



**Fondation pour un Centre pour le Développement Socio-Eco-Nomique  
(Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development, CSEND), Geneva**

**Position for the 9<sup>th</sup> Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing  
23<sup>rd</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

***Intergenerational cooperative housing for sustainable ageing and inclusive communities***

This statement is made on behalf of CSEND and the members of the World Healthy Ageing Consortium, a multi-stakeholder group united to strengthen the economic, social and cultural rights of older persons.

Dear Mr President,

We were delighted to listen to the intervention by the distinguished delegate from Norway. My intervention supports several of her messages and suggestions.

With growing age, older persons inevitably lose relatives and friends who die away and often older persons also lose the sense of family when their children leave and move to their own homes or apartments. A sense of loneliness is the consequence, which can further deepen should their neighborhood also change due to urban renewal projects and renovation of their building. Renovations of older buildings often results in higher financial and social costs since tenants are often driven out of their home and of their familiar neighborhood.

These life cycle losses shrink older persons' psychological living space, engender a sense of isolation, loneliness and abandonment which often deepens should the older persons not be able to find adequate housing because of financial hardships or simply loss of family ties and social networks (Saner, Raymond, 2018).

Once living in their oversized family homes is no longer financially affordable, older persons or couples might prefer to move to smaller two-three room apartments rather than be told or forced to move to a retirement or nursing home. Yet a transition to comfortable and age-appropriate housing facilities might be too expensive and hence not possible for older persons

who do not enjoy a well-off pension scheme or for older people living in rural or remote territories.

Still, a careful cost and benefit analysis might prove that a move to an obstacle-free and age-appropriate new home would be beneficial in the longer term especially for older persons. Yet, such a move means taking difficult decisions. The question then becomes where an older person could or couple move to if staying in their old homes is no longer possible.

Older persons look for possibilities to overcome their sense of isolation and are looking for ways to re-integrate into a new housing environment that provides affordable rents, security, and connection with other persons- young or old. Such a move could result in a renewed sense of well-being.

Co-housing, or co-living, or housing cooperatives aim to mix private and shared living spaces in a way that meets the need for both privacy and a sense of community and support. Housing cooperatives in Germany also called “Baugruppen” (groups of building homes) is a prominent international example of active cross-generational housing (Lloyd Alter, 2017).

In these types of homes, the relationship between private space (the person’s own accommodation) and communal spaces (such as dining and recreation area) varies from the accepted norm, reflecting changing perspectives on social contact, privacy and economic viability.

Research conducted by Australian journalist Chris Riedy (2017) found that co-housing is well established internationally as a housing option. Despite huge diversity in the size, density and design of co-housing, there are some common characteristics of co-housing namely:

First, the future residents of co-housing units are typically involved in the design process to ensure that the final building meets the personal needs of the older tenants. Second, the design includes some mix of private dwellings and shared spaces and encourages community interaction. Shared spaces can be as minimal as a garden or laundry, or as extensive as a common kitchen, lounge and guest facilities. Third, residents are usually actively involved in the governance of the property.

These new forms of inter-generational housing offer older persons affordable rents, modern and age adequate rooms, proximity to other persons of different age levels and hence opportunities to re-create social space and psychological bonds crucial for positive aging.

Such new housing is novel and fully conforms to the three principles of the SDGs which are transparency, participation and inclusiveness and aligned with the three interrelated dimensions of the SDGs namely economic, social and environmental sustainability.

We call on our governments and urban planners to urgently align their housing concepts and budgets to the social and economic needs of older persons. Planners must humanize their often inhumane concepts of housing and with holistic forms of housing described above.

For co-housing to become mandatory reality, the Open Working Group must acknowledge the need for a healthier form of housing aligned with the aging process of all people in all parts of the world, developed or developing.

In order to enable more humane and socially integrative housing, the Open Working Group must provide a policy framework in the form of a legally binding international convention of human rights for older persons to protect their basic rights to affordable and humane housing that provides opportunities for meaningful engagement in daily life.

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