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**Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing
Report by the Chair**

Report by the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing

1. The Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing, Mr. Edmundo Martinho, is pleased to submit his report to the 115th meeting of Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 5 March 2021.
2. The report presents highlights of the work undertaken in support of mainstreaming population ageing in the national policy and regulatory frameworks and creating an environment that is conducive to the realization of the individual and societal potential of living longer. It covers achievements since the previous report presented in February 2020, and the major activities planned for 2021 and beyond. Further details can be found in the report of the thirteenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing, ECE/WG.1/2020/2, and the document ECE/WG.1/2020/4 on Implementation of the work programme of the Standing Working Group on Ageing in 2020.

Introduction

3. Population ageing has been recognized as one of the four global demographic megatrends with continued and lasting impacts on sustainable development. The UNECE region, currently accounting for around 30 per cent of the world's population aged 65 years and older, is at the forefront of this trend. Guiding and strengthening policymaking by member States to adapt to population ageing and other demographic changes are among the core activities of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).
4. The work is governed by the Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA) – its current status and revised Terms of Reference were approved by ECOSOC in July 2020 (E/RES/2020/19). The SWGA is composed of National Focal Points on Ageing nominated by the respective governments of UNECE member States. The UNECE Population Unit acts as the secretariat to the SWGA and enables the preparation and implementation of the SWGA Programme of Work. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing older persons and/or working in ageing-related areas and the scientific community participate as observers to the Standing Working Group and are represented in the SWGA Bureau. The international organizations with programmes related to population ageing also take part in the Standing Working Group as observers.
5. The SWGA supports the realization of the policy principles set out in the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and its Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS), and the subsequent UNECE Ministerial Declarations on Ageing. The SWGA Programme of Work for 2018-2022 responds to the goals of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration “A Sustainable Society for All Ages: Realizing the potential of living longer”. The programme of work links the implementation and monitoring of MIPAA/RIS with activities addressing the regional / national follow-up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other population-related international frameworks such as the ICPD Programme of Action and the WHO Global Strategy on Ageing and Health.
6. The SWGA work is based on international cooperation, exchange of experience and policy discussion on ageing and intergenerational relations, taking into account ongoing and emerging challenges in an increasingly interconnected, dynamic and digitized environment.
7. The vulnerability of older persons in emergency situations and the dysfunctions of the long-term care systems in the region were brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic. The SWGA has swiftly responded by adjusting both the substantive focus and the working methods to provide a platform to national policymakers, experts and practitioners to reflect on the first lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and share the existing [resources](#) and newly gained expertise across the UNECE countries.
8. In many countries, the COVID-19 pandemic has become also an accelerator of business and social innovation to warrant continuity of long-term care and social services for older people. Investing in strengthening / reforming long-term care systems to ensure ageing

with dignity and decent work for those providing care is an essential part of adapting to population ageing.

I. Achievements over the past twelve months

9. The SWGA actively used the opportunities for critical reflection and the sharing of insights and promising practices between governments, research, and civil society networks to take account of the vulnerability of older persons, improving emergency preparedness, response, and recovery, and for addressing some of the fundamental ageist and structural issues around long-term care. The SWGA also pursued its commitment to support mainstreaming ageing in policy and regulatory frameworks and assert that population ageing and MIPAA are/need to be an integral part of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other global programmes and platforms of action.

10. The active involvement and initiatives of SWGA members ensured successful implementation of the 2020 work programme as briefly presented below.

A. Policy seminar “Older persons in emergency situations: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic”

11. In an online consultation in April 2020, soon after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, member States decided to dedicate the 2020 UNECE Policy Seminar on Ageing to “Older persons in emergency situations: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic”. The Policy seminar took place on 18 November 2020, online. Around 130 delegates from 41 countries participated in the seminar. Reflecting on the first lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic in UNECE region, the discussions focused primarily on access to essential goods and health and long-term care services, sensitivity to specific needs and preferences, and ensuring that mental well-being, dignity and human rights of older persons are safeguarded. With evidence emerging that some policy measures employed at the beginning of the pandemic sometimes amplified ageism, exacerbated social isolation or cut off older persons from needed support and services, countries shared how such measures have been revisited / corrected in the wake of the second wave of the pandemic. They also shared what innovative solutions and practices have been championed by communities, businesses, civil society organizations and older persons themselves. Further details can be found in the [report](#) of the policy seminar.

B. Policy briefs on ageing with good practice examples

12. In 2020, three policy briefs on ageing were published: “Gender Equality in Ageing Societies (No. 23, March 2020)”, “Ageing in Sustainable and Smart Cities” (No. 24, May 2020) and “Older Persons in Emergency Situations” (No. 25, November 2020). This latest brief - highlighting how older persons tend to be disproportionately affected by emergencies and often neglected in disaster risk reduction strategies and emergency preparedness, relief, and recovery - served also as a background paper for the Policy Seminar.

13. Policy briefs on ageing are prepared on topics selected by the members of the SWGA. They suggest policy measures and promote the exchange of good practice examples among member States. Many of the briefs are translated into several languages (French, German, Portuguese, Russian, Serbian and Spanish) by the member States.

C. Guidelines for mainstreaming ageing

14. The SWGA included the development of guidelines for mainstreaming ageing in its programme of work for 2019-2020 in response to the MIPAA/RIS commitment to “mainstream ageing in all policy fields with the aim of bringing societies and economies into harmony with demographic change to achieve a society for all ages”. The initiative builds on the experience gained in developing country-tailored road maps for mainstreaming ageing. A Task Force on Mainstreaming Ageing was established in June 2019 to lead this work. The initial stocktaking exercise on mainstreaming policies, tools and practices developed by UNECE countries was carried out in 2019. 23 country notes were received facilitating the

drafting of the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing. In summer 2020, the secretariat led the two-months consultations with the national focal points on ageing and experts in the field on a zero draft of the Guidelines. Constructive comments and suggestions received from 21 reviewers were taken into account to the extent possible. The revised draft of the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing was presented to the thirteenth meeting of the SWGA in November 2020 and after receiving endorsement was finalized in February 2021.

15. The purpose of the Guidelines is to support governments in building a strategic framework for mainstreaming ageing to facilitate the systematic consideration and integration of both individual and population ageing aspects into broader national policies. The Guidelines recognize that each member State is unique and stress the importance of country ownership of the mainstreaming process. They do not prescribe a “one-size-fits-all” solution but suggest and share approaches that can be adapted to each specific country context, government structure, levels of decentralization, as well as traditions and cultures. They encourage countries to align their policies with relevant international frameworks and initiatives such as MIPAA/RIS, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), while taking into account and building on existing structures, processes and measures that work well and can support the mainstreaming process.

D. Launching the fourth review and appraisal cycle of MIPAA/RIS and preparations for the UNECE Ministerial conference in 2022

16. The Secretary-General’s report on Modalities for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 (E/CN.5/2020/4) and the subsequent ECOSOC resolution on the same topic (E/RES/2020/8), endorsed the timeline for carrying out the fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA, in which it is determined that the national reviews will take place in 2021, the regional review events in 2022, with a global review concluding the appraisal in 2023.

17. In September 2020, the SWGA Bureau launched the fourth review and appraisal cycle of the MIPAA/RIS in UNECE region by disseminating the [guidelines for preparation of national reports](#). The guidelines were prepared by a drafting group lead by Austria with active involvement of Bureau members and NGOs. UNECE member States are expected to submit their reports to the secretariat by 30 September 2021. The guidelines strongly encourage using a bottom-up participatory approach in preparing the report and ask to outline the most important policy achievements over the last 20 years that consider the impact of population ageing and older persons’ needs (e.g. lifelong learning, poverty, gender equality, ageing with dignity, intergenerational solidarity, quality standards for long-term care, working conditions of care workers, etc.).

18. At its thirteenth meeting in November 2020, the SWGA welcomed Italy’s proposal to host the fifth UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in May 2022 in Rome. A joint Civil Society and Researchers Forum will precede the Conference. At the breakout session of the meeting, three discussion groups – by now the established mode of the SWGA work during the annual sessions – reviewed the initial concept note prepared by Italy on thematic areas and format of the 2022 Ministerial Conference. SWGA members decided to have a political declaration as an outcome document of the Conference and to link the thematic topics with the main declaration items. To advance the preparations for the conference, two groups within the Bureau were created to work on the structure of the Ministerial Conference and the draft declaration. The Bureau of the SWGA currently consists of 10 national representatives – Portugal (chair), France and Norway (vice-chairs), Austria, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, and Spain – and two observers representing respectively research community and NGOs.

E. Monitoring implementation of MIPAA/RIS and strengthening the evidence base for policymaking

19. The latest biennial computation of the Active Ageing Index (AAI) for European Union (EU) countries was prepared in December 2020 providing index values disaggregated by

gender for six points in time: 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016 and 2018 (issued as 2010 AAI – 2020 AAI). Most of 2020 AAI indicators were also computed for several other UNECE member States that participate in the pan-European surveys. The number of non-EU countries for which national AAI is computed has been increasing, with Belarus and Kazakhstan including the AAI into the core monitoring framework of their national action plans on ageing. The [guidelines on application of AAI in non-EU countries and at subnational level](#) support these new initiatives.

20. In 2020, an evaluation of the UNECE Population subprogramme covering its activities since September 2016 was carried out under the title “Advancing intergovernmental work towards the implementation of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration and MIPAA/RIS commitments”. The evaluation concluded that the work performed by the Standing Working Group and the Population Unit is highly relevant, effective, needed and in line with the demographic priorities in the region. The evaluation was based on a desk review of relevant documents, 34 semi-structured interviews with current and former members of the Bureau of the SWGA and key partners from other UN organizations and an online survey completed by 44 National Focal Points on Ageing and other relevant stakeholders. It found significant evidence that national governments find relevant the opportunity to meet in the framework of the SWGA, exchange information and good practices and learn from experiences of other countries, and to receive a direct technical and capacity enhancement support from the SWGA and the Population Unit. Further details can be found in the [final evaluation report](#).

II. Major planned activities for 2021 and beyond

21. The SWGA and the secretariat will continue working towards its main objective to enhance the implementation of MIPAA/RIS in UNECE member States, focusing on mainstreaming population ageing in the national policy and regulatory frameworks and the goals of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration. Following the increasing use of online and hybrid meetings, the SWGA and the secretariat will continue to explore possibilities and try new approaches to make the best use of the advantages offered by the digital platforms of communication to continue to provide efficient support to countries and to adapt the working methods to the (ongoing and post-) pandemic environment.

22. The SWGA activities and outputs for 2021 and beyond will centre around the fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS implementation as well as the launch and operationalization of the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing, policy seminars and policy briefs.

A. Policy seminars on ageing

23. The policy seminars that focus on specific policy challenges and responses developed by member States will be organized back-to-back with annual meetings of the Standing Working Group. A hybrid format – with in-person and online participation – will be considered. The policy seminar in November 2021 will be dedicated to “Ageing in the digital era” as agreed at the thirteenth SWGA meeting.

B. Policy briefs on ageing

24. Policy briefs remain an important element of the SWGA Programme of Work as they provide evidence-based policy advice on specific aspects of MIPAA/RIS and showcase good practices from across the region. Two new policy briefs are planned for 2021. Policy brief No. 26 “Ageing in the Digital Era” - its focus and content were briefly discussed by the SWGA at its thirteenth meeting in November 2020 - will be issued in spring 2021 and serve as a background document for the 2021 Policy Seminar. The brief No. 27 will be on mainstreaming ageing and highlight pertinent country experiences.

C. Capacity building - operationalizing the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing

25. In 2021, the SWGA aims to promote the development of national strategic frameworks for mainstreaming ageing as outlined in the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing. The launch

events for the Guidelines are foreseen during the annual session of the General-Assembly's Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in April 2021 and on the occasion of the Social Summit in Porto in May 2021, convened by Portugal's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. The development of a toolkit and the first capacity-building workshop on using the Guidelines and toolkit are planned for the second part of the year. Based on the feedback, the preparation of an on-line training programme for policymakers, technical experts and other stakeholders will be considered in 2022.

26. In 2021, the SWGA will also be supporting the work on the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing in Kazakhstan, which was postponed in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions and liquidity constraints. Its finalization is tentatively planned for October 2021.

D. The fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA/RIS

27. The fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS implementation in the region will span throughout 2022. The SWGA and its secretariat will be supporting reviews at national level and lead the preparations for the regional review, which will culminate with the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in May 2022.

28. UNECE member States are expected to conduct national review and appraisal exercises and submit their reports to the secretariat by the end of September 2021. The UNECE guidelines for national reports ask member States also to reflect on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and highlight policy measures and activities planned in alignment with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) that was proclaimed by the General Assembly in December 2020 (Resolution 75/131).

29. The guidelines stress that preparation of the report and the involvement of stakeholders through a bottom-up participatory process are important contributions to advancing the implementation of MIPAA/RIS. To support countries in adhering to the guidelines, the SWGA and its secretariat in cooperation with NGOs and partner organizations (WHO, UNFPA, OHCHR) plan to conduct a series of webinars starting in April 2021. The first webinar will share information on both good practices and barriers in applying a bottom-up participatory approach to the national review and appraisal processes and preparation of the reports.

30. In November 2020, the SWGA started acting as a preparatory committee for the 2022 UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing. To effectively lead the preparations, the SWGA Bureau has divided tasks between a declaration drafting group and a conference preparation group that will work closely with the host-country team. Over the course of 2021, the Bureau foresees regular / quarterly online meetings to ensure coordination between the two groups and timely decision making. The first briefing to the member States on the 2022 Ministerial Conference, its format and provisional programme as well as a timeline for the formal consultations on the ministerial declaration draft is planned in October 2021. A draft of the ministerial declaration will be ready for in-depth discussion at the SWGA annual meeting in November 2021 and - providing agreement on the core elements is reached - the draft declaration will be submitted for the formal consultations with member States in December 2021.

31. The secretariat will prepare a brief overview on the submitted national reports on the fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS and an outline for the Synthesis Report to be presented at the annual meeting of the SWGA in November 2021.

III. Any proposed change to the subsidiary structure of the SWGA

32. There are no proposed changes to the subsidiary structure of the Committee to report.

33. During its thirteenth meeting on (19–20 November 2020, Geneva), the SWGA adopted the draft Programme of work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management

and Population subprogramme for 2021, as contained in document ECE/WG.1/2020/5. EXCOM is invited to approve the above programme of work.

IV. Follow-up to the 2019 session of the Economic Commission for Europe

34. The 2019 session of the Economic Commission for Europe, under the item F (68) Revised terms of reference and change of name of the Working Group on Ageing, took a decision to change the name of the Working Group on Ageing to “Standing Working Group on Ageing” and adopted the revised terms of reference of the Group. Subsequently, in July 2020, ECOSOC issued a resolution 2020/19 approving this decision with immediate effect.

V. Intersectoral activities: new activities and/or progress in existing intersectoral activities

35. The SWGA work on population ageing contributes to numerous intersectoral activities of UNECE and beyond. The SWGA provides direct inputs to the UNECE Nexus on Sustainable and Smart Cities for All Ages (e.g. Policy Brief No. 24). The Population Unit being a part of Statistical Division is also contributing to the Nexus on Measuring and Monitoring Progress Towards SDGs. The Population Unit also collaborates with the UNECE focal point on disaster risk reduction in the work related to vulnerable population groups (e.g. Policy Brief No. 25).

36. The Population Unit acts as the UNECE focal point for matters related to the United Nations Commission for Population and Development and the Commission for Social Development and liaises respectively with the UNDESA Population Division and the Division for Inclusive Social Development. For example, in August 2020, the Population Unit convened and moderated the regional breakout session for Europe during the Expert Group Meeting “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: The role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all” organised by UNDESA in preparation for the fifty-ninth session of the Commission for Social Development.

VI. Technical cooperation activities

37. Enhancing the capacity of all member States, and particularly those in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, in mainstreaming ageing and aligning their policies with relevant international frameworks and initiatives such as MIPAA/RIS and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), to meet the challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is at the core of the capacity-building activities coordinated by the Population Unit. They include:

- Country-tailored road maps for mainstreaming ageing
- Capacity development workshops
- Advisory services to address country-specific needs
- Development of methodological guidance, tools and training material

38. The member State contributions to the UNECE “Ageing – phase 3” project fund provide the main source of financing capacity-building activities under the SWGA work programme in 2020–2022. In January 2020, contributions received to the fund from Austria, Estonia, Germany, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland amounted to USD 271,000; in the course of 2020 and early 2021, additional contributions to the fund were received from Estonia (USD 3,300), Germany (USD 179,200) and Switzerland (USD 20,000). The development of the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing, preparation of the two policy briefs, and the work on the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing in Kazakhstan were financially supported by the

fund in 2020. The fund also provided financing for a temporary part-time P3 project support staff.

39. In 2020, the Population Unit worked on the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing in Kazakhstan. The desk study and the first field mission to the country in January 2020 as well as the national media review of ageing/older persons issues coverage between 1 October 2019 and April 2020 were completed. However, further work on the Road Map had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and liquidity crisis. In August 2020, UNECE RPTC allocated USD 10,000 to the Population Unit to initiate technical cooperation work on a rapid country assessment of COVID-19 impact on older persons to identify long-term care systems challenges and building an evidence base for necessary interventions. A pilot is currently being implemented in Kazakhstan.

40. In 2021, the SWGA and its secretariat will be working on developing a toolkit for mainstreaming ageing and conduct a related capacity development workshop as well as a series of webinars in support of preparation of national reports on MIPAA/RIS implementation.

VII. Cooperation with other organizations

41. The Standing Working Group on Ageing and its secretariat maintain good cooperation with the international organizations active in the area of population ageing in the UNECE region. Close relationships have been maintained with the European Commission, WHO (HQ and the regional office for Europe), and the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECARO) in Istanbul. On an annual basis, the UNECE Population Unit and the EECARO exchange information on their work programmes and discuss possible joint activities.

42. In July 2020, UNFPA, WHO, UNECE, OHCHR and HelpAge International launched the "[Joint programme on Ageing: Building forward better in light of COVID-19](#)". This regional initiative aims to strengthen coordinated support and action in member States through the United Nations country teams. Collaborative actions focus on: (1) enhancing preparedness and emergency response during the pandemic and beyond to mitigate the impact; (2) person-centred integrated social care during and beyond the pandemic to ensure ageing in dignity; and (3) contributing to changing the narrative about older people to promote their human rights and to enable participatory, conducive environments.

43. The Population Unit coordinates an informal Geneva-based inter-agency group on ageing, with representatives from the International Labour Organization, the International Social Security Association, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the UNFPA Geneva office, WHO, and the NGO Committee on Ageing. The meetings of the inter-agency group are held to mutually update on planned ageing-related activities and discuss how the group members could be involved in/benefit from each other's activities.

44. At the global level, the Population Unit is a member of the United Nations-wide inter-agency group on ageing and actively participates in the regular (online) meetings with its counterparts in other regional commissions.