

IFA 11th Global Conference on Ageing „ageing connects“ Conference Report

The IFA 11th Global Conference on Ageing, ‘Ageing Connects’ was held on 28 May – 1 June 2012 in Prague. The conference took place at a time of perhaps the greatest demographic crisis in world history – the juncture of *globalisation, urbanisation and population ageing*. The conference also marked twenty years since the first IFA conference in India in 1992 and marked the year of the 10th Anniversary of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity Between Generations, and the World Health Organization Year of ‘Health.’ For the first time in the history of IFA, the biannual conference took place in the heart of Eastern Europe.

The conference was held under the auspices of The Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, the Czech Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Jaromír Drábek, the City of Prague, and the Dagmar and Vaclav Havel VIZE 97 Foundation.

The IFA 11th Global Conference on Ageing provided a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary forum for networking and the sharing of information related to new research and evidence-based programs and policies. It offered an opportunity for those interested in the field of ageing to take stock of social trends (e.g., age-friendly environments); to evaluate recent policy developments; to facilitate stronger linkages among research, policy and practice; and to explore in greater depth the role of civil society.

The pre-conference program on 28 May per tradition included the Senior Official Meeting “Long term care and technology” held in the historic Kaiserstein Palace. Other pre-conference events included the INPEA Conference “Elder Abuse: global concern (in the Portus House of Zivot90), the BRAID Conference (in Corinthia Prague Hotel), lectures by Leaders of the International Longevity Centre (ILC) Global Alliance “Productive Ageing: Conditions and opportunities” (Holiday Inn Hotel) and the Master Class “Frailty and Vulnerability” (at Charles University).

The conference officially started with the Opening Ceremony on 29 May 2012 featuring a Czech legendary rock band performance of now-seniors. Jan Iorman, Zivot90 President and the conference organizer officially welcomed the delegates, Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Jaromír Drábek greeted the delegates on behalf of the Czech Government, other address was delivered by The Hon. Alice Wong, Minister of State (Seniors), Government of Canada. Alex Kalache delivered the keynote address; IFA thanked immediate past President Irene Hoskins and welcomed President Elect K R Gangadharan. The opening ceremony also introduced Extraordinary Voices of the Czech Republic, and former Czech Prime Minister and EU Commissioner Vladimir Spidla addressed the audience on their behalf.

Zivot90, organizer of this year's conference, introduced a novel and innovative program in comparison with previous conferences. The main focus was on the quality and high level of expertise of the speakers and on the diversity of their representation.

Each of the four main Plenary sessions (based on the main conference themes) was followed by four parallel Kick-off Symposia introducing sub-themes. Each of the Kick-off Symposia opened with a short video presentation to set the stage for the debate. The novel use of video also represented a conference innovation, as did the four Master Classes, one of which focused on media and the use of film. An additional new program was an Exhibition of Photographs, in addition to the traditional Poster Section.

648 delegates from 53 countries participated in the conference, among them 61 speakers for the Plenaries and Kick-off Symposia. There were many outstanding speakers – professors, professionals, politicians, NGO representatives. Just to name a few – A. Walker, J. T. Waters (Pfizer), A. Kalache, A. Borelli (Intel), prof. G. Tegart (Australia), M. Cabrnoc (EU), R. Muenz (Germany), M. Mitchell (UK), G. Minnigaleeva (Russia), T. Yeni (South Africa), G. Gutman (Canada), Baroness S. Greengross, I. Holmerova (Czech Republic), J. Sadavoy (Canada), S. Somers (USA), Y. Liang (China), A-S. Parent (Belgium), I. Doron (Israel), S. Beales (UK), D. Jarré (Germany). The program included six Plenary Sessions, four master classes, The Daniel Thursz Memorial Lecture, 12 Kick-off Symposia, 102 concurrent sessions, exhibition of 88 posters and 17 photographs.

Intel was the general sponsor of the conference and the organizer succeeded in arranging future close cooperation between Intel and IFA. As additional sponsors, Emporia, Linet, and Czech Tourism staged their expositions at the Congress Centre during the conference. The Mayor of Prague hosted a reception for invited delegates and participants of the conference in his Official Residence. A Gala Evening (two ballet performances) followed by cocktails took place in the historic building of the National Theater on 30 May 2012. The organizer also offered several Site Visits on 1 June in the afternoon.

Through the conference program, mainly based on the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the protection of human rights was expressed as the fundamental prerequisite to an effective response to population ageing. Equally critical was also the recognition of important contributions older people make to the broader social and economic productivity of a nation. The conference provided an opportunity for the development and strengthening of powerful alliances. Its main theme of '*ageing connects*' focused on how technology would change - and hopefully improve - the lives of the elderly and their communities in an interconnected world.

Despite the growing understanding of the role older persons play in the day-to-day life of communities and society – even in the gravest times of natural and man-made disasters – there is a lingering and pervasive stigma toward older people which often results in violations of their rights. This may also be marked by the lack of sound, proactive government policies and limited evaluation of promising programs. Furthermore, there is a paucity of mechanisms to exchange information and to learn from one another and a failure to recognize the extent to which we are able to help shape and influence future policy with the legitimate engagement of older persons themselves.

The conference and its program was highly appraised and valued by the Czech officials who personally attended and followed the presentations, as well as by EU representatives and representatives of major corporations – INTEL, Pfizer, EMPORIA, and ERSTE Bank. Attached you can find some of their letters and correspondence.

The current economic crisis in Europe and throughout the world and the very high registration fees set by IFA, had a strong impact on the number of delegates in comparison to the expected and projected numbers of the conference.