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2007 UNECE CONFERENCE ON AGEING

Preparatory Committee

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PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT ELEMENTS FOR THE POLITICAL DECLARATION

PREPARATIONS FOR THE 2007 UNECE CONFERENCE ON AGEING

Note by the secretariat*

Introduction

1. This document presents potential elements of the draft political declaration for the 2007 UNECE Conference on Ageing (León, Spain, 6–8 November) and is meant to serve as the basis for the first discussion on the content and format of this declaration by the Preparatory Committee. It has been prepared by the UNECE secretariat on the basis of inputs received at the Joint Meeting of the Expert Group for the 2007 UNECE Conference on Ageing and the Task Force “Monitoring RIS” (Vienna, Austria, 26–27 February 2007). In addition, discussions at the Workshop “Ageing – A challenge and an opportunity for the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia” (Chişinău, Moldova, 13–16 March 2007) and at the Meeting of national focal points on ageing (Segovia, Spain, 13–15 November 2006) contributed towards identifying the issues reflected in this document. This document does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the UNECE secretariat.

* This document was submitted on the above date because of resource constraints.

I. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND THE CURRENT SITUATION

2. Population ageing and the onset of decline in the working-age population have become an increasing concern for Governments in the UNECE region. Gradually, the period of economically favourable age structure of low youth and old-age dependency rates, the so-called demographic bonus, is coming to an end. This change has important and far-reaching implications across all spheres of society, including on economic development, social cohesion, sustainability and equity. Societies need to adjust to this change.
3. Population ageing does not only mean an increase in the share of older persons in relation to that of the working-age population, but also a rise in the mean age of the working-age population. In some countries, sharp fluctuations of past fertility are reflected in a large variation in the size of adjacent birth cohorts.
4. In all countries in the UNECE region, women live longer than men and outnumber them in older age. In some countries, the difference in life expectancy between men and women is particularly large.
5. Considerable differences exist between the countries in the UNECE region in the stage of their demographic development and in the pace of the ageing process. Several countries in the region, those of Central Asia in particular, are projected to have relatively low dependency rates for many years, which gives them more time to adjust their policies to population ageing.
6. In countries in transition, economic and social problems continue to pose specific challenges to policymaking.
7. Reference will be made to the main findings of the UNECE regional report on ageing, which the secretariat is preparing based on the submitted country reports.

II. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR POLICIES

8. UNECE member States reaffirm their commitments to the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA/RIS), and to the Berlin Ministerial Declaration.
9. To meet the challenges and benefit from the opportunities, UNECE member States need to take coordinated action in cooperation with relevant actors, such as international organizations, civil society, and the private sector.
10. Policies should adopt an integrated approach that considers the different age-groups as different stages of an individual's life course, taking into account the need to promote gender equality. Policies should be enacted with the participation of citizens.
11. A systematic approach to policymaking and programme development is needed, aiming at coherence in the different stages of the project cycle: data collection, situation analysis, impact analysis, planning, implementation, and monitoring and assessment.

12. Citizens should be at the centre of these policies, and the enlargement of their choices and capabilities should be main policy objectives. It is important to ensure that citizens are fully informed about new initiatives and reforms.
13. Mainstreaming ageing remains a major strategy to address the challenges and opportunities of ageing. The relatively new paradigm of mainstreaming ageing needs to be promoted to ensure that ageing issues are integrated into all policies and programmes and that a balance between targeted programmes and mainstreaming is preserved.
14. Building a society for all ages should remain the ultimate objective. To achieve this, Governments should make full use of the skills and abilities older persons have acquired in their lives, for the benefit of their families and society. The valuable contribution that older persons make to families and society, especially as volunteers and caregivers, should be given due recognition and encouragement.
15. To build a society for all ages, social cohesion must be fostered, human rights secured, and actions taken to counter fragmentation and discrimination of various societal groups. Policies should consider counteracting the social exclusion resulting from decreased functional ability related to old age.
16. The self-organization of civil society must be promoted by creating enabling environments, such as legal, institutional and financial frameworks, to allow and encourage the expression of societal needs and aspirations and to install appropriate mechanisms for the effective participation of all citizens in society. Participation should promote social cohesion and help overcome age segregation.
17. The bottom-up participatory approach has proven to be a promising tool for monitoring. It is advised to further promote this approach and make use of it not only for monitoring, but also for increasing the participation and involvement of citizens of all ages. A truly participatory approach that involves older persons not only in ageing-related issues, but in all social issues, needs to be adopted. The objective should be promotion of real empowerment, which can only be achieved through involvement in decision-making processes and in governance and management processes. Participation through organized civil society, and through non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in particular, is one of the decisive factors for social cohesion.
18. To promote a positive image of older persons and the ageing process, the need to raise public awareness through educational curricula and the media should be taken into consideration. Education needs to encompass the various life circumstances of older individuals and demographic aspects of ageing. The media should offer a forum to elucidate the consequences of demographic developments and to discuss stereotypes and images of ageing.
19. The practice of monitoring, evaluating and following up on the policy actions has to be promoted.

III. SUGGESTED PRIORITY AREAS FOR FURTHER ACTION

20. Age discrimination and abuse are considered part of poverty and social exclusion. At the same time, they also violate human rights. Yet they still seem to be a socially accepted prejudice. Societies should fully recognize the contribution of older persons and ensure that they can live their lives in dignity. The rights, skills and abilities of older persons need to be respected and promoted in all spheres of society. Leading a life with dignity, independence and full participation are fundamental human rights. The full implementation of these fundamental rights and easy access to them for all people remains a key objective for policymaking that aims at a cohesive society for all ages. The United Nations Principles for Older Persons should be seen as the fundamental document for the rights of older persons.

21. The special needs and rights of vulnerable populations, such as ethnic, linguistic, and racial minority elderly, of rural elderly, and of the oldest-old, need to be considered in policies and programmes.

22. The need to promote gender equality must be taken into consideration.

23. The reconciliation of work with a variety of family forms and changing functions of the family needs to be promoted. Members of families with caring responsibilities, in particular women involved in these tasks, should be protected against being marginalized in their professional careers, as well as in the pension system as a consequence of care delivery to family members over a long period of time.

24. Care should be a priority issue. The adjustment of care provisions, in particular of long-term care, with the structural and functional transformations of family care can be promoted through innovative and flexible approaches. One of the objectives should be to reconcile family and work, with consideration given gender equality.

25. The different dimensions of care need to be integrated. A caring society is composed of different care providers, including the State, the family and civil society. It should also be ensured that a care society adopts a balanced care model, one which also pays the necessary attention to the provision of care to children. Public resources for care remain a vital pillar to ensuring quality care for all.

26. Care should not only be aimed at maintaining the functioning of older persons, but at activating, promoting, and optimizing the functioning of individuals. A new approach needs to be promoted, focused on fostering and training the cognitive, physical and sensory capacities of older persons.

27. Care needs to be seen as a right for everybody. Equal access to care for men and women and for all social groups needs to be promoted.

28. The well-being and health of older persons should be promoted. The focus of public policies related to ageing should be on the mental, physical and social activities of older persons, and should be promoted by the private and public sectors as well as by the older persons themselves. In promoting policies that aim to prolong life, particular attention should be paid to prolonging life free from disability.

29. Policies for promoting human development across the life course are an important way of preventing disability and promoting quality of life in old age.
30. Learning needs to be promoted throughout the life course. Learning is both a means and an end for welfare because it promotes participation in society, including in the labour market, and self-sufficiency. It is important to adopt a life-course perspective to learning. There is a need to promote an enabling environment and to provide incentives and training for job enhancement and job retention to citizens of all ages.
31. Service provision is a crucial issue to be addressed. The preferable approach would involve equal, non-discriminatory access to services, participation in the monitoring and delivery of services, and empowerment of all age groups through effective contributions in the management and governance systems of service providers. This approach is based on adequate funding of services and the assurance that this funding is integrated with civil-society and private-sector programmes aimed at improving quality of life.
32. Social protection mechanisms need to be adjusted to changing demographic and social realities, with an emphasis on quality of life. It is critical to recognize that quality of life is multidimensional and cross-sectoral and does not simply reflect health issues.
33. Increasing life expectancy requires adjustment of retirement age. For appropriate integration to the labour market of people around retirement age, flexibility and real freedom of choice must be provided with regard to the transition from working life to retirement. Adequate pensions and other financial means must be part of retirement planning, and must be subsidized by public funds to meet at least minimum standards.
34. Life after retirement is a crucial issue for public policies to address. It is important to ensure that retired persons continue to fully participate in society. Volunteerism and civic engagement are important ways to achieve this.
35. When addressing the challenges and opportunities of ageing, economic growth needs to be understood as a tool for promoting a society of all ages. Concerning economic growth, it is essential to simultaneously promote social equality and the fair distribution of resources, which requires a coordinated and integrated approach to social and economic policies.
36. Old age poverty is an important concern for many countries in the UNECE region.
37. Social changes and political reforms over the past years have shown that customs and traditions, and their intergenerational transmission, are important for sustaining the societal role of older persons and maintaining social cohesion. They have to be considered when promoting a society for all ages.
38. Insufficient data on ageing-related issues and from impact analyses of policies and legislative measures is an important obstacle to the effective implementation of policies and programmes. Consistent and methodologically sound indicators related to ageing and continuously updated empirical data form an important pillar in the knowledge base for ageing-related policymaking. In several areas, such indicators are provided by the project

“Mainstreaming Ageing: Indicators to Monitor Implementation” (MA:IMI), carried out by the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research.

39. Research is vital to enable UNECE member States to base their policies and programmes on up-to-date knowledge. This requires sustainable research infrastructures that offer a comprehensive and up-to-date empirical platform for basic understanding of the interplay of social, economic and demographic processes, as well as for applied studies to develop and substantiate related policy recommendations. Improved understanding of the factors that influence social and demographic developments, such as intergenerational relationships and gender relations, is of crucial importance. Existing research strategies, such as the Valencia research agenda, need to be effectively implemented.

IV. MAIN ACTORS AND PARTNERS

40. Governments of UNECE member States have the principal responsibility for the implementation of their commitments related to ageing. They implement these commitments in close cooperation with regional and local authorities, paying particular attention to the need to provide services close to the people and to incorporate their input at all levels. A society where the state assumes its functions and responsibility and is seen as a reliable partner by citizens can effectively address the challenges and opportunities of ageing across the lifespan.

41. Close involvement of all actors of society and organized civil society in particular, is crucial for monitoring and implementation. The implementation of MIPAA/RIS needs to benefit in a systematic way from the expertise of civil society. NGOs need to be full-fledged partners of Governments in the design, implementation and monitoring of ageing-related policies and programmes.

42. Civil society should be able to organize itself in a spirit of cooperation and coordination to produce consolidated positions that reflect the issues of common concern, not just the individual stances of different organizations. Member States acknowledge that involvement of organized civil society at the international level requires financial and technical support.

43. Implementation of MIPAA/RIS and the follow-up decisions of the 2007 UNECE Conference on Ageing requires international cooperation and monitoring. Exchange of experiences among UNECE member States on ageing-related issues, and advocacy and awareness-raising about the population ageing and its implications, must be promoted. Member States acknowledge the vital role of the UNECE secretariat in these efforts, and reaffirm that it should remain entrusted with the coordination of these tasks.

44. Capacity development is a vital element for the successful implementation of the Strategy and the Plan of Action. There is an obvious need to strengthen the capacities of national and local authorities to design, develop and implement programmes that would help societies adapt to ageing. International cooperation should ensure that countries in transition are able to benefit from the experience and knowledge of others.

45. Member States acknowledge the contribution of the Government of Austria to monitoring MIPAA/RIS under provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding with the UNECE. This

contribution has enabled the European Centre Vienna to develop ageing-related indicators, to collect relevant data, and to maintain a specialized website for MIPAA/RIS. It has also enabled the Task Force “Monitoring RIS” to provide substantive guidance on the follow-up to MIPAA/RIS.

46. Member States acknowledge the contributions of the Government of Spain and the United Nations Population Fund in organizing and supporting financially a number of workshops and meetings to exchange experience in MIPAA/RIS follow-up, develop related capacities in the member States and facilitate coordination between non-governmental organizations.

47. Further voluntary contributions from UNECE member States and from the international donor community in support of international cooperation, exchange of experiences and monitoring are welcome. Further improvement in the coordination of donor activities is called for.

48. To ensure appropriate follow-up to the Conference and to strengthen the population-related work in the UNECE region, member States would welcome the establishment of an intergovernmental body in the UNECE that would oversee this work and request the UNECE secretariat to take the necessary steps for establishing it.

49. The member States acknowledge their appreciation to the Government of Spain for hosting of the Conference, and for its hospitality.

50. A decision should be made to convene the next high-level meeting in five years' time in order to assess progress in the implementation of the above commitments.
