The Active Ageing Index research project has aimed at providing a new tool for policy makers to enable them to devise evidence-informed strategies in dealing with the challenges of population ageing and its impacts on society. It is predicated on the insight that, in tackling issues associated with population ageing, the successful measures are those which enable and increase older people’s participation in the labour market and in social and family activities. By these, and by additional means of access to healthcare, security and lifelong learning, it is commonly agreed that older people are empowered to live independent, healthy and secure lives. The tool that has emerged is called the Active Ageing Index 2012 (“AAI”).

The AAI toolset consists of the overall index AAI, as well as gender and domain-specific indices and their constituting individual indicators. Thus, it allows policy makers to base their social policy interventions on the comparative and substantive, quantitative evidence of active ageing indicators and indices for EU Member States and so promote active and healthy ageing for its citizens. The multifaceted design of the active ageing policy discourse will allow setting of policy goals to maintain, even raise, prosperity and social cohesion and improve financial sustainability of public welfare systems. The context of the AAI project has been that the year 2012 was the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. It also marked the 10th anniversary of the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in April 2002, and the second 5-year cycle of review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA. More details about the EY2012 can be found at: http://europa.eu/ey2012; for information about MIPAA and RIS, see http://www.unece.org/pau/age/index.html To mark these major occasions, and to contribute to their activities, the Population Unit of the UNECE, the EC’s Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research have jointly undertaken the research project to construct the AAI and disseminate its findings.

In its design, the AAI draws from the definition offered by the WHO during the 2nd World Assembly on Ageing (2002), base itself on the strands of the EY2012, makes use of the methodology similar to the Human Development Index of the UNDP, connects with the MIPAA/RIS and promotes the activities of the EY2012. It enables credible comparisons between 27 EU countries by quantifying the differential extent to which older people have and can realise their potential in the distinct domains of their lives that determine their active ageing experiences: employment; social activity and participation; and independent, healthy and secure living. The AAI also offers the novelty of including an additional 4th domain that goes beyond the actual outcomes of active ageing and captures how EU countries differ with respect to the capacity and enabling environment for active ageing. In this pursuit, the AAI also offers the transversal breakdown by gender, so as to highlight the specific social policy goal of reducing gender disparity in positive experiences of ageing.

The work undertaken in the AAI project can be seen to fulfil a number of aspirations:

- To raise awareness of the contributions that older people make to society and also encourage dialogue on issues of policy on active and healthy ageing.
- To provide unique insights to national policy makers for the fact that such comparative perspective is often not possible from national studies alone.
- To help highlight how existing large-scale comparative data-sets can be further developed to provide the evidence necessary in formulating social policies, especially in the policy discourse of active and healthy ageing.
- To connect with the process of monitoring progress in the implementation of MIPAA and RIS.
- The replication of the AAI in the future will help track progress over time and evaluate the outcomes of policy reforms.

To undertake this project in the most rigorous manner, the project partners had the services of the UNECE Expert Group on Active Ageing (the Expert Group), comprising distinguished international experts from UNECE, the EC, the OECD and academia as well as from Eurofound and EUROSTAT and the national statistical agencies of Italy and the UK (ISTAT and ONS respectively) and representatives of policymaking bodies of national governments (Belgium Federal Ministry of Social Security) and the civil society (AGE Platform Europe). The project team also undertook consultations with other experts and stakeholders, and made presentations in major fora to introduce the AAI project and its findings to a wider audience.

Amongst the most notable of them are:

- The World Demographic and Ageing Forum, in St. Gallen (August 2012);
- The UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, in Vienna (September 2012);
- The 11th Meeting of National Coordinators of the EY2012, in Brussels (September 2012);
- The Gulbenkian Foundation’s International Conference ‘Ageing and social innovation’, in Lisbon (November 2012);
- The 5th Annual Meeting of the UNECE’s Working Group on Ageing, in Geneva (November 2012); and

The work reported in this paper includes the definition of active ageing used for the particular purpose of measurement of active ageing outcomes and capacities in EU countries (Chapter 1). The paper also includes a detailed description of the selection criteria for and requirements of active ageing indicators used in the AAI (Chapter 2). The methodology adopted is described next in constructing the gender and domain-specific active ageing indices for each of the 27 EU Member States (Chapter 3). The final set of results on the aggregated overall index (all domains together) and the gender and domain-specific indices for each of the 27 EU Member States are presented next (Chapter 4). A synthesizing discussion is provided at the end (Chapter 5).

This paper is a substantive revision of an earlier methodology paper ‘Towards an Active Ageing Index: Concept, Methodology and First Results’, released in July 2012 (Zaidi et al. 2012). In addition to this revision, the final AAI results will also be made available in the form of an Excel Sheet for use and further extension. This flexible tool would therefore allow policy makers to set their own targets, adapted to the specific circumstances and policy challenges in their country.