



” Aging Cities – how to plan senior-friendly cities?

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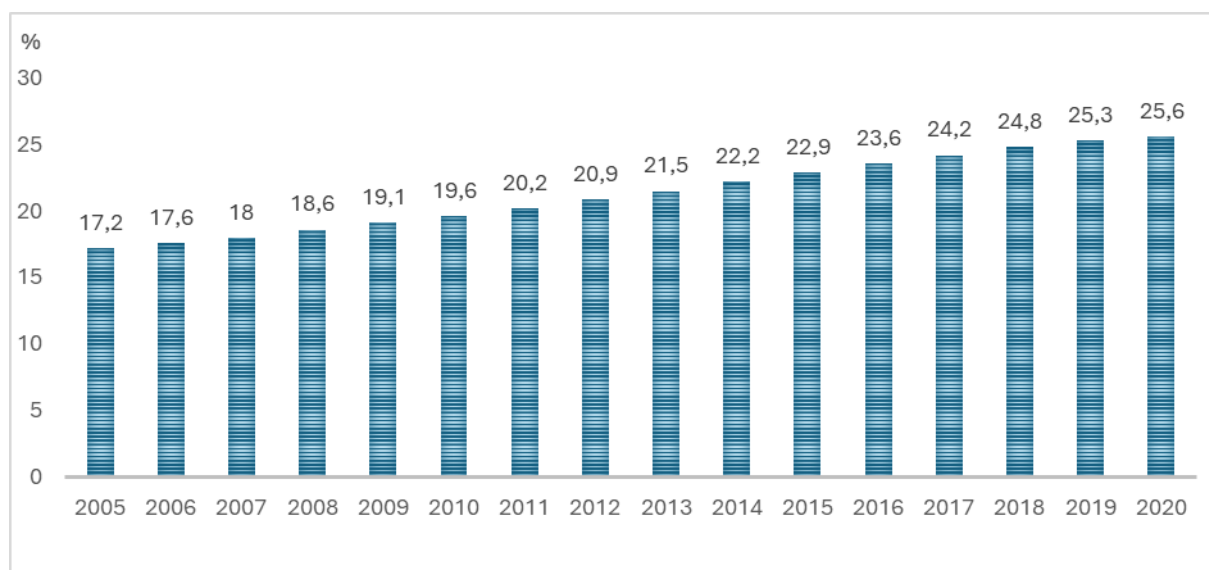




Population aging is a demographic phenomenon characterized by an increasing proportion of elderly people in the population. It is caused by both longer life expectancy and low fertility rates. On one hand, the favourable phenomenon is that people live longer thanks to advances in medicine, better access to healthcare and improved living conditions. This means that the number of elderly people in the population is growing, indicating an improvement in quality of life and health in society. On the other hand, low fertility rates, which means an insufficient number of births, exacerbate the aging process. Social changes in recent years, such as delaying the decision to have children to later years, fewer children per family, as well as economic factors such as the rising costs of raising children and economic uncertainty, contribute to the decline in birth rates. Fewer children mean that younger generations are smaller, which in the long term leads to a decrease in the number of working-age people. This can cause several social and economic problems, such as labour market shortages, burden on pension and healthcare systems and changes in social structure.

According to data from the Statistics Poland (GUS), the current aging index accounts for 133, which means that there are 133 "grandparents" (people aged 65 and over) for every 100 "grandchildren" (children aged 0-14), with a population difference of 1.9 million in favour of the elderly.

CHART 1. SHARE OF PEOPLE AGED 60 AND OVER IN THE TOTAL POPULATION



source: GUS

According to the assumptions of the demographic forecast developed by the Statistics Poland, in the assumed perspective there will be a significant decrease in the number of children and adults, while the number and proportion of seniors will increase. The number of people aged 65 and over will rise – it is prognosed that by 2060 there will be over 2.5 million more people aged 65 and over than in 2022 (an increase of 34.2%). A significant increase in the number of people aged 80 and over is also expected – by 2060, their number will more than double compared to 2022.



Population aging poses numerous challenges for cities but also opens up opportunities to create more inclusive, accessible and senior-friendly urban environments. It will be crucial to adapt urban spaces to the needs of older people, as in 40 years half of Europeans will be mature and will need a place where they feel not only safe, but also welcomed.

The dominant concepts in Europe regarding population aging, according to the OECD, i.e. “active aging” and “aging in place”, are key to understanding the housing policy, services and spatial planning. Both concepts are essential for creating friendly urban spaces and implementing sustainable development strategies.

“Active aging” is a concept that promotes maximizing the health, social and cultural potential of older people, ensuring their active participation in social, economic, cultural and civic life.

“Aging in place” is a concept that assumes older people should have the opportunity to live in their homes and familiar communities as long as possible, with appropriate support and services that enable them to maintain independence and quality of life.

The concepts of “active aging” and “aging in place” are crucial for the sustainable development of cities in Europe. Integrating these concepts into urban, housing and service policies allows to create spaces that are friendly and accessible to older people while promoting their activity and social integration. This way, cities can better address the challenges associated with population aging and promote sustainable development for all residents.

Several key aspects to consider when planning cities with the needs of older people in mind include:

1. Accessibility and Mobility:

- improvement of public transportation: easily accessible transport means, such as low-floor vehicles, frequent schedules, routes adapted to seniors' needs, bus stops with benches and shelters;
- safe pedestrian crossings: adapting road infrastructure, including traffic lights, to the needs of people with limited mobility (longer signal duration for slower movement, well-marked and well-lit crossings);
- reducing architectural barriers: even sidewalks, ramps instead of stairs, low curbs.

2. Greenery and Public Spaces:

- spatial planning: creating friendly, accessible, and green urban spaces that promote physical and social activity;
- parks and green areas: easily accessible, with seating areas and paths adapted for people with limited mobility;
- benches and rest areas: regularly placed throughout the city, especially on walking routes and in parks.



3. Safety:

- street lighting: good lighting on streets, pedestrian crossings, and public places;
- road safety: creating spaces designed for easy and safe travel on foot or by bike through a dense network of well-designed pedestrian crossings (thoughtful traffic organization, speed bumps, designated bike paths).

4. Housing:

- construction and adaptation of housing stock: modernizing apartments and buildings to meet the needs of older people, e.g., installing ramps, elevators, grab bars in bathrooms, as well as adapting older buildings to accessibility standards (buildings with wide corridors and doors, bathrooms adapted for people with limited mobility, step-free entrances);
- assisted living: housing options for seniors requiring care or support but wishing to maintain independence, e.g., development of senior communities (designed for older people, with access to healthcare, recreation and services);
- home safety: implementing technologies and systems that support safety, such as smart homes.

5. Services and Healthcare:

- proximity of services: planning integrated spaces in the city and surroundings that are close to residential areas (shops, pharmacies, clinics, banks, and other daily services);
- healthcare services: building and developing healthcare facilities tailored to the specific needs of older people, easy access to clinics, hospitals, preventive and rehabilitation programs;
- care services: development of local care services, such as home help, nursing, meal delivery.

6. Community and Integration:

- recreational and cultural facilities: developing infrastructure that supports physical, mental, and social activity for seniors, such as senior centres, senior clubs, theatres, libraries;
- lifelong learning: educational and training programs that enable older people to acquire new skills and develop interests;
- continued employment: providing opportunities for older people to continue working, making them feel socially useful.

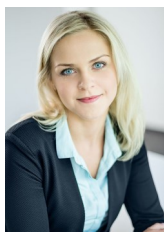
7. Technology and Information:

- technological education: courses and workshops teaching seniors how to use modern technologies;
- easily accessible information: clear signage and easily accessible information about city services, events, and support options, up-to-date information at bus stops and in vehicles.



Many cities around the world are taking initiatives to create friendly environments for the aging population. These include Manchester, The Hague, Tokyo, Copenhagen and Barcelona. Many cities in Poland also have support programs for seniors aimed at improving their quality of life and ensuring safety and assistance in daily tasks. One such program is "SOS for Seniors" conducted in Lublin. This initiative aims to provide quick help in emergencies through a wristband worn on the wrist. Each wristband is equipped with a heart rate monitor, fall sensor, and GPS locator. In case of an emergency, one can press the appropriate button on the watch and a signal is sent to the care centre, which responds appropriately to the alert.

Population aging poses numerous challenges for cities, but also opens up opportunities to create more inclusive, accessible, and senior-friendly urban environments. Creating a city friendly to older residents requires the involvement and cooperation of various sectors and interest groups, including city authorities, urban planners, non-governmental organizations and the seniors themselves. It is essential to adopt a holistic and proactive approach that considers the needs of all residents, regardless of age. Only in this way can we ensure that urban spaces are safe, accessible, and conducive to active aging.



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