

Background Paper

Regional Meeting on the Third Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab Countries: Achievements and Future Prospects Beirut, 03 August 2017

Background

During the Second World Assembly on Ageing held in April 2002, Governments adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and its Declaration, which follow a comprehensive approach to development linking the issue of ageing to other United Nations human rights and social and economic development frameworks. The Plan of Action is the first global agreement that recognizes older people as contributors to development and entrusts governments to include ageing issues in all development policies. It underlines the importance of adopting a positive approach in addressing ageing issues and surmounting the negative stereotypes linked to ageing, and follows a comprehensive rights-based approach to addressing issues of concern to older persons. “The aim of the International Plan of Action is to ensure that persons everywhere are able to age with security and dignity and to continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full rights”.¹ This is very much in line with the key concept of leaving no one behind that underlies the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The plan of action highlights three priority areas to build a society for all ages, namely “older persons and development”, “advancing health and well-being into old age”, and “ensuring enabling and supportive environments”. Each of the three priority areas include priority issues, with specific objectives and actions to guide governments in the development of age-sensitive policies.

The regional commissions are the main entities of the United Nations System responsible for coordinating the MIPAA review and evaluating progress in reaching the MIPAA objectives at the regional level. The review and appraisal process, which takes place every five years, acquires a special importance in light of the pace of the ageing phenomenon and the situation of older persons in the Arab region.

The population of older persons (aged 60 and above) in the Arab region almost tripled over the past three and a half decades, increasing from around 9.3 million in 1980 to around 26.5 million in 2015. Nevertheless, this age group still represents the smallest proportion of the Arab population, going up from 5.6 per cent in 1980 to 6.8 per cent in 2015. Significant variations exist between countries of the region, with countries that have witnessed sharp declines in fertility ageing rapidly compared to those that have maintained more steady rates of fertility. In fact, the pace of increase in the proportion of the older persons is projected to pick up after 2030, going up from around 9.6 per cent to around 12.1 per cent in 2040, 13.7 per cent in 2045 and 15.2 per cent in 2050 respectively, with twenty-one countries in the region having more than 8 per cent of their population in the older persons age group

¹ United Nations (2002). Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid 8 – 12 April 2002), Page 7.

by 2050. At the same time, the old age dependency ratio, which stood at around 7.0 per cent between 1980 and 2015, is expected to start increasing after 2015 and will get to 12.6 per cent in 2040, 14.4 per cent in 2045 and 16.6 per cent in 2050.

Although ageing might not at present be considered the most pressing issue for the region as a whole, it should not be underestimated given the growing absolute number of older persons, putting additional pressure on already scarce resources and outstripping existing health and social protection systems generally found to be inadequate. Also important is the fact that the ageing process is taking place at a relatively faster pace in developing countries than it did in developed countries and at lower levels of socio-economic development, leaving Arab countries with less time to adjust their infrastructure and institutional frameworks to the requirements and consequences of ageing populations. Moreover, internal factors such as urbanization, migration patterns, the changing role of the family and political tension further intensify the situation. This necessitates advanced planning by Arab countries to create a policy environment more favourable to meeting the requirements/exigencies of an increasingly ageing population.

Objective

The objectives of the regional meeting is to:

- Review the progress made by ESCWA member countries in the implementation of MIPAA and identify the main challenges, opportunities and issues of priority for the region that will guide work on ageing in the short to medium term; and
- Agree on the key regional messages and recommendations emanating from the findings of the Third Review exercise and the meeting discussions to serve as a framework to support member countries in addressing key challenges to the implementation of MIPAA and promote ageing in dignity.

The key findings of the meeting will inform the input to the Secretary General's report prepared for the Third Global Review and Appraisal of MIPAA that will take place in 2018.

Expected Outcome

Building on the findings of the review and the discussions during the meeting, it is expected that participants will agree on: a) a set of priority issues to the region in the area of ageing; b) the main challenges to dealing with the identified issues; and c) commensurate recommendations on the actions needed to address and overcome these challenges with a view to build a society for all ages and leave no one behind.

Date and Venue

The Third Review Meeting of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab Countries: Achievements and Future Prospects will take place on 03 August 2017 at the ESCWA headquarters in Beirut, Lebanon.

Participation

Participants will include the officially nominated national focal points for the Third MIPAA Review along with civil society organizations focusing on issues of concern to older persons and experts in the field of ageing and older persons. Representatives from the League of Arab States, the United Nations Population Fund / Regional Office for Arab States and the International Labor Organization / Regional Office for Arab States will also participate in the meeting.

Format

The meeting will consist of an opening and a closing session, and three thematic sessions. The thematic sessions will take the form of round table discussions and will address findings from the Third Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab Countries as well as issues of importance to the region in the area of ageing. They will begin with brief presentations that will serve as a basis to open the discussion.