



Transforming society – Uncovering Opportunities and Challenges Amidst Change

European Centre's key findings on digital, green,
demographic transitions

Selam Woldemariam, Nikko Bilitza, Elif Naz Kayran, and Kai Leichsenring
14 October 2026

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR SOCIAL WELFARE POLICY AND RESEARCH

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



2026

Three transitions reshaping societies in Europe and beyond

1. DIGITAL TRANSITION

Changing how we work, interact and participate

MAIN CHALLENGES

- Digital divides and unequal access
- Safety, rights and protection online
- Labour-market transformation and participation

EU RESPONSE

Digital Decade 2030: skills, infrastructure, digital public services and inclusion

2. GREEN TRANSITION

Changing how we live, work and consume

MAIN CHALLENGES

- Jobs, skills and labour-market transformation
- Health & social impacts of the transition
- Affordability and unequal impacts across social groups

EU RESPONSE

European Green Deal: decarbonisation, clean energy and a fair transition

3. DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Changing how we live, work and care

MAIN CHALLENGES

- Growing and changing care needs
- Health, workforce and service pressures
- Adequate and inclusive social protection

EU RESPONSE

Demography Toolbox: support across the life course, active ageing and adaptation of welfare systems

How can we shape these transitions so that change translates into greater wellbeing, inclusion and social cohesion?

Outline

- **Digital transition**

- Social policy research on technology-facilitated violence among children
Selam Woldemariam
- The Political Economy of Integrating Digital Change
Nikko Bilitza

- **Green transition**

- Adapting to decarbonisation in Europe and the role of industrial relations
Elif Naz Kayran

- **Demographic change**

- Accompanying the long-term care reform in Slovenia
Kai Leichsenring
- Towards a new MIPAA Regional Implementation Strategy
UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing



Social Policy research on technology-facilitated violence among children

Cyberbullying and policies to address violence against children in Digital

Selam Woldemariam

14 October 2026

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Social policy research on technology-facilitated violence among children

Cyberbullying and Policies to Address Violence Against Children in Digital Spaces

- Digital environments are **emerging as social spaces** for children
 - Peer relationships, status negotiated, inclusion and exclusion experienced, conflicts encountered
- Rapid emergence of **new apps, platforms, features**, and forms of interaction continually changes how children communicate and how **online harmful behaviours manifest**
 - Difficult to **recognise harmful behaviours** early and develop effective prevention and response strategies
- **Parents, educators, and policymakers** often have **limited insight** into the digital platforms, norms, and interactions shaping children's online experiences

Social policy research on technology-facilitated violence among children

Cyberbullying and Policies to Address Violence Against Children in Digital Spaces

Macro level

- **EU Legal and governance** framework (**European Commission's Actional** plan against cyberbullying)
- **National** government and **public authorities** (translating broader framework into prevention at country level)
- **Prevention, protection and reporting** support measures and guidance (legal, educational)

Meso level

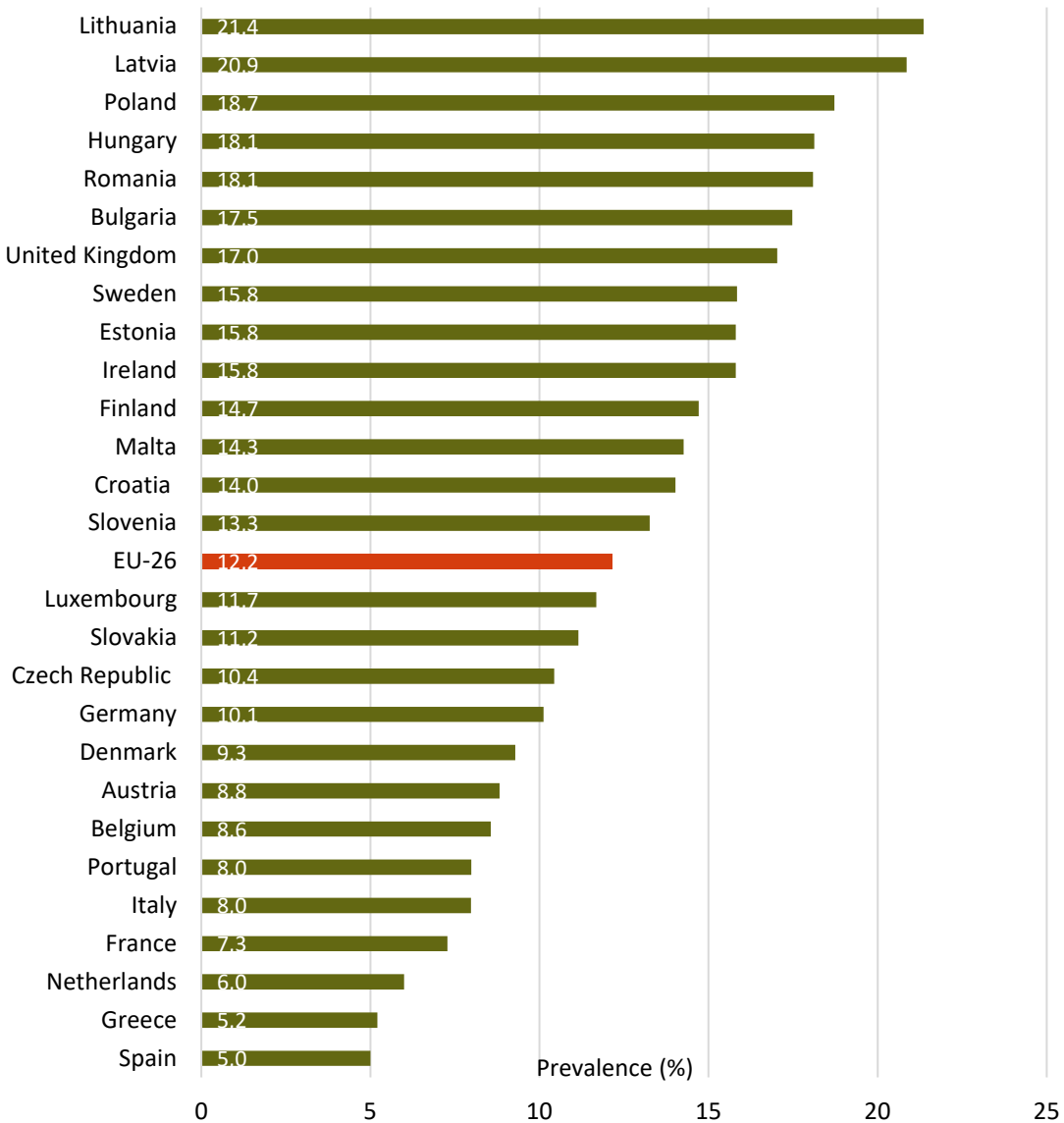
- **Rapidly involving digital environments:** digital spaces (social media platforms and apps) though which social interactions are taking place, **peer relationships** and conflicts are
- **Social environments:** includes broader school environment in which relationship with peers and teachers are taking place

Micro level

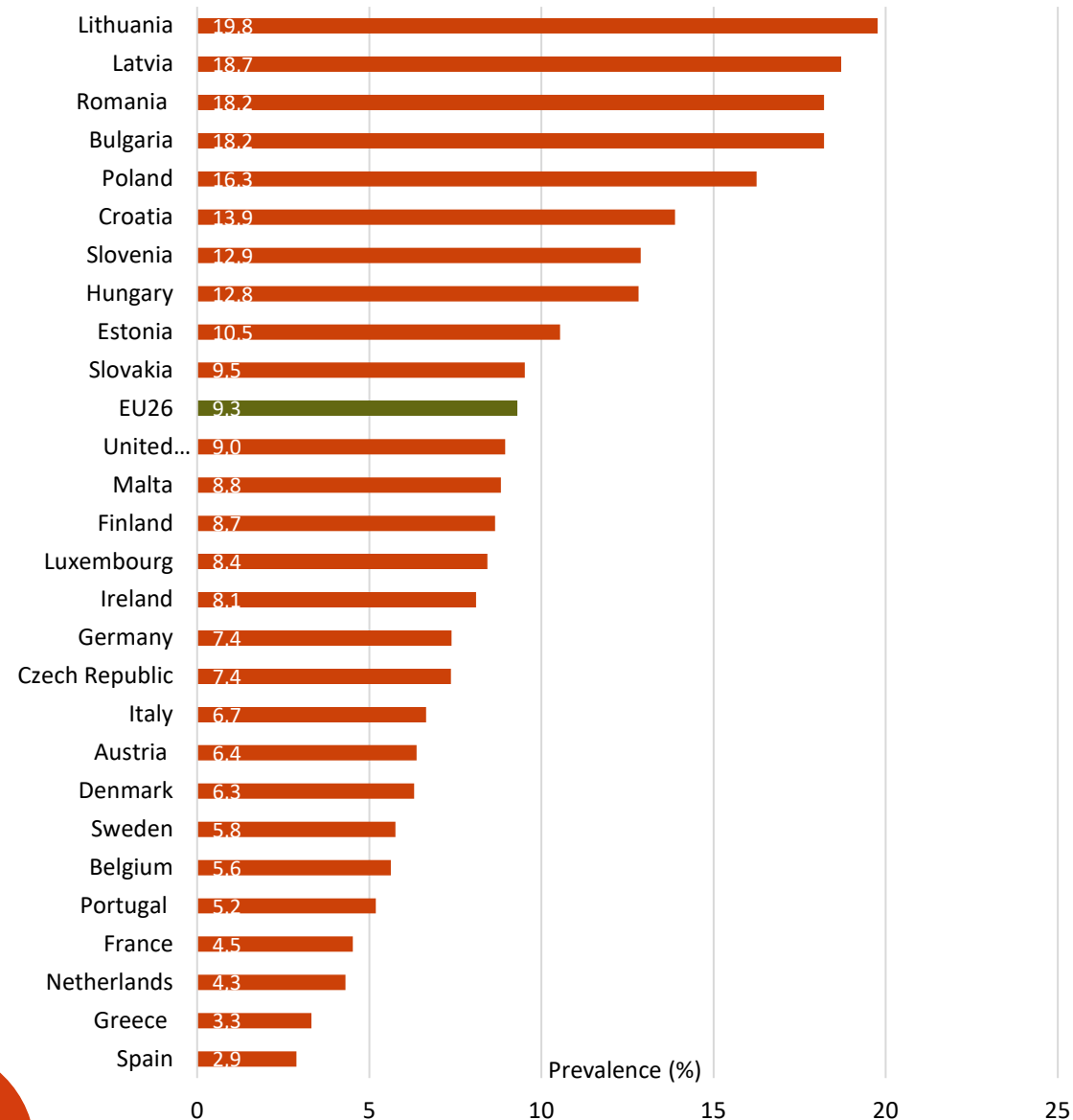
- **Individual** demographics (age, gender, sexual identity, migration background), physical and psychological health conditions, lifestyle risk behaviours, social media use
- **Child home and family environment,** parent's socio-economic status (SES), quality of family relationships and parental support.

Findings on social policy research on technology-facilitated violence among children

Cyberbullying victimisation in EU countries + UK



Cyberbullying perpetration in EU countries + UK





The Political Economy of Integrating Digital Change

Disruption, bargaining, and regulatory re-embedding in
Vienna's on demand transport sector (2014-2024)

Nikko Bilitza
14 October 2026

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The Political Economy of Integrating Digital Change

Theoretical Framework & Research Context

EGRUiEN explores how social dialogue can help manage the impact of the twin digital and green transition in labour markets and production regimes.

WP2 Investigated how **Austria's coordinated market economy (CME)** negotiated and institutionalized the digital disruption caused by Uber's entry into Vienna's on-demand transport sector from 2014 to 2024

Methodology: Process-tracing approach grounded in parliamentary transcripts, judicial rulings, semi-structured stakeholder interviews (n=5), press materials, and survey data. Theoretical approach combines Polanyi's "double movement" concept with a power-resources lens to examine how cross-class coalitions and domestic institutions negotiated, absorbed, and recalibrated digital platform disruption

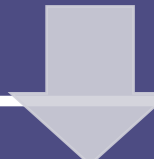
Source: Kayran, E. N., & Bilitza, N. (2025). *The political economy of integrating digital change: Disruption, bargaining, and regulatory re-embedding in Vienna's on-demand transport sector (2014–2024)* (EGRUiEN Historical Case Study Report: Austria). European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research.

The Political Economy of Integrating Digital Change

From distributive conflict to conditional integration

Uber entered Austria in 2014 via the hire-car segment, partnering with licensed rental-car firms. This allowed them to **circumvent driver licensing requirements** as well as the **regulated taxi tariff** and offer dynamically priced, app-booked rides. **Hire-car licences grew rapidly.**

Phase I (2014–2018): Distributive confrontation dominated by legal battles, grassroots migrant driver protests, and protectionist pushback.



Phase II (2018–2021): Shift from litigation to legislative reform with coordinated involvement of social partners, trade unions, policymakers resulting in the **2019 GelverkG reform** that merged taxis and hire-cars into a single regulated trade

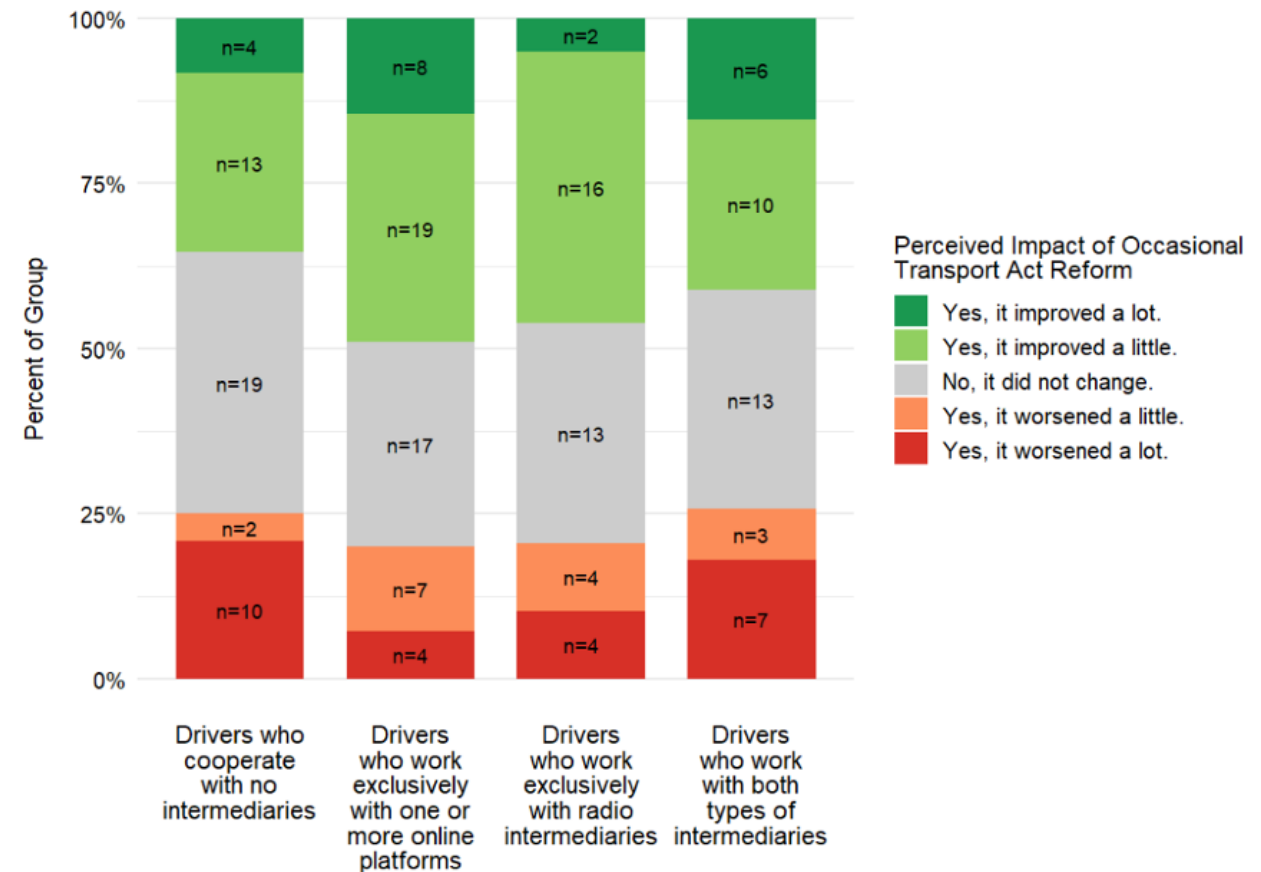


Phase III (2021–2024): Shifts in the political landscape as well as lobbying by platforms reopened the compromise, leading to a 2020 legal amendment that introduced flexible price corridors for digitally booked rides and renewed fare competition

The Political Economy of Integrating Digital Change

Empirical Data on Post-Reform Working Conditions

- Online survey fielded in Austria from September 2023 to January 2024, offers rare quantitative picture of post-reform driver sentiment.
- **91% of surveyed drivers report that digital platforms depress fares** (compared to **57%** for traditional radio dispatch operators), with only **25%** viewing platforms as having a net positive impact on their work.
- **96% of Viennese drivers identify the local tariff level as a major operational challenge.**
- **Across all driver categories, the largest share reported no net change in their personal working situation** following the legislative reform.



The Political Economy of Integrating Digital Change

From Market Shock to Negotiated Re-Embedding and Ongoing Sectoral Friction

- **Institutional Adaptation via Negotiated Re-embedding:** Coordinated market economies can channel disruptive platform business models into corporatist frameworks through legal unification rather than resorting to outright deregulation or market exclusion
- **New Coalitions:** Platform disruption reconfigured traditional labour-capital cleavages into a cross-class alliance (uniting taxi operators, self-employed drivers, unions, and employers) supported by a broad political spectrum centred on market fairness and national protectionism.
- **Unresolved Limits & Future Governance:** Formal trade unification failed to entirely resolve driver discontent pointing to ongoing challenges in building resilient regulatory frameworks capable of governing platform work.



Adapting to decarbonization in Europe and the role of industrial relations

Employment, production, and challenges for addressing wins & losses

Elif Naz Kayran
14 October 2026

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Adapting to decarbonization in Europe and the role of industrial relations

Europe's climate transition: An employment & governance challenge

- **Binding climate objectives**

EU aims to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and 90% by 2040, compared with 1990, and achieve climate neutrality by 2050. The Council formally adopted the 2040 target in March 2026.

- **Accelerated renewable deployment**

The revised **Renewable Energy Directive** establishes a binding target of at least 42.5% renewable energy in gross final energy consumption by 2030, with an ambition of 45% → **directly affecting the broader energy sector.**

- **Competitiveness and quality employment**

The **Clean Industrial Deal** connects decarbonization with affordable energy and industrial investment. The 2025 Quality Jobs Roadmap emphasized social dialogue, collective bargaining and early worker involvement in managing green and industrial transitions.

- **An implementation challenge**

The 2025 review of the Council's fair transition recommendation identifies continuing weaknesses in worker involvement in anticipating and managing change. 2026 consultations on the **Quality Jobs Act** initiative further address fair green transitions and the role of social partners - this initiative remains under preparation.

Adapting to decarbonization in Europe and the role of industrial relations

Different transition pathways, different negotiation challenges

Transition pathway	Countries as cases in the EGRUiEN project	Central employment and negotiation questions
Repurposing existing assets	Italy, Finland, Estonia	How can existing production sites and workforces adapt to new activities? Skills retention, retraining, redeployment and uncertainty over investment and technological change.
Coal phase-out and site remediation	Slovakia, Poland, Spain	How are closure and contraction managed? Employment protection and redeployment intersect with regional diversification, requiring coordination between workplaces, social partners and public authorities.
Continuing fossil activities alongside renewable expansion	Norway, Estonia	How do actors negotiate parallel investment priorities? Continuing fossil activities and renewable expansion face different market pressures, with implications for employment security and transition timing.
Renewable baseline	United Kingdom, Austria	How are renewable operations expanded and adapted? Workforce capacity, changing skills and effective representation become central, without fossil closure being the primary adjustment within these research settings.

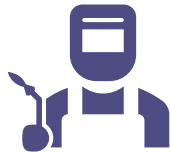
Adapting to decarbonization in Europe and the role of industrial relations

Austria: Strong bargaining institutions in a changing energy sector



An established renewable base within a broader energy transition:

Hydropower remains central to Austrian electricity production, alongside expanding wind and solar activities.



A relatively small, comparatively well-paid workforce:

Electricity, gas, steam and air-conditioning supply employed approximately 29,100 employees in 2024.

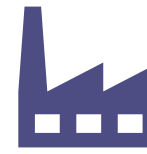
Mean gross hourly earnings were €29.51 in 2022 (mean = €20.25)



An institutional framework for negotiating change:

Sectoral agreements cover electricity utilities, gas and district heating, and mineral oil.

Works councils provide a complementary channel for workplace participation.



Renewable expansion crosses bargaining boundaries:

Hydropower largely operates within established utility agreements.

Renewable project development, installation and contracting can fall under different sectors which challenge bargaining.



The Austrian cases focuses on renewable developments with institutional adaptation:

How can established bargaining arrangements address changing skills, work organisation, and diversification of company types while maintaining job quality and effective representation?

Adapting to decarbonization in Europe and the role of industrial relations

What can industrial relations contribute?

- Earlier involvement in transition decisions
- Negotiated pathways between jobs
- Representation across changing production structures
- Coordination beyond individual workplaces
- Meaningful influence and implementation
- Preparing workers and institutions for the transition

Transforming society – Uncovering Opportunities and Challenges Amidst Change**Conclusions: What do we learn across these transitions?****Anticipate change**

Social policy needs to prepare for change, not only react to it.

Adapt institutions

Policies and institutions need the capacity to adjust and implement change effectively.

Address unequal impacts

The costs, risks and opportunities of transitions are not equally distributed.

Ensure participation

People affected by change need a meaningful role in shaping it.

Common challenge: How can we make digital, demographic and green transitions socially sustainable?



Mind the traps!

Learnings from long-term care reform in Slovenia

Addressing the demographic transformation

Kai Leichsenring
14 October 2026

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Addressing key challenges of the demographic transformation

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Long-term care reform in Slovenia

LTC Insurance entitlements by care category per month:

Services in kind and benefits in cash

Benefits	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5
LTC at home	20 hrs	40 hrs	60 hrs	80 hrs	110 hrs
LTC in institution	20 hrs	40 hrs	60 hrs	80 hrs	110 hrs
Day care	7 hrs	14 hrs	21 hrs	27 hrs	37 hrs
Cash benefit	91 EUR	184 EUR	275 EUR	367 EUR	504 EUR

Source: Ministry of Solidary-Based Future, as of 2026.

Important features:

- Universal rights: needs- but not means-tested
- Insurance principle
- Step-by-step implementation
- (Single) Entry Point
- Care coordination
- Services to strengthen independence
- E-care
- “Paid Family Carers” scheme

Framework conditions



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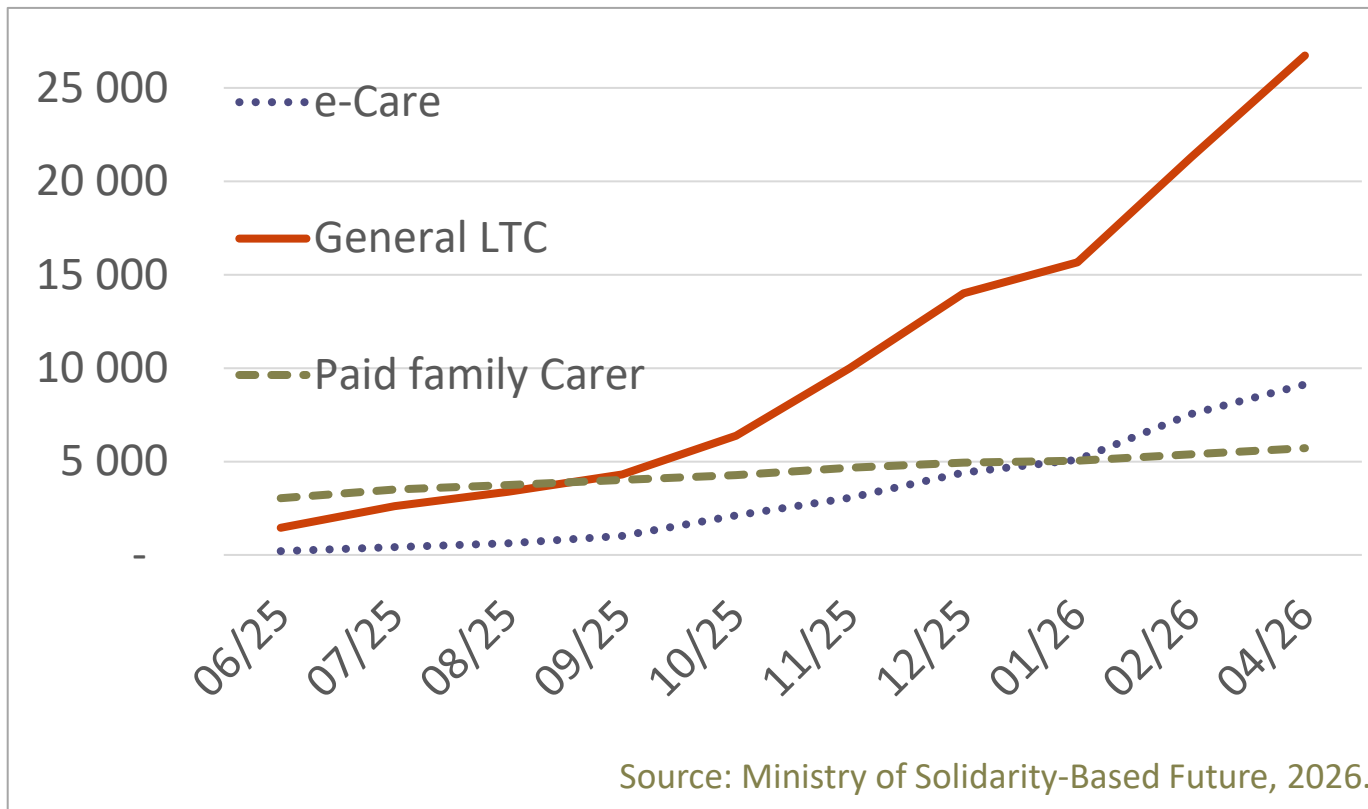
- Staffing constraints
- Limited extent of services and service providers
 - Legacy of previous schemes: home help, attendance allowance
 - Now: lack of support for necessary investments
- Entry Points at Centres for Social Work:
 - Needs assessment as bottleneck
- Provider organisations:
 - New types of professionals (e.g., physiotherapists and occupational therapists) and professional profiles (care coordinators)
- Health Insurance Institute also becomes LTC Insurance
 - Data processing and monitoring

Long-term care reform in Slovenia

Funded by
the European Union

Entry Points under pressure

Number of applications by types of rights from June 2025 to April 2026 (aggregated data)



- LTC Advisors (Needs Assessors) too much burdened by red tape
- Steep increase of applications
- Long waiting lists
- Lack of software

Long-term care reform in Slovenia

Learnings



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- Avoid parallel systems and facilitate smooth transition by defining guaranteed benefits
- Focus on efficient information system (software)
- Ensure sufficient staffing (Single Entry Points, Care Coordinators, other specialists ...)
- Clarify the role of Entry Points with all stakeholders
- Strengthen the role of Care Coordinators to move towards integrated, person-centred care
 - Align needs assessment and care coordination and planning
- Align funding and costing models
- “Paid Family Carer” scheme has pros and cons, but consider consequences for labour market and social security rights of family carers
- Reconsider the necessity of increasing competition among providers and choice for clients

Source: Leichsenring et al., 2026.



Towards a new MIPAA Regional Implementation Strategy

Addressing the demographic transformation

UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing
14 October 2026

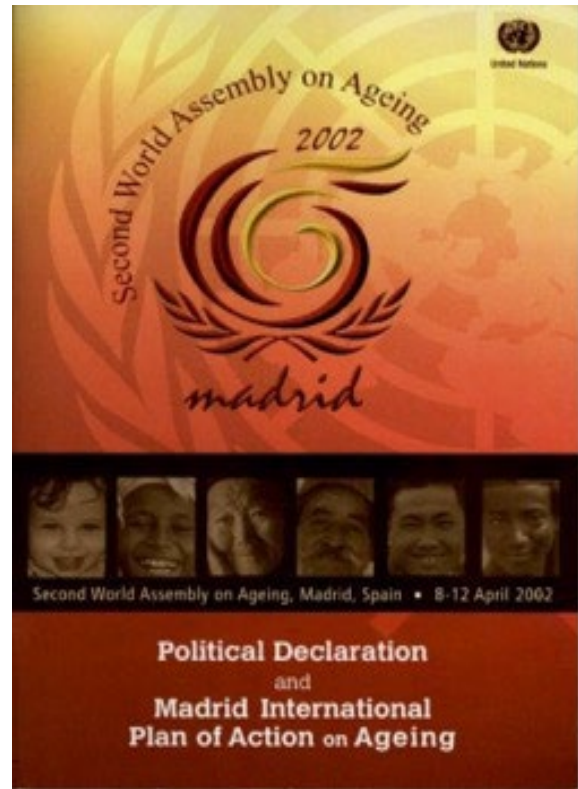
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25 Years of MIPAA and its Regional (UNECE) Implementation Strategy



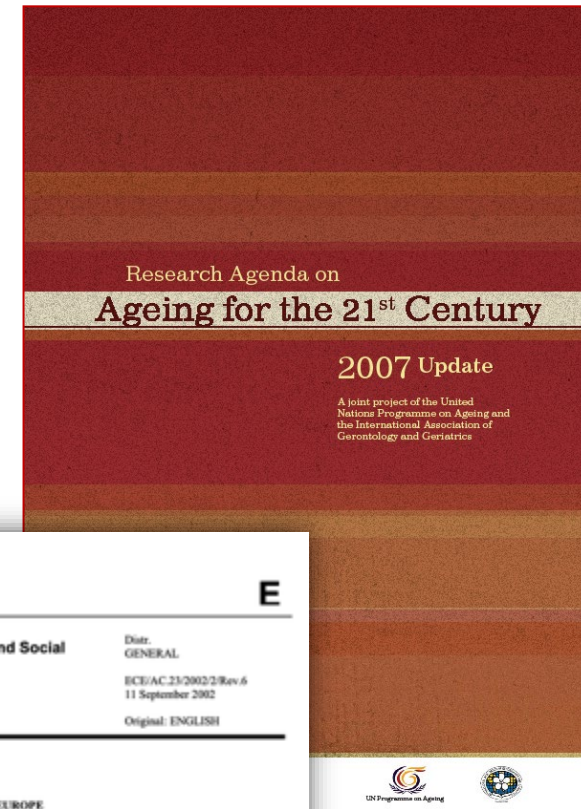
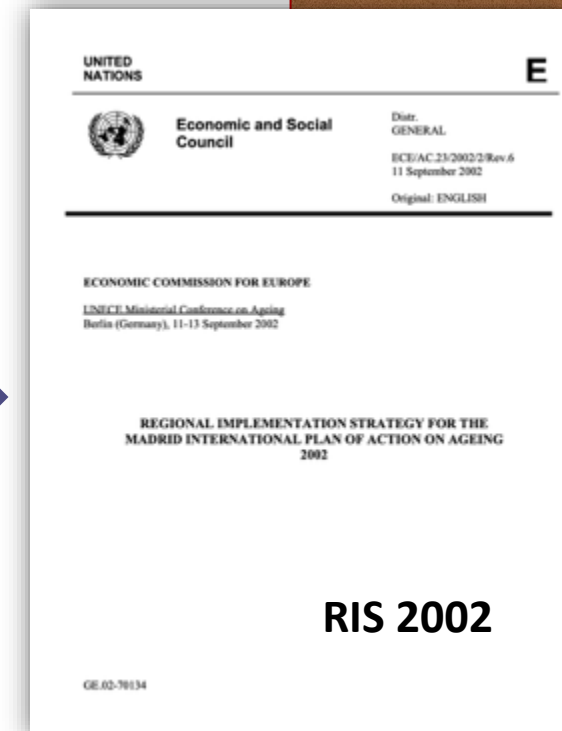
Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

- 239 recommendations
- 35 objectives
- 18 priority issues
- 3 priority directions

Priority direction I:
Older Persons and Development

Priority direction II: Advancing health and well-being into old age

Priority direction III: Ensuring enabling and supportive environments



Addressing the demographic transformation: MIPAA RIS**Has the MIPAA process failed?****Do we need a new Regional Implementation Strategy?**

- Progress in tiny steps and distinct adaptation towards mainstreaming ageing in some (rich) countries, less awareness in middle- and low-income countries
- Insufficient human and financial resources at national and international levels
- Weak national capacities to implement mainstreaming ageing policies
- Lack of political will and insufficient coordination of the global and regional implementation processes
- MIPAA is not a legally binding document, a new international plan is out of sight, current debates about the potential UN Convention
- Updating the UNECE RIS is a necessity in the context of new geopolitical challenges, climate change, digital transformation and rising longevity ...

6 Goals

- Change the narrative on ageing and promote a society that values people of all ages
- Support lifelong learning, skills development and digital inclusion
- Enable and value participation and contribution across life
- Foster wellbeing, autonomy and independent living
- Enable healthy living in caring communities
- Ensure safety, protection and financial security



Source: Task Force RIS, UNECE SWGA, 2026.

Looking ahead

- Further involvement of stakeholders, including research(ers) and NGOs during autumn 2026 to elaborate on sub-topics, cross-cutting themes, implementation and monitoring
- Preparation of a Ministerial Declaration
- Joint Forum and Joint Declaration of Civil Society and Research at the Ministerial Conference in Leipzig, September 2027

Transforming society – Uncovering Opportunities and Challenges Amidst Change

Closing Discussion

- Which of these transitions is creating the most pressing social policy challenges in your country and why?
- What is proving most difficult in responding to these changes: anticipating them, adapting institutions, addressing inequalities, or involving those affected?
- Where could the European Centre add most value through comparative evidence, mutual learning, or exchange between countries?