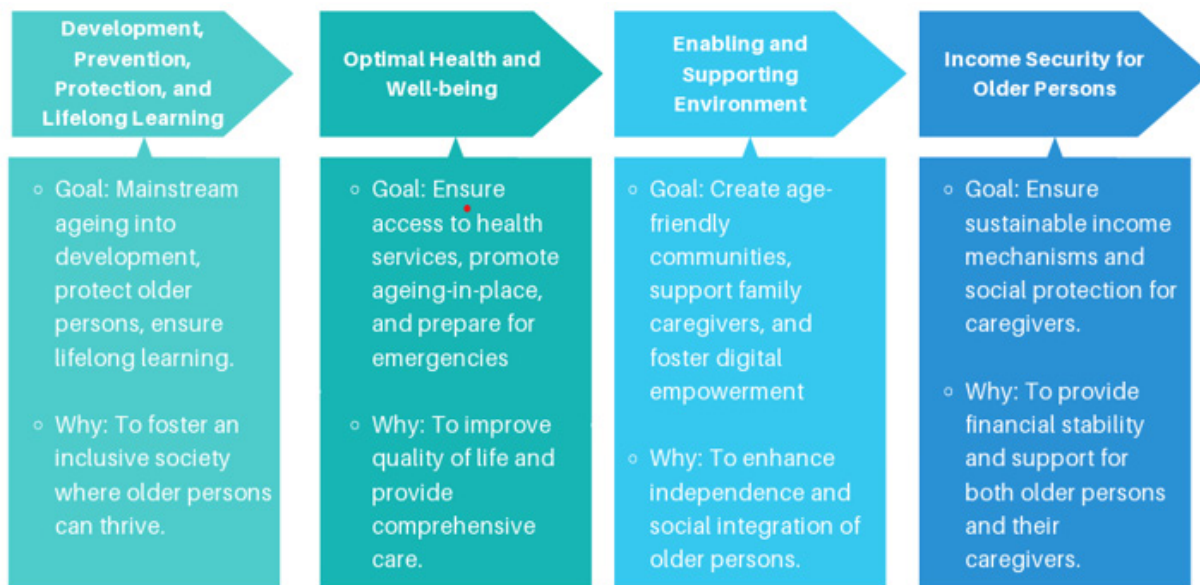


Figure 2. The priority of the National Ageing Public Policy in Maldives [10]

In the Maldives, *community centres for older persons*, called ‘Israhvehinge Naadhee’, have also been developed as part of the government’s efforts to engage older adults. The first center was opened in February 2024 in Malé, and this experience has been adopted by about 60 atoll administrations. The activities carried out include: light exercise and healthy living sessions; nutritional guidance and health screenings; cultural, religious and recreational activities; digital literacy and awareness programmes, and workshops on safety topics like scam prevention [11]. All the activities aimed to contribute to improving physical, emotional, and social wellbeing of older people.

Another initiative related to ageing, launched in 2025, is *the home-visit program* focused on addressing the social needs and wellbeing of bedridden older persons [12]. The program consists in mobilizing volunteers to visit bedridden older persons monthly in order to reduce isolation, assess social needs, and ensure that required support is delivered.

NGOs are also involved in carrying out activities aimed at older people. Thus, the Aged Care Maldives NGO provide several programmes and activities, such as: exercise and rehabilitation programmes to maintain mobility and health; friendly visits and community support to reduce loneliness; home healthcare services for older adults and awareness campaigns on healthy ageing and rights advocacy [13]. One aspect identified in the research refers to a poorly developed network of NGOs active in the field of aging in the Maldives, which makes it difficult to promote active aging in the atolls and dependent on measures taken by central authorities.

Based on the demographic situation in the Maldives, active aging had not been a national priority. Recent demographic changes and projections have raised awareness among authorities about the need to promote policies in this field. However, the high concentration of the young population in Malé creates a need to implement ageing-related policies in the more remote atolls, where the proportion of older persons is increasing.

Conclusions

Active ageing policies in the Republic of Moldova and the Maldives differ significantly in their origins, focus, and level of development, largely due to the distinct demographic realities of the two countries.

In the Republic of Moldova, active ageing became a policy priority as a direct response to an already advanced process of demographic ageing. The growing share of older persons has placed considerable pressure on the social protection, healthcare, and pension systems, which required the Government to adopt a structured and long-term approach. As a result, the Republic of Moldova has been developing and institutionalizing active ageing policies for more than a decade. Ageing is mainstreamed in several public policies and the approach is systemic and policy-driven, aiming to integrate ageing issues into all sectors of social life.

By contrast, in the Maldives, active ageing was not initially considered a priority because of the country's predominantly young population. Only recent demographic changes and future projections have raised awareness among authorities about the need to prepare for population ageing. Therefore, the Maldivian approach is more preventive and forward-looking, seeking to build structures and services before ageing becomes a critical social challenge. The public policy on ageing is a very recent initiative, and the focus is still on establishing practical mechanisms to support older persons rather than fully integrating ageing into all policy sectors.

In conclusion, Moldova's active ageing policy is more mature, institutionalized, and integrated into the public policy framework, developed as a response to an already ageing society. The Maldives, on the other hand, is at an earlier stage, adopting a preventive and community-oriented approach aimed at preparing for future demographic ageing by building supportive environments and social engagement mechanisms for older persons.

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Data about authors:

Anastasia OCERETNÎI, PhD, Associate Professor, Head of the Department of Sociology and Social Assistance, Moldova State University.

ORCID: 0000-0002-4648-7921

E-mail: anastasia.oceretnii@usm.md

Zeenath SOLIH, The Maldives National University, Republic of Maldives.

ORCID: 0009-0003-4399-2679

E-mail: zeenath.solih@mnu.edu.mv

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