

VIII Session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (5 - 7 July 2017)

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Background

All countries in the Asia-Pacific region are experiencing profound and rapid demographic changes. The transition towards 'ageing' and 'aged' societies is occurring at an unprecedented pace, although its timing varies across the region. Overall, in 2016, approximately 12.4 per cent of the population in the region was 60 years or older, and this is expected to increase to more than 25 per cent - or 1.3 billion people - by 2050. The significant increase in the pace of ageing in the region can be largely attributed to two key factors, namely declining fertility rates and increased life expectancies. The most marked declines in the region's fertility have been in the South and South-West, and South-East Asia sub-regions, with the fertility rates falling declining by 50 per cent in the last 40 years. At the same time, due to improved standards of living and increased access to health care and nutrition, life expectancy in the region has shown a steady upward trend, from 63.8 years for males and 67.1 for females in 1990 to 70.3 years for males and 74.5 years for females in 2016.

This significant demographic transition has critical social, economic and political consequences. For example, the ratio of persons of working-age (defined as being between 15 and 65 years old) relative to older persons is decreasing sharply, which means that fewer persons of working age could will be able to support every person older than 65. This will have profound impacts on income security for older persons but also on the provision of care for older persons. According to United Nations' projections, the "old age support ratio" will decrease by approximately 60 per cent, from the current 8.4 working-age persons for every older person to the ratio of 3.4:1 by 2050. The most significant decrease will be in the South-East Asia sub-region, where the ratio will drop from 11.1 to 1, to 4.2 to 1, which corresponds to the largest projected increase in the proportion of older persons in the population in this sub-region.

These changing demographic structures pose significant developmental challenges in terms of economically supporting a rapidly growing population of older persons, protecting their rights and ensuring their health and well-being. At the same time, there are also potential opportunities to be harnessed since older persons play critical roles in families, communities and society at large. Therefore, the Asia-Pacific Region must be fully prepared for the onset of its future ageing - and aged - societies as well as its multi-sectoral policy implications. The Third Regional Review of the MIPAA is therefore more timely than ever: As countries plan and implement national policies to meet the challenges of population ageing, the MIPAA is a global and regional opportunity to sharing knowledge and comparing models for adapting to this demographic transition.

Third Regional Review of the MIPAA

In its resolution 2015/5, the Economic and Social Council mandated regional commissions to conduct comprehensive reviews at the regional level. As part of this process, 25 countries in the Asia-Pacific region have submitted responses to a 2016-17 ESCAP-administered survey on progress towards the implementation of the MIPAA. In addition, two preparatory Regional Expert Forums will have been held in the first half of 2017 subsequent to the high-level Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, to be held in Bangkok from 12 to 14 September 2017.

The Regional Expert Forum on Integrated Care for Older Persons was held from 17 to 19 March 2017 in Nanjing, The People's Republic of China. The Forum discussed key outcomes of analytical studies in three focus areas: (1)

human resource requirements for meeting the needs of an ageing society; (2) availability and use of appropriate technology to enhance access to services such as health and long-term care; (3) gender dimensions of ageing in the Asia-Pacific region. The meeting highlighted good practices and guidelines on long-term care policies that governments may consider when formulating a financially viable framework that safeguards the rights of older persons.

The second Preparatory Regional Expert Meeting on the Third Regional Review of the MIPAA will be held from 14 to 15 June 2017 in Bangkok, Thailand. Government representatives will report on progress related to the implementation of the MIPAA at country level. These experiences, of good practices and lessons learned, are expected to be developed into recommendations for consideration in the formulation of the Outcome Document of the Asia-Pacific Intergovernmental Meeting on the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The 2016 Third Regional Review Survey assesses progress towards the implementation of the MIPAA, and is structured according to the commitments made by Member States to work towards implementation of the objectives of the MIPAA. In addition to the three priority focus areas of the MIPAA as mentioned above, the survey also considers questions related to 'National Policy and MIPAA Implementation'. Overall analysis of the survey responses indicates that uneven progress has been made in effectively mainstreaming the issue of population ageing into national policies and practices at country level. While a number of commendable initiatives are underway in the region to provide enhanced protection, care and support to older persons in the social and economic spheres of life, data from surveys also indicate significant limitations particularly with respect to the availability of reliable and comprehensive age and sex-disaggregated data relevant to effective socio-economic policy formulation. The analysis and conclusions drawn in this report are however preliminary in nature in that the quality and availability of survey data vary significantly across the Asia-Pacific Region.

Abuse, neglect and violence (755 words)

Respect for older persons is a strong part of societal and family values in the Asia-Pacific region. Older persons have the authority and recognition in family and community, which is emphasized by Member States in their survey inputs on the Third Regional Review of MIPAA. However, when instances of elderly abuse or violence do occur, the institutional instruments and mechanisms for their reporting and prevention are not always in place, or do not always work in practice.

Protection of older persons from abuse, neglect and violence is normally warranted under the state constitutions and universal protection acts of most countries in the region. MIPAA survey responses from 25 Asia-Pacific countries suggest that, as of 2017, only 40 percent of the respondent countries have a national legislation on older persons' rights, or have specific provisions for older persons in universal rights legislations, such as laws on domestic violence. These include Australia, People's Republic of China, Fiji, Republic of Korea, Myanmar, Nepal, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore and Sri Lanka, among others.

A number of countries are implementing measures to prevent abuse, neglect and violence of older persons in family, care homes and community. In Australia, an Aged Care Complaints Commissioner is appointed to handle complaints and provide advice on the protection and rights of aged care service recipients. The Republic of Korea supports older persons' protection agencies in efforts to educate the public, improve awareness on elderly abuse and offer professional counseling to the victims. The government also supports the project providing shelters for the abused older persons and working to prevent re-occurrence of abuse through family counselling. New Zealand issues Elder Abuse and Neglect Prevention Guidelines to assist health care workers to identify, support

and empower older persons experiencing abuse and provide support on risk assessment and appropriate referral options. New Zealand has also developed a Dementia Care Framework, which provides good practice on ensuring the wellbeing of the persons with dementia, with specific provision for issues of abuse and neglect. The government supports 27 organizations nationwide, to provide older persons' abuse and neglect prevention services, including counselling for victims, advocacy and education programmes. In Singapore, the government works with local NGOs and voluntary welfare organisations to detect, report and reach out to vulnerable older persons and help them receive community-based care services. The government facilitates cooperation between agencies in the social service and healthcare sector, as well as law enforcement and the judicial system to protect vulnerable older persons.

With a growing share of older persons in societies, the governments are conducting an increasing number of ageing-related research and studies, although studies on abuse, violence and neglect of older persons are still limited. Among few examples are New Zealand's 2012 study 'Towards gaining a greater understanding of Elder Abuse and Neglect' and Australia's 2016 study on "Protecting the Rights of Old Australians from Abuse".

Due to limited research and institutional constraints, the data on cases of abuse, neglect and violence against older persons is mostly unavailable in the Asia-Pacific. Among few examples, Australia has a compulsory reporting mechanism in permanent residential care homes, where during 2014-2015, 2,862 assault notifications were recorded - this is 1.2 percent incidence per year. Of those, 2,422 were related to the use of force, 396 to sexual contact, and 44 to both. In 2015, 375 cases of older persons' abuse were recorded nationwide in Myanmar and 6,154 cases in the Republic of Korea. In the Republic of Korea, 38 percent of those, were classified as emotional abuse, 26 percent as physical abuse, 16 percent as neglect, 9 percent as financial abuse and 2 percent as sexual abuse. Over the same year in Singapore, a total of 1,194 complaints were reported nationwide, 85 percent of which were raised by females. New Zealand's 2012 study 'Towards gaining a greater understanding of Elder Abuse and Neglect' found that among people aged 50 to 84 years, 1 in 10 experienced some form of abuse. Such data is currently absent for the most of the Asia-Pacific, but the intra-regional disparity within these numbers support the existing knowledge that in many cases, abuse incidents are underreported, furthermore, older women are more likely to become the victims of abuse.

Whereas there are commendable efforts across the region, there remain legislative, policy and implementation gaps in providing safety and security to older persons, while ensuring that those affected receive due emotional and physical support. This requires specific legislation, as well as stronger complaint and support mechanisms, but importantly, a collective action among government units, local organisations, communities and families.

Equality and non-discrimination (673 words)

Bringing everyone to an even playing field requires giving voice to older persons, promoting their engagement in social and economic development and eliminating all forms of discrimination against them. In essence, discrimination prevents older persons from utilizing their full capacity to benefit to societies and economies, leaving them marginalized and vulnerable. This partially contributes to the view of older persons as passive recipients of social services, rather than able contributors, many of whom continue participating in social and economic realms of life. This is particularly true for Asia-Pacific countries, where older persons continue working, often informally, to sustain living in the absence of sufficient social protection, or perform unpaid child care and household work, when family members are away.

ESCAP-administered 2017 MIPAA survey of Asia-Pacific countries suggests that, age-based discrimination is part of constitutions and universal rights legislations in majority of 25 respondent countries, such as New

Zealand's 'Human Rights Act' of 1993. A small number of countries have further adopted framework anti-discrimination laws on older persons specifically, such as Australia's 2004 'Age Discrimination Act', which prohibits age discrimination in areas of public life, including accommodation, education, employment, and access to goods and services. The enforcement of the law is performed by Age Discrimination Commissioner who also cooperates with the Sex Discrimination Commissioner and the Disability Discrimination Commissioner, to combat employment discrimination and older persons' abuse. A few countries also have sectoral laws, such as Republic of Korea's "Act on Prohibition of Age Discrimination in Employment and Aged Employment Promotion". In some countries, older persons' rights are protected under the laws and plans on disability, such as Fiji's 'Rights of persons with disability Bill 2016'. Similarly, in New Zealand, where 59 percent of persons aged 65+ are disabled, the government's Disability Strategy 2016-2026 was developed in consultation with older persons and includes outcomes in sphere of education, employment and economic security, health and wellbeing, rights protection and justice, accessibility, attitudes, choice and control, as well as leadership.

In other efforts to remove discrimination in access to healthcare, Australia's, Private Health Insurance Community Rating prohibits insurers from discriminating older persons by charging them higher premiums, or based on past or likely future health or risk factors, such as age. Furthermore, the government promotes removal of stigma and discrimination of HIV patients through work of the National Association of People Living with HIV in Australia (NAPWHA), which represents people of all ages. In effort to remove barriers for older persons access to healthcare services, some states, such as Macao SAR, have established priority registration and consultation services, or older persons areas in hospitals and medical centres.

Even when the legislative measures are available, their effectiveness is often curtailed by the lack of institutional mechanisms to report and record discrimination cases, as well as measures to prevent their re-occurrence. There is very limited data or research on such incidences in employment, access to healthcare and social care, justice or access to goods and services. As an example, Australian government has made a National Inquiry into Employment, Discrimination Against Older Australians and Australians with Disability under a 'Willing to Work: Healthy Ageing Paper 2016.' More studies and research is required in the Asia-Pacific countries to understand the extent of old-age discrimination, assess the effectiveness of laws and policies, and complement existing efforts to combat discrimination and promote equality.

Achieving greater equality also entails empowering older persons to become advocates for their own rights and have a voice to engage in decision-making processes related to them. Currently, 60 percent of the Asia-Pacific countries have at least basic measures in place to promote participation, although much more work is needed to enhance their implementation mechanisms and ensure engagement of the most vulnerable groups, such as older women and disabled persons. In today's societies, where the proportion of the working age population is rapidly shrinking relative to the share of older persons, eradicating all forms of discrimination and empowering older persons to take active part in development, will be fundamental steps for countries to achieve sustainable social and economic development.