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**Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**

**Report**

**Regional meeting on the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid  
International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab countries:  
achievements and future prospects  
Beirut, 3 August 2017**

**Summary**

The Population and Social Development Section under the Social Development Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a regional meeting to consider the findings of the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab countries: achievements and way forward, at the United Nations House in Beirut on 3 August 2017. The meeting began with a preliminary session, followed by three main sessions to discuss the main findings of the Third Review on the following three priority areas: older persons and development; advancing health and wellbeing into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments.

Discussions focused on the review's main findings, especially the achievements of and challenges faced by member States that participated therein. The meeting resulted in a set of recommendations on priority issues for the region in the field of ageing, and highlighted the necessary steps to tackle key challenges faced by member States in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the Madrid Plan of Action to build societies for all ages, and ensure social inclusion for all. The present report sets out the main topics discussed at the meeting, and the adopted recommendations.

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## **Introduction**

1. The Population and Social Development Section under the Social Development Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held a regional meeting to consider the findings of the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab countries: achievements and future prospects, at the United Nations House in Beirut on 3 August 2017. The meeting was held pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2015/5 of 8 June 2015 on modalities for the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, which requests the Secretary-General to submit a report on the Third Review and Appraisal to the Commission on Social Development at its fifty-sixth session, highlighting existing and emerging issues and related policy options.
2. The regional meeting aimed to:
  - (a) Review progress by ESCWA member States in implementing the Madrid Plan of Action, and identify challenges, opportunities and priority issues for the region;
  - (b) Formulate key regional recommendations emanating from the findings of the Third Review, so as to establish a framework to assist member States in tackling key challenges in implementing the Madrid Plan of Action and in developing institutional and political frameworks that guarantee a decent life for older persons.
3. The main findings of the meeting will be included in a report by the Secretary-General for submission to the Commission on Social development at its fifty-sixth, to be held in February 2018.
4. The present report sets out the topics discussed at the meeting and the resulting recommendations.

## **I. RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. The meeting adopted the following recommendations on the review process:
  - (a) Maintain the same focal points responsible for preparing and coordinating the various review processes. If not possible, ensure proper documentation to maintain the continuity of work and information;
  - (b) Hold a workshop prior to the review process to standardize concepts and terms on ageing and the methodology for completing the questionnaire, train focal points on this methodology, and reach practical solutions for challenges related to coordination between stakeholders and lack of data, and provide sufficient time to complete the questionnaire;
  - (c) Develop a guide containing definitions of terms used in the questionnaire to clarify the questions asked and facilitate responses;
  - (d) Establish a website containing data on older persons and information collected during the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing, and periodically update and populate the website to draw upon it in future review processes;
  - (e) Reduce countries' workload given the various commitments necessary for preparing progress reports on implementing recommendations resulting from international conferences, by building upon available information and populating the review questionnaire with data from United Nations databases for review, certification and completion;
  - (f) Coordinate between United Nations organizations and the League of Arab States, and harmonize goals in preparation for review processes to avoid repeat requests to countries, especially since the questionnaires received from various international and regional actors are fully comprehensive and sometimes repetitive;

(g) Prepare a joint workplan between ESCWA and the League of Arab States in preparation for the fourth review of the Madrid Plan of Action in Arab countries;

(h) Prepare national reports on older persons in preparation for the fourth review of the Madrid Plan of Action to help build a more comprehensive picture of this demographic group;

(i) Include in the Third Review's regional report key achievements in implementing the Madrid Plan of Action, and highlight shortfalls and gaps between policies and practices to draw lessons learned and effectively tackle challenges.

6. The meeting adopted the following general recommendations:

(a) Prepare a study to help determine the age bracket that best defines the older persons' age groups in the Arab region given disparities in the adopted age brackets between countries, taking into account existing social and economic specificities;

(b) Develop an international convention on the rights of older persons, requiring countries to submit periodic reports on its implementation as is the case with conventions on women and persons with disabilities;

(c) Involve civil society organizations in review and information collection processes, which will help engage them in the provision of services to older persons;

(d) Intensify efforts to build a society for all ages, and benefit from the experiences of older persons;

(e) Provide accurate, reliable and up-to-date data on older persons for use in formulating evidence-based policies to tackle challenges facing this demographic group and guarantee them a decent life. Given the differences in needs between various groups of older persons, such data must be disaggregated by age (the 'old' (aged 60-79) and the 'oldest-old' (aged 80 and above)), sex, geographic location within a country (rural or urban areas), social, economic and marital status, migratory status and disability;

(f) Conduct in-depth research and comprehensive studies on ageing issues to inform the development of policies and programmes on older persons;

(g) Evaluate adopted policies and assess their effectiveness to see whether it is necessary to amend them or adopt new policies on priority issues for older persons, so as to improve their situation and ensure their right to a decent life;

(h) Approach older persons' issues within the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by including them in national workplans and development plans aimed at achieving the 2030 Agenda, especially since countries are required to develop mechanisms for measuring progress in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals and targets and to prepare reports thereon;

(i) Encourage ageing in place and within the family, and support the family to care for older persons by offering benefits, including financial support, concessions and tax cuts, and by providing home-care services for older persons;

(j) Enact appropriate legislation and allocate sufficient budgets to provide pensions, social protection and health insurance to all older persons;

(k) Provide comprehensive health-care services to older persons, and develop and fund specialized health programmes;

(l) Broaden the scope of geriatric medicine, include gerontology in curriculums for social workers, and train relevant cadres in the provision of care for older persons;

(m) Provide a supporting environment for older persons in line with their social, economic and physical needs, with specific focus on those isolated from their families who lack support networks;

(n) Develop mechanisms to protect older persons from all forms of discrimination, violence and exploitation.

## II. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

7. The meeting comprised a preliminary session and three main sessions. In the preliminary session, participants reviewed the appraisal methodology, the situation of older persons in the Arab region, and key findings related to institutional and regulatory frameworks on ageing and older persons in the Arab region.

8. The three main sessions focused on discussing the key findings of the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action in Arab countries related to the following priority areas: older persons and development; advancing health and wellbeing into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments.

### A. PRELIMINARY SESSION

#### 1. *Appraisal methodology*

9. Ms. Abba Sibai, Head of the Epidemiology and Population Health Department at the American University of Beirut, gave a presentation on the methodology used in the appraisal process. She explained that all ESCWA member States<sup>1</sup> had been invited to take part in the Third Regional Review, but only 10 had appointed national focal points and completed the questionnaire.<sup>2</sup> She also commented on the completion rates and formulation of the questionnaire; and the team tasked with analysing questionnaire responses. She noted that the main weakness gauged from the review process was the lack of information, its inaccessibility, unreliability or inaccuracy. She stressed that the ability to coordinate between various actors and to work collectively were the main factors contributing to the success of a review process.

10. She proposed organizing a capacity-building workshop for national focal points on completing the questionnaire; and on coordinating with national teams in State departments, the national committee for older persons, civil society organizations concerned with ageing issues and service providers to enable them to collect comprehensive data from various sources. She emphasized the need to standardize concepts and data collection approaches on ageing, or at least make data comparable between countries.

#### 2. *Older persons in the Arab region: demographic trends*

11. Ms. Sibai gave a presentation on demographic trends in the Arab region, highlighting the ageing phenomenon. She reviewed key demographic characteristics focusing on older persons, indicating that the percentage of the population aged 60 and above was expected to increase in all Arab countries because of a drop in fertility and mortality rates and an increase in life expectancy. Consequently, by 2050, over 10 per cent of the population would be aged 60 or above in 14 Arab countries compared with two countries in 2015.

12. Ms. Sibai elaborated on the ageing indicators, clarifying the difference between the old-age dependency ratio defined as the number of dependents aged 65 and above divided by the total population aged between 15 and 64, and the ageing index defined as the number of persons aged 65 and above per 100 persons under the age of 15, which measures the relative weight of older dependents to dependent children. She underlined that the old-age dependency ratio might not be accurate in some ESCWA member States with large numbers of

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<sup>1</sup> ESCWA member States are: Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

<sup>2</sup> Member States that completed the regional review questionnaire for the Madrid Plan of Action: Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Sudan, Tunisia.

migrant workers (Gulf countries). In those cases, the ageing index provided more reliable estimates of the demographic weight of older persons. Accordingly, using the ageing index estimates for 2030, Arab countries could be divided into three categories following their ageing pace: countries with a rapid ageing pace, namely Lebanon, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, Morocco and Bahrain; countries with a moderate ageing pace, namely Libya, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait, Egypt, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan; and countries with a slow ageing pace, namely the Sudan, Mauritania, the State of Palestine, Yemen and Iraq. She added that the pace of ageing was clearly reflected in the changing shape of the population pyramid over time.

13. Ms. Sibai noted that different ageing paces between Arab countries were caused by changes in demographic characteristics resulting from family planning, conflicts in some countries, and large numbers of migrant workers in Gulf countries. She added that ESCWA member States with rapid ageing rates had only two decades to benefit from current demographic dividends, as the effects of the youth bulge were expected to end by 2030 with the retirement of most economically active individuals of working age. She gave some solutions in that regard, including regularizing and regulating migrant labour, amending family planning policies to encourage reproduction in countries with a rapid ageing pace, and building a society for all ages.

### *3. Institutional and regulatory frameworks for ageing issues and older persons in Arab countries*

14. Ms. Sibai stressed the importance of institutional and regulatory frameworks and their effects on policy formulation, programme implementation and services for older persons. She said that 9 of the 10 countries that completed the questionnaire had an entity responsible for developing policies and plans and coordinating activities related to older persons, generally under the Ministry of Social Development or the Ministry of Health. Those countries were Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia.

15. The following six countries have national committees on older persons: Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine and the Sudan. They do not exist in Egypt, or in Morocco and Tunisia that have a rapid ageing pace. The committees comprise representatives of government departments and non-governmental organizations. The ministries of social affairs and of health are represented in the committees of all countries; civil society organizations are represented in most committees, but academic and research institutions are only represented in a small number. National committees and institutions concerned with older persons have several functions, including planning, cooperation and coordination, follow-up and evaluation, awareness-raising, preparing studies and conducting research, implementation, providing technical support and guidance, and resource mobilization. Functions differ between countries: some task such bodies with implementing all the above functions, as is the case in Morocco, the Sudan and Tunisia, while others are tasked with implementing some or just one function, as is the case in Oman.

16. Ms. Sibai clarified that inclusive national policies or strategies focusing on older persons' issues existed in 7 of the 10 countries that completed the questionnaire, namely Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia, and were under preparation in Morocco. National workplans on older persons had been developed in five countries, namely Jordan, Oman, Palestine, the Sudan and Tunisia. She added that Iraq had national policies and plans to prevent noncommunicable diseases - they did not target older persons in particular but included them in the provision of care services. National policies for older persons in Jordan, Oman and Tunisia on providing income, social coverage, pensions, housing and tax exemptions, and on poverty reduction were mostly under implementation. In Kuwait, Lebanon and Morocco, some policies were still in the planning or preliminary phases.

17. Most countries that had completed the questionnaire had prepared studies or conducted surveys on older persons at the national level since the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action in 2012, and had held conferences to tackle topics concerning that demographic group. The conferences focused on issues of importance to older persons, such as providing family care, participating in the labour market, enhancing their role in society, offering support in emergency situations, and promoting positive images of ageing. Some

countries had also launched national policies or plans on older persons. Ms. Sibai indicated that the results of the regional questionnaire showed that some countries with a slow ageing pace were more active in holding national conferences on ageing.

18. She concluded by highlighting the following two main challenges faced by most countries in developing and implementing national strategies and workplans on ageing that must be addressed: a lack of financial and human resources, and weak coordination between ministries despite the presence of political will. She called for strengthening the capacity of government departments and national committees concerned with ageing issues in translating knowledge of such issues into effective policies and programmes to advance the situation of older persons, and reinforcing research capacity in the region to intensify knowledge production on ageing issues and assist in developing evidence-based policies.

#### *4. Conclusions of the preliminary session discussions*

19. Discussions focused on key challenges faced by focal points in completing the regional questionnaire for the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action, notably:

(a) Difficulties in coordinating with relevant ministries, and the absence of established integrated national reporting systems as is the case for reporting on women's issues, for instance;

(b) The length of the questionnaire, making difficult its adequate completion;

(c) The absence of databases on older persons with accurate and up-to-date comparable data, disaggregated by sex, residence (urban or rural) and age bracket to help clarify differences in needs and challenges between the 'old' (aged 60-79) and the 'oldest-old' (aged 80 and above) and their economic, social and household situations, making data collection for completing the questionnaire difficult and resulting in most quantitative questions not being answered;

(d) Different data production standards between countries.

20. Participants proposed several solutions to existing challenges, such as developing forms for dissemination to all ministries concerned with ageing in preparation for the review of the Madrid Action Plan, organizing meetings with relevant government institutions to encourage them to collect the necessary data to better complete the questionnaire, preparing reports on older persons, and shortening the questionnaire to facilitate its completion.

21. It was agreed that data collected from completed questionnaires would be sent to focal points for validation and to complete missing information.

#### **B. FIRST SESSION: OLDER PERSONS AND DEVELOPMENT**

##### *1. Third Review of the Madrid Action Plan in ESCWA member States: Older persons and development*

22. Ms. Sibai gave a presentation on older persons and development, focusing on the results of the regional questionnaire regarding the following four topics: older persons' participation in development and national policies, older persons' employment, securing income and social protection and preventing poverty, and accessing knowledge, education and training. Under the first topic, she stressed the need to develop mechanisms to promote the role of older persons as partners in the development process, and the importance of their effective participation in formulating national policies and programmes on ageing to meet their needs. She emphasized the vital role of social society organizations in that regard, and the need to enhance it. Some countries that participated in the Third Review, especially Kuwait, Morocco, Oman and the Sudan, indicated that they supported the effective participation of older persons in developing and monitoring national policies and programmes on ageing.

23. Under the second topic, Ms. Sibai highlighted difficulties in extracting quantitative information on older persons' employment from country data, except for Lebanon and Morocco. She stressed the need to update surveys and research in all countries to provide basic data on older persons. She explained that the reasons driving older persons to work after retirement differed between countries. While their labour market participation in high-income countries aimed to encourage active ageing, it was an economic necessity in most middle and low-income countries. Some countries that had completed the questionnaire encouraged early retirement in the public sector for various reasons, but most did not have policies preventing employment in the private sector after reaching retirement age. Nevertheless, only a few countries offered practical programmes promoting the participation of older persons in the labour force.

24. Under the third topic, Ms. Sibai noted that most countries that had completed the questionnaire had effective policies to provide social security to formal sector workers and programmes benefiting older persons in rural areas, although they did not target older persons in particular but rather offered support to them as part of broader plans for various social groups, such as rural women in Oman and rural populations in Iraq and Lebanon. Five countries had reported the presence of policies and programmes supporting income-generating projects for older persons. However, most of those programmes were not specifically designed for that demographic group and did not take into account its special needs, except for income-generating projects targeting older persons without any family support to provide them with job opportunities in Iraq, Jordan, Morocco and the Sudan.

25. Under the fourth topic, Ms. Sibai indicated the lack of data on literacy among older persons in the region. She emphasized the significant role of literacy policies and programmes in empowering older persons to better participate in the labour market. She noted that most countries which had participated in the Third Review reported the formulation and implementation of national policies and programmes on literacy, with some aimed at older persons in particular, such as in Lebanon, Tunisia and the Sudan. She added that ESCWA member States only had one lifelong learning programme, provided by the University for Seniors headquartered at the American University of Beirut. Other existing programmes were being implemented on a smaller scale in Jordan, Palestine and the Sudan, and had been incorporated under several educational institutions.

## *2. Conclusions of the first session discussions*

26. Participants discussed the findings of the review on progress towards achieving the goals of the Madrid Plan of Action in the first priority area, as set out in the presentation. The following key points were covered in the discussions:

(a) Benefiting from social security, considered a key issue for older persons in the Arab region, since most of that age group does not have access to any income or provisions guaranteeing the minimum requirements for a decent life. As such, many older persons must work for a living;

(b) Replacing the term 'literacy' with 'senior education' and 'employment' with 'participation in economic activity', and examining older persons' contributions to specific sectors;

(c) Promoting issues of concern to older persons without separating them from issues of concern to other social groups;

(d) Tackling the lack of reviews and research in the Arab region that highlight ways to benefit from older persons' expertise, and providing recommendations thereon;

(e) Determining the duration of existing programmes targeting older persons and the number of beneficiaries, and whether they target subgroups in that age group (the 'old' (aged 60-79) and the 'oldest-old' (aged 80 and above)), given their differing needs;

(f) Encouraging specialization in geriatrics, and providing formal training to health professionals and caregivers for older persons.



27. Participants also discussed the nature and formulation of the questionnaire's questions, especially question 14-a on budgets stating that budgets were general and did not specifically take into account older persons or other groups, and that most countries did not allocate enough funding for older persons' issues. They reiterated that completing the questionnaire was difficult, and proposed conducting a dialogue on question formulation to rewrite them in a way that would allow more accurate responses. In that context, the Moroccan focal point noted that completing the questionnaire had been easy for her country because of a national study on older persons that had been drawn upon. An expert indicated that employment data could be collected from household surveys, an untraditional but practical approach to data collection.

28. Ms. Sibai stressed the difficulty of presenting information quantitatively in the regional report being prepared by ESCWA on the findings of the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action in Arab countries owing to existing differences between countries and sectors, thus rendering information and data incomparable. She requested participants to provide a summary of best practices and success stories on older persons for inclusion in the report.

#### C. SECOND SESSION: ADVANCING HEALTH AND WELLBEING INTO OLD AGE

##### 1. *Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action in ESCWA member States: Advancing health and wellbeing into old age*

29. Ms. Aline Semaan, Research Assistant at the Epidemiology and Population Health Department of the American University of Beirut, gave a presentation on advancing health and wellbeing into old age, summarizing the health situation of older persons in member States. She explained that the significant progress in average life expectancy in the region did not reflect the additional years of good health, and that the rapid urbanization in the region over the past few years was unplanned and coincided with other demographic developments, such as a faster ageing pace and higher levels of noncommunicable diseases. She added that the region's noncommunicable disease burden was estimated at 47 per cent, and was expected to rise to 60 per cent by 2020. The mortality rate from noncommunicable diseases for those over 60 was estimated at over 66 per cent. Nonetheless, research on older persons' health in the region was rare, as was data on the subject.

30. Ms. Semaan considered the prevalence of physical and psychological diseases and motor impairment among older persons. Most countries participating in the Third Review had reported that noncommunicable disease was most prevalent among older persons (45 per cent in Lebanon, and 57.5 per cent in Morocco). Some countries had provided data on motor impairment, with rates between 14 per cent in Palestine and 33 per cent in Morocco. Iraq had reported only on the prevalence of psychological diseases among older persons at 23 per cent. In response to the question on tackling older persons' health care by including it in national plans or in other policies and plans, most countries had indicated that it was clearly included in national plans. Countries with rapid and average ageing paces had indicated the existence of policies and programmes focusing on older persons' health care, which were mostly under implementation. Such policies and programmes covered the following: primary health care, good mental health, chronic disease diagnosis, free medication provision, smoking cessation, physical exercise, home health care provision, nutrition, and free transport.

31. Ms. Semaan noted that geriatric medicine was recognized in Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, which had a fast ageing pace, with the number of specialized doctors ranging between 11 and 400. The specialization was also recognized in Kuwait and the Sudan, but the number of geriatricians was very small in both countries. Despite the shortage or absence of specialized doctors in most countries participating in the Third Review, Jordan, Kuwait and Oman (with a moderate ageing pace) reported the existence of training programmes on geriatric medicine and gerontology for health-care personnel.

32. In conclusion, Ms. Semaan indicated the following main obstacles hampering the advancement of health and wellbeing into old age: a lack of political will and legislation on health care for older persons; a lack of

human resources; a lack of necessary equipment to facilitate transport for older persons with disabilities; the high cost of medical and health care; and the absence of health standards for nursing homes.

## *2. Conclusions of the second session discussions*

33. The following key points were covered in the discussions:

(a) Highlighting the issue of home health care for older persons and its regulation, especially given that it was not mentioned in the questionnaire of the Third Regional Review despite its importance in promoting ageing in place;

(b) Keeping older persons within the family, improving the provision of health-care services to them, and effectively supporting families that care for them;

(c) Providing comprehensive health-care services for older persons, and launching and funding specialized health programmes;

(d) Providing health insurance as a right for all older persons;

(e) Recognizing geriatric medicine, and supporting the capacity of cadres concerned with older persons' care;

(f) Developing a clear and integrated framework on the concept of care that accounts for society's perception of older persons, health care, and treatment and prevention, and enables a better monitoring of progress in implementation given that it does not occur equally among all the components of care;

(g) Reaching a common understanding of terms, such as policies, strategies and plans;

(h) Preparing comprehensive national reports on older persons' issues to draw upon when completing the questionnaire.

34. Countries exchanged experiences and success stories. The representative of Oman mentioned that the country provided a community health nursing service, offering health and nursing services for older persons in their homes. Lebanon shared its experience on developing standards to ensure service quality for older persons in institutions, and establishing a mechanism to implement them. Lebanon also touched on outreach services and prostheses provision for persons holding disability cards, which assisted persons with special needs in going about their daily lives and guaranteed their independence for as long as possible. Tunisia elaborated on disability cards whose holders were eligible for tax cuts and free medical services. A law was currently being enacted to protect older persons' rights, which would allow all older persons, not just those with disabilities, to benefit from tax exemptions and other types assistance.

## **D. THIRD SESSION: ENSURING ENABLING AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

### *1. Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action in ESCWA member States: Ensuring enabling and supportive environments*

35. Ms. Joanna Khabsa, Research Assistant at the Epidemiology and Population Health Department at the American University of Beirut, gave a presentation on ensuring enabling and supportive environments for older persons. She said that the questionnaire results had revealed disparities between countries in providing such environments through policies and support programmes, such as establishing clubs and organizing recreational activities for older persons which were almost non-existent in countries with slow ageing rates. She stressed the need to develop more programmes, such as those on home care, mobile teams, alternative families, meals on wheels and sitters, to encourage ageing in place rather than moving to care homes. She said that Palestine and Lebanon had the largest ratio of care homes (35 and 18, respectively, per 100,000 persons over 60, compared with between two and eight in other countries). Most were managed by civil society

organizations, except in Palestine. Ms. Khabisa emphasized the importance of implementing specific standards for the provision and evaluation of services in care homes.<sup>3</sup>

36. She noted the adoption of policies on solidarity between generations as part of national workplans or sectoral policies in most countries. Regarding mistreatment of or violence against older persons, she pointed to the fact that most existing policies and programmes against neglect, abuse and violence did not target older persons specifically, except for policies in Iraq, the Sudan and Tunisia and programmes in Iraq, Kuwait and Palestine. Such programmes covered legal consultations, awareness-raising, individual and social counselling services, and institutional care. Data on the neglect and mistreatment of older persons were extremely rare because of weak or non-existent monitoring systems.

37. Ms. Khabisa stated that most emergency preparedness programmes did not target older persons, and did not consider their special needs. There was evidence of including older persons' issues in national emergency preparedness plans in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and the Sudan. Moreover, programmes offering assistance and support to refugees in Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon and Morocco did not particularly target older persons. She added that the Sudan was an exception, with programmes and services directly targeting older refugees, whereby several relevant ministries and national and foreign organizations worked in displacement camps to support and provide treatment and medication to older persons, and offer, food, clothing, education and reunification services.

## *2. Conclusions of the third session discussions*

38. Key points covered in the discussions included the following:

(a) Defining the concept of violence and its different forms, especially since the neglect of older persons, for example, constitutes a type of violence because it affects the mental and psychological health of victims;

(b) Ensuring older persons' access to green and public places;

(c) Evaluating existing policies to determine their effectiveness and ability to achieve the desired results, and the necessity of amending them in line with older persons' needs;

(d) Taking into account differences between geographic areas and the sexes as they influence the needs of older persons;

(e) Reaffirming the importance of keeping older persons within their families, and providing the needed support to make that choice possible;

(f) Developing a website to store data collected during the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action, to build on available information in future review processes.

39. Participants exchanged experiences on providing an enabling and supportive environment for older persons. They discussed the family foster care programme for older persons without family support in Tunisia, where foster families took in older persons to protect them from exclusion and isolation. They also discussed the *Bader* programme in Kuwait, geared towards promoting solidarity between generations through the provision of training on how to deal with older persons, and a number of best practices such as the 2007 law on protecting older persons from violence and abuse, amended in 2013 to add provisions on encouraging home care for older persons and support to home care providers, giving priority to older persons in government departments and granting them tax exemptions. Other countries' experiences on advancing older persons'

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<sup>3</sup> Jordan has developed such standards, which are currently under implementation. Lebanon, Morocco and Palestine have prepared them, and Lebanon has developed a mechanism for their implementation. They are under development in Iraq, the Sudan and Tunisia.

rights, providing them with support and care, and tackling neglect, mistreatment and violence against them were also presented.

### **III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK**

#### **A. DATE AND VENUE OF THE MEETING**

40. The regional meeting on the Third Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab countries: achievements and future prospects was held in Beirut on 3 August 2017.

#### **B. OPENING**

41. Ms Karima El Korri, Chief of the Population and Social Development Section, gave the opening statement on behalf of ESCWA. She welcomed participants, thanked them for their contributions to the success of the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action, and presented the meeting's goals. She affirmed that the Third Review provided an opportunity to highlight the region's demographic, economic and social specificities given the fast ageing rates in some countries, indicating the difficulty of separating the process from the 2030 Agenda that had become the most comprehensive framework for measuring progress towards achieving sustainable development.

42. Despite national, regional and international efforts to drive development in Arab countries, many large groups were being excluded from development, as shown by numerous economic, social and political indicators. Older persons were among those groups not benefiting from development or given the required attention in most Arab countries, despite estimates indicating an imminent increase in the number of older persons in all Arab countries, without exception.

43. She noted the need to recognize challenges threatening the future of older persons in Arab countries. The number of persons aged 60 and above in the region had almost tripled over the past 35 years, from 9.3 million (5.6 per cent of the population) in 1980 to 26.5 million (6.8 per cent of the population) in 2015. The ageing rate was expected to increase after 2030, with 12.1 per cent of the population over 60 by 2040, and 15.6 per cent by 2050. Despite numerous disparities between countries, she stressed that the situation in the region was worrying, and raised questions on how to ensure decent lives for older persons today and until 2030 considering conflicting priorities, weak coordination and scarce resources.

44. She noted that during the Third Review of the Madrid Plan of Action, several urgent issues of concern to older persons had been confirmed, including the importance of providing social protection to guarantee pensions and health insurance, the need to develop mechanisms to support families in view of changes that influenced the concepts of care, intergenerational solidarity and social cohesion, and the necessity of developing and making available measurement and data collection tools to formulate evidence-based policies.

45. She urged the meeting to deepen understanding of existing challenges, highlight key achievements realized over the past five years since the Second Review of the Madrid Plan of Action, and review progress by ESCWA member States in implementing the Plan of Action. She expressed her hope that current efforts would help establish older persons' issues among the region's development priorities, and ensure that their right to a decent life became integral to achieving a better future for Arab societies.

#### **C. PARTICIPANTS**

46. The Regional Adviser of the United Nations Population Fund/Arab States Regional Office and the officially-appointed national focal points for the Third Review of the Madrid Action Plan participated in the meeting. Experts on older persons' issues and policies and in the fields of statistics and population also attended, in addition to representatives of civil society organizations concerned with older persons' issues. The list of participants is set out in the annex to the present report.

Annex\*

**LIST OF PARTICIPANTS**

**A. MEMBER COUNTRIES**

Iraq

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