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How to Meet the Challenges of Longer-Life Societies?

First Meeting of the Preparatory Committee for the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing

Palais des Nations, Geneva, 12-13 July 2007

Population ageing has become an increasing concern for Governments in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) region. In most countries, the period which has seen the working-age population at a record high, the time of the so-called “demographic bonus”, is gradually coming to an end. While the degree and timing of this process may vary greatly, the change is common to all countries, and has important and far-reaching implications across all spheres of society, including on economic and social development, sustainability and equity.

This year, UNECE member States will take stock of the implementation of the commitments made in 2002 when they adopted the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). What is the real situation five years on? Have Governments been able to take the actions necessary to prepare and adapt their societies for demographic change?

To review progress made and challenges to be met, the Government of Spain and the UNECE are organizing a Ministerial Conference on Ageing in León, Spain, from 6 to 8 November 2007. A forum for civil society and the scientific community will precede the Conference. The Conference is expected to adopt a political declaration that will identify priorities for future action. The intergovernmental Preparatory Committee for the Conference will meet on 12 and 13 July at the Palais des Nations in Geneva to deliberate and decide on the content and documents for the Conference, including the political declaration.

In their recommendations, experts emphasized the need to adopt an integrated approach, one that considers the different needs of different stages of an individual's life course, the questions of how to apply mainstreaming ageing as the major policy strategy, and the overarching objective of building society for all ages. Broad participation and social cohesion are the key elements to achieving a society for all ages. This makes a highly participatory approach essential, whereby older persons are involved in decision-making processes not only on ageing-related issues, but on all social issues. The important role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in implementing this approach is vital, as is the need for research to strengthen the knowledge base for policymaking.

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Potential priorities for future action range across such areas as tackling age discrimination, reconciling work and family life, promoting lifelong learning, and providing flexibility in the transition to retirement and the adjustment of care provisions – to name just a few. Delegates to the Preparatory Committee will discuss the roles that these and other policy areas should have in the Conference and the political declaration.

For further information please contact:

Andres Vikat
Chief, Population Activities Unit
UN Economic Commission for Europe
Palais des Nations
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Phone: +41 (0) 22 917 2764

Fax: +41 (0) 22 917 0107

E-mail: ageing@unece.org

Website: http://www.unece.org/pau/age/ConferenceonAgeing_2007/PCI