

**Fourteenth Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing
(20 – 22, and 24 May 2024)
Input from UN-ESCAP, 3 April 2024**

Background (356 words)

The Asia-Pacific region is undergoing rapid and significant demographic shifts due to a decline in fertility and mortality levels, resulting in rapid population ageing. In 2022, the region was home to 697 million individuals aged 60 years or over, which represented about one in every seven people. This number is projected to double by 2050, reaching 1.3 billion, or one in four people, highlighting the unprecedented pace of population ageing in comparison to other world regions. This shift presents multifaceted challenges and opportunities; while it is a testament to improved public health and socio-economic development, it also poses significant challenges due to the rapid nature of the demographic transition, its extent since it is affecting almost all countries of the region, and its extensive impact.

The reasons behind this demographic transition are twofold. First, there has been a significant decline in fertility rates across the region, with many countries experiencing a drop to below-replacement levels of 2.1 children per woman. This decline has contributed to a smaller proportion of young people and a higher proportion of older persons. Given women's longer life expectancy, the majority of all older persons in the region are women. Secondly, improvements in public health and medical advancements have led to increased longevity, further contributing to the ageing population. Despite living longer, older persons in the region are projected to spend an increasing number of their years in ill health, particularly older women, who generally outlive older men. Non-communicable diseases have become the leading cause of death among older persons, posing a significant healthcare challenge.

Governments across the Asia-Pacific region have begun to address these demographic changes through the strengthening of institutions, policies and action plans focused on older persons. Despite the challenges posed by COVID-19, progress has been made, particularly in areas focusing on health, healthy ageing, care and social protection. Yet, issues such as misconceptions about ageing, lack of data and insufficient human resources dedicated to ageing remain significant challenges. Furthermore, the integration of health and social care remains a distant goal for several countries, underscoring the need for continued efforts to adapt to the region's rapidly changing demographic landscape.

Fouth Regional Review and Appraisal of the MIPAA (492 words)

In accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/167 and Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/8, ESCAP convened the Fourth Regional Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in Asia and the Pacific in 2022, following a bottom-up and a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach. During the review, synergies with the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2020, were also explored.

The review and appraisal process in Asia and the Pacific included stakeholder consultations that aimed to gather views regarding MIPAA's three priority directions, and prevalent and emerging issues such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, intergenerational solidarity, climate change, digital transformation and the future of work, with gender considerations mainstreamed throughout the consultations. Moreover, a national survey assessing the implementation of MIPAA in Asia and the Pacific provided a snapshot of recent policies, programmes and initiatives targeting older persons. The survey responses and consultations revealed progress in the implementation of MIPAA in the region, albeit unevenly, with many challenges remaining. The COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated existing vulnerabilities, and stakeholders felt that commitment to certain aspects of MIPAA had been limited in some countries. There was need for more digital and skills training opportunities for older persons, especially older women, and neglect, abuse, violence, discrimination, and ageism remained prevalent. Accessible and affordable health care and universal health coverage for all, including older persons, remained a distant goal for several countries.

The outcome document of the review, "Accelerating Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 to Build a Sustainable Society for All Ages in Asia and the Pacific,"¹ reaffirms the commitment of ESCAP members and associate members to MIPAA. It emphasizes the need for comprehensive, integrated policy frameworks that incorporate ageing into national development strategies, ensuring a human rights-based and people-centred approach.

The outcome document also recognizes the diverse challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly affecting older women. It underlines the importance of safeguarding the dignity and human rights of older persons, addressing all forms of violence, discrimination, stigmatization and social exclusion. It provides detailed recommendations concerning the promotion and safeguarding the human rights of all older persons by closing gaps and mainstreaming their rights within legal and policy frameworks, developing adaptable social protection systems that consider the vulnerabilities of older persons to poverty and social exclusion, and mainstreaming gender and disability perspectives into all-age-friendly policy initiatives to empower women and meet individuals' needs throughout their life course.

Furthermore, the outcome document encourages the active participation of older persons in society by promoting employment opportunities, lifelong learning and digital literacy, while also combating discrimination in the workforce and beyond.

The Fourth Review and Appraisal of MIPAA in Asia and the Pacific and the accompanying Asia-Pacific Report on Population Ageing,² highlight the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the challenges and opportunities presented by population ageing. ESCAP's continued commitment to

¹ ESCAP/MIPAA/IGM.3/2022/3/Add.1

² <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-pacific-report-population-ageing-2022-trends-policies-and-good-practices-regarding>

supporting its members States in implementing the MIPAA and enhancing the well-being of older persons in the region reflects a collective endeavor to build a sustainable society for all ages.

The following input was provided based on the results of a member State survey,³ conducted prior to the Fourth Review and Appraisal of MIPAA in Asia and the Pacific in 2022, additional desk research and findings from the Asia-Pacific Report on Population Ageing 2022.⁴ The good practices presented further below have been compiled into a dashboard and made public on the ESCAP website.⁵

Accessibility, infrastructure and habitat (transport, housing and access) (674 words)

Several countries in Asia and the Pacific have spearheaded the implementation of inclusive policies and legal frameworks aimed at protecting the rights of older persons, particularly in terms of adequate housing, accessible transportation and public services. Singapore's Enhancement for Active Seniors (EASE) programme stands out as an initiative, offering age-friendly modifications to housing that accommodate the needs of older persons, thus fostering safer and more comfortable living environments. The Proximity Housing Grant (PHG) by the Housing and Development Board of Singapore provides financial support to citizens looking to purchase a home close to their parents or children, to foster intergenerational living close to one another.

In the Philippines, concerted efforts have been made to improve accessibility for older persons with disabilities, ensuring that both infrastructure and services are inclusive. The Philippines has implemented the Accessibility Law (Republic Act No. 344), which establishes minimum requirements and standards for public buildings, facilities and utilities to be accessible to persons with disabilities, including older persons. This law is complemented by the Act Expanding the Benefits and Privileges of Persons with Disability (Republic Act No. 10754), which further enables older persons with disabilities to access medicines, transport and recreational facilities more easily. Additionally, Macao, China has set a standard for inclusivity by enhancing public transport accessibility for older persons through fare concessions and improved physical access.

The concept of 'ageing in place', supported by age- and disability-friendly infrastructure, is gaining prominence across the region. Initiatives such as Thailand's community-based services demonstrate local solutions that foster inclusive environments, enabling older persons to live independently and stay integrated within their communities. These initiatives are pivotal in promoting the health and well-being of older persons at the grassroots level.

However, despite such progress, the development of a comprehensive legal and policy framework recognizing older persons' rights to accessibility and inclusive infrastructure universally across the region remains a work in progress. Factors such as urbanization, migration and changing family

³ <https://www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/mipaa/voluntary-national-survey-response>

⁴ <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/asia-pacific-report-population-ageing-2022-trends-policies-and-good-practices-regarding>

⁵ <https://www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/policies>

structures present unique challenges faced by older persons, particularly in rural and remote areas. The digital divide further compounds these challenges by limiting access to essential services like transportation, healthcare and information, leading to increased social isolation among older populations. Australia's Seniors Connected Programme aims to bridge this gap by improving older persons' access to information and communications technology (ICT), thereby combating social isolation.

The lack of systematically collected, analyzed and disseminated data on older persons' needs and the challenges they face limits the effectiveness of targeted policies and programmes designed to support them. About 13 of 22 countries responding to the MIPAA survey reported that a lack of age-disaggregated data is a concern for the Government. Only 4 of the 22 countries responding to the survey acknowledged knowing about the Titchfield City Group⁶ or being active in the group. This gap underscores the urgent need for enhanced data collection methods, increased research on ageing populations and the development of indicators that accurately reflect the accessibility and inclusivity of infrastructure and services for older persons.

Combatting ageism and promoting equality are essential in ensuring that older persons can fully enjoy their rights. Malaysia's Age-friendly City pilot project in Taiping, Perak, showcases how creating environments can be crafted to encourage and support active participation of older persons in society. Addressing ageism requires continuous advocacy, education and policy interventions that challenge stereotypes and transform perceptions of ageing, promoting respect and understanding across generations.

Mechanisms for older persons to voice complaints and seek redress for denial of their rights are paramount. Examples from the Republic of Korea, where investigations into care facilities during the COVID-19 pandemic led to policy reforms, highlight the importance of accountability and the protection of older persons' rights in care settings. Furthermore, empowering older persons to participate actively in policymaking, as seen in Australia's Council of Elders, not only increases policy relevance but also promotes the dignity and contributions of older persons to society.

Continued collaborative efforts between Governments, civil society and international organizations are key to developing policies that are inclusive and adaptable to the unique socio-economic contexts of each country.

⁶ The Titchfield Group on Ageing statistics was created at the forty-ninth session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in March 2018. The purpose of the group is to contribute to establishing international standards and methods for the compilation of statistics and data on the major dimensions of ageing and age-disaggregated data across the life cycle, and to collaborate with United Nations (UN) bodies and other organizations concerned with specific aspects of ageing and age statistics. For more information, see: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/citygroups/Titchfield.cshtml>

Participation in public life and decision-making processes (719 words)

In the Asia-Pacific region, a diverse array of legal provisions and policy frameworks has been formulated and implemented to enhance the participation of older persons in public life and decision-making processes. For instance, 20 out of 22 survey-responding ESCAP members⁷ reported measures to foster the active involvement of older persons, with China, for example, implementing a specific “Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of the Elderly” in 1996, with amendments in 2018, which mandates the inclusion of their perspectives in relevant policymaking. This law specifically requires that policies affecting older persons must consider their needs and preferences, ensuring their active involvement in society and the decision-making processes that impact their lives. Australia’s creation of the Council of Elders, designed to amplify the voices of older Australians in policy formulation, exemplifies a significant initiative towards inclusive governance. Japan’s General Principles Concerning Measures for the Ageing Society and India’s National Policy on Senior Citizens highlight a collective commitment to create inclusive environments that not only protect but also actively involve older persons in shaping the policies that affect their lives.

Proactive initiatives across various countries further demonstrate this commitment. In Thailand, the Government supports Older Persons Councils at the national, provincial and sub-district levels, ensuring that older persons have a voice in governance and community planning. Similarly, the Philippines’ Expanded Senior Citizens Act provides older persons with opportunities to participate in educational, cultural and social programmes, emphasizing their integral role in the community.

Efforts to ensure non-discriminatory participation encompass a range of practices, including those aimed at involving older persons in policy design and implementation, as seen in Australia’s aged care system reform and Mongolia’s inclusion of older persons as senior advisors or members of policy-drafting working groups. Despite these advances, there is a noted scarcity of data specifically addressing the participation of older persons in public life and decision-making, pointing to a need for enhanced data collection efforts in this domain. Malaysia’s Senior Citizen Activity Centres (Pusat Aktiviti Warga Emas), promoting active ageing, show the potential for older persons’ involvement and underscore the importance of data collection in this area. In the Philippines, the Magna Carta of Women has an explicit provision mandating the State to “protect women senior citizens from neglect, abandonment, domestic violence, abuse, exploitation, and discrimination” and to “ensure special protective mechanisms and support services against violence, sexual abuse, exploitation, and discrimination of older women.”⁸

Ageism and discrimination against older persons, alongside technological barriers, stand as significant challenges to their full participation. Initiatives to combat ageism and promote social inclusion, as well as efforts to improve digital literacy among older persons, are important toward

⁷ This refers to ESCAP member States that completed the voluntary national MIPAA reviews in 2021/2022.

⁸ <https://pcw.gov.ph/faq-republic-act-9710-the-magna-carta-of-women/>

mitigating these barriers. The digital divide emerges as a significant barrier to older persons' participation in modern society. Innovative programmes like the Republic of Korea's Digital Literacy Training for older persons aim to bridge this gap by equipping them with necessary digital skills, thus enhancing their access to information and services, and enabling their active participation in digitalized public spheres. ESCAP is also implementing a project "Developing tools to increase digital literacy of older persons," supported by the China-ESCAP Cooperation Programme (CECP), aiming to foster greater social inclusion of older persons through enhanced digital literacy. This initiative acknowledges the parallel megatrends of rapid population ageing and digitalization in Asia and the Pacific, targeting the empowerment of older women and men to utilize digital tools for active participation in economic and social life.

The development of specialized mechanisms for older persons to seek redress and file complaints is another important aspect of ensuring inclusivity and accountability. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in countries such as Australia, the Philippines and New Zealand play an active role in championing the rights of older persons and addressing grievances related to discrimination or exclusion from public life and the decision-making process. For example, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHRP) has advocated for a systematic reporting and monitoring mechanism at the national level for acts of violence against older persons in the Philippines. CHRP is supporting the enactment of comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, including on the basis of age, to promote equality and prevent and protect persons from discrimination. Together, these initiatives and frameworks pave the way toward a society that not only values but actively incorporates the insights and experiences of its older members.

Social inclusion (731 words)

Social inclusion refers to the integration of older persons into societal life, acknowledging their right to participate in cultural activities, digital engagement, independent living and community involvement. Legislative frameworks across various countries underscore a commitment to these principles by fostering environments that encourage the active ageing and societal participation of older persons. For instance, one notable effort is the "Act on Stabilization of Employment of Elderly Persons" in Japan. This legislation mandates efforts by both public and private sector employers to ensure employment opportunities for older persons up to the age of 70, promoting their active participation in the workforce and, by extension, their communities. This legislation mandates efforts by both public and private sector employers to ensure employment opportunities for older persons up to the age of 70, promoting their active participation in the workforce and, by extension, their communities. In the Philippines, the Accessibility Law (Republic Acts No. 344 and No. 10754) support the functional capacity of older persons with disabilities, ensuring they have equal access to participate in society.

Similarly, Azerbaijan's Silver DOST (Silver Friend), which is a sub-programme of the DOST Volunteer project, aims to ensure an active lifestyle for older persons aged 50 or over through volunteer activities. This programme helps older persons to share knowledge with younger generations, promoting social participation and integration into society. In the Russian Federation, vocational

training was provided under a federal project aimed at promoting continued employment for older persons, allowing them to participate in vocational training opportunities.

The role of States in facilitating social inclusion for older persons is pivotal, requiring legal, cultural and digital frameworks that respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of older individuals to equitable access to services and infrastructure. This encompasses the promotion of age- and disability-friendly environments and policies that support the ability of older persons to live independently and within their communities. Singapore's Silver Infocomm Initiative, which provides IT training for older persons, exemplifies the push to bridge the digital divide, enabling the active participation of older persons in the digital realm. In Türkiye, the "Life is simpler with the Internet" project is a digital literacy project that was launched in 2013 by Turk Telekom, UNDP and other partners to provide training for anyone regarding digital tools, including older persons. The Republic of Korea's focus on enhancing digital literacy among older persons further demonstrates the importance of fostering an inclusive digital environment through initiatives such as the "Senior Internship" programme. This programme encourages the re-employment of older persons and includes training to improve their digital skills, thus supporting their active engagement in society.

Thailand's efforts to foster social inclusion are highlighted by the creation of the "Brain Bank," a repository of knowledge from older persons, and the implementation of the Second National Plan on the Elderly (2002-2021). These initiatives aim to leverage the experience and expertise of older persons, encouraging their active contribution to society and promoting intergenerational learning.

The active participation of older persons in policy-making processes, as seen with Australia's Council of Elders, is crucial for ensuring that policies reflect the insights and experiences of older persons. However, challenges such as the digital divide and stereotypes that limit the full participation of older persons in societal life persist. Countries like the Republic of Korea have implemented online safety training for older persons, promoting digital inclusion. Furthermore, intergenerational programmes that foster mutual learning and respect between younger and older generations contribute to reinforcing social cohesion. In the Russian Federation, from 2015 to 2018, unemployed older persons and non-working pensioners were taught basic computer skills to familiarize them with technology. This programme aimed at enabling access to public information sources for older persons.

For fostering social inclusion of older persons, it is recommended to develop and enforce legal frameworks that clearly define and safeguard their rights to social participation. This includes enhancing digital literacy and safety programmes to ensure older persons remain connected in an increasingly digital world. Intergenerational exchange programmes are also vital for bridging the gap between young and old, promoting mutual understanding and respect. Additionally, advocating for the development of age-friendly communities and cities can significantly enhance older persons' accessibility to public spaces and services, encouraging active community life. Establishing mechanisms for the regular assessment of social inclusion policies and encouraging international cooperation can further enrich the sharing of good practices and innovations in promoting the social inclusion of older persons.

Rights to health and access to health services (697 words)

The right to health for older persons goes beyond mere access to healthcare services. It touches on broader issues, such as social protection, access to adequate water and sanitation, housing and health education. This right aims to ensure that older persons enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and well-being, marked by equality and non-discrimination in accessing healthcare services. Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of addressing the material conditions necessary for its full enjoyment.

Understanding the right to health for older persons within national legislation means acknowledging both their access to healthcare and the conditions necessary for this access. For example, Thailand's Act on Older Persons is notable for its emphasis on holistic care and universal health coverage, showcasing a commitment to the well-being of older persons in all health dimensions. State obligations in this context extend to ensuring non-discriminatory access to a wide range of health facilities, goods and services — from preventive to palliative care. Countries like Armenia have taken steps to enhance care services for older persons through initiatives like community-based services under the Strategy for the Development of a Health Care System (2021-2025).

Beyond health services, some member States recognize the need for older persons to access social protections, housing, clean water and health education. Innovative approaches such as Singapore's Action Plan for Successful Ageing and the Republic of Korea's Silver Care Robot Project have been developed to enhance the quality of life and health of older persons through technology and comprehensive policymaking.

Addressing the right to health for older persons also involves tailoring responses to their specific needs, which include the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases and mental health issues, as well as overcoming challenges such as the digital divide in accessing health information and telehealth services. Special measures, including the provision of geriatric care and gerontological training programmes, are crucial. Japan's integrated community care system and the Philippines' policies on rural health units consider the diversity among older persons, ensuring those even in remote areas receive quality health services.

The Asia-Pacific region has seen several good practices in promoting the health and well-being of older persons, including the integration of health and social care and the expansion of long-term care systems. Australia's focus on person-centred care and the expansion of home-based services stands as a commendable example. Yet, challenges such as inconsistent healthcare coverage, high out-of-pocket expenses, and limited access to specialized services for older persons, particularly in rural and underserved areas, remain.

In terms of recommendations, codifying older persons' right to health within national laws is fundamental, ensuring compatibility with international human rights standards and a clear stance against age discrimination in healthcare. New Zealand's healthcare system, which provides specialised services for Maori and Pacific older persons, exemplifies the need for culturally

appropriate care. Expanding palliative care services and long-term care systems to be more integrated, flexible and community-based is essential, recognizing the significant role of formal and informal caregivers. Singapore's Palliative Care Plan is a model for integrating palliative services into the health system, offering dignity and comfort to older persons in end-of-life care.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to support mental health programmes tailored to older persons, addressing issues such as loneliness, depression and dementia. Enhancing the quality of care, including patient safety and dignity in health services for older persons, is critical. This involves training health professionals in geriatric care, as seen in Japan's Long-term Care Insurance System, which ensures high standards of care, including palliative and rehabilitative services.

Addressing the digital divide through promoting digital literacy among older persons ensures that telehealth services are accessible and user-friendly. Australia's Be Connected initiative aims to increase older persons' digital skills, facilitating their access to telehealth and online health information. It is also important to involve older persons and their representative organizations in health policy development, implementation and evaluation, ensuring their experiences and needs inform health services and policies. Lastly, exploring sustainable financing models for comprehensive healthcare for older persons and strengthening research and data collection on their health needs and outcomes are crucial steps. This approach, exemplified by Malaysia's National Health and Morbidity Survey, aims to inform evidence-based policymaking and targeted health interventions and policies.