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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups: Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

Preliminary assessment of the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to the Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/8](#) entitled “Modalities for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002”. It provides an analysis of the preliminary findings of the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, including the identification of prevalent and emerging issues and related policy options. The report also highlights information on the regional preparations for the fourth review and appraisal exercise, including actions, activities and the utilization of a bottom-up participatory approach.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [2020/8](#), the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the Commission for Social Development at its sixtieth session, in 2022, a report, including an analysis of the preliminary findings of the fourth review and appraisal exercise of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, together with the identification of prevalent and emerging issues and related policy options.
2. The Madrid Plan of Action, adopted by the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in 2002, marked a turning point on how international, regional and national actors approach ageing and the well-being of older persons. The Plan is a fundamental framework for the design of policies and programmes concerning population ageing and human rights for older persons.
3. In its resolution [57/167](#), the General Assembly endorsed the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. In its resolution [58/134](#), the Assembly took note of the road map (see [A/58/160](#)) for the implementation of the Plan of Action; a practical framework geared to assist countries in setting national priorities and in selecting appropriate approaches for age-inclusive communities.
4. The implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action contributes to accelerating progress towards the realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which further anchored the issue of ageing in the global development agenda. With older persons estimated to globally outnumber youth by 2030,¹ global ageing is poised to shape the prospects for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
5. The Madrid Plan of Action provides for a systematic review of its implementation by Member States. The Commission for Social Development is identified as the body responsible for follow-up and appraisal of the implementation of the Plan of Action, and the Commission is urged to integrate the various dimensions of population ageing as contained in the Plan of Action. In resolution [2003/14](#), the Economic and Social Council invited Governments, the United Nations system and civil society to participate in a “bottom-up” approach to the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Plan of Action through, inter alia, sharing of ideas, data collection and best practices.
6. The Commission for Social Development set out the approach for the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action every five years in resolutions [42/1](#), [44/1](#) and [45/1](#). The United Nations regional commissions were requested to disseminate information about the Plan of Action at the regional level and to convene regional review and appraisal activities and events.
7. Section II of the present report provides an update of the process to date at the regional level in the preparations for the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, including the contribution of the United Nations system to the exercise.
8. Section III provides an overview of the preliminary findings on prevalent and emerging issues and related policy options in the context of the fourth review and appraisal exercise, emanating from the work of the regional commissions, together with inputs, where applicable, from the United Nations system.
9. Section IV presents key recommendations for consideration by the Commission.

¹ See United Nations, Annual population by age groups: both sexes, World Population Prospects: 2019 (revision).

II. Process to date at the regional level

10. In resolution [2020/8](#), on the modalities for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action, the Economic and Social Council invited Member States to identify actions that they have taken since the third review and appraisal exercise, and those that they intend to review. It also requested the regional commissions to continue to facilitate the review and appraisal exercise at the regional level, including through consultation with relevant regional bodies.

11. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) undertook a preliminary analysis of the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on the continent's ageing population and social protection responses. Findings and recommendations will inform the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action. The ECA secretariat will provide guidance and technical support to member States as they prepare their national reports. National consultative reviews involving both government and civil society that follow a bottom-up approach will provide the main basis for the regional review process. The national reports will form the main input of the regional review report. A high-level policy forum will be organized for member States to endorse the regional report, as well as share experiences in the implementation of the Plan of Action. It is anticipated that the review process will be supported by other United Nations agencies, the African Union Commission and civil society organizations. Beyond this, sustained dialogue and engagement among member States and stakeholders will be facilitated by ECA in the lead-up to the global review in 2023.

12. Preparations for the fourth review and appraisal in the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region² commenced in 2020 with the issuance of national reporting guidelines, adopted in September 2020 by the Bureau of the ECE Standing Working Group on Ageing. Most member States will submit their national reports by the end of 2021. The ECE secretariat will prepare a regional synthesis of national reports received and share it with member States for review in April 2022.

13. A series of three online workshops was organized from April to June 2021 to support ECE member States in the review and appraisal exercise. The first workshop focused on the bottom-up, meaningful participation of civil society and older persons in the Madrid Plan of Action review process. Subsequently, ECE issued a guidance note³ on the meaningful participation of older persons and civil society in policymaking. The second online workshop drew links between the Plan of Action and the 2030 Agenda, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) and the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism,⁴ as well as follow-up to the policy brief of the Secretary-General entitled “The impact of COVID-19 on older persons”. The third workshop focused on specific aspects of reporting and clarified questions on the preparation of national reports. The regional review will culminate with the fifth ECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing, hosted by Italy in Rome on 16 and 17 June 2022, preceded by a joint civil society and research forum. A ministerial declaration will be adopted at the Conference.

14. Preparations for the fourth review and assessment in the Latin America and the Caribbean region began at the end of 2020, within the framework of the Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing and the Rights of Older Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean. The technical secretariat prepared a guide for the preparation of country reports on the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, recommending the participation of various relevant governmental institutions, as well

² See <https://unece.org/population/ageing/MIPAA20>.

³ <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/UNECE%20meaningful%20participation%20guidance%20note.pdf>.

⁴ See www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism.

as civil society representatives of older persons, in the participatory preparation of the country reports. The guide was presented to government focal points in August 2021 and to regional civil society organizations in September 2021.

15. Member States prepared their national reports on the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action with technical assistance from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and submitted them to ECLAC by 15 November 2021. The reports will form the basis for the preparation of the regional report. A series of online meetings with country focal points on ageing and regional civil society were organized from August to November 2021 with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), to support member States in the review and appraisal exercise.

16. The regional preparatory meeting for the fifth Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing and the Rights of Older Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean was held on 18 November 2021. The objectives of the meeting were (a) to establish the main themes that countries and civil society are interested in addressing at the Conference; (b) present progress in national reports; (c) to deliberate on the implementation of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, in coordination with the Pan American Health Organization; and (d) to propose the host country for the fifth Regional Intergovernmental Conference, to be held in November 2022.

17. In 2020, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) launched the fourth review and appraisal process, with support from United Nations entities active at the regional and national levels, including relevant resident coordinator offices. It held the first informal consultation of ESCAP member States on the Asia-Pacific review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action in May 2021 and the second informal consultation⁵ in August 2021. Another consultation for focal points on ageing from North and Central Asia, co-organized by ECE and ESCAP, took place on 29 October 2021. At least one more informal consultation is planned prior to the intergovernmental meeting in 2022 to discuss updates on the review and appraisal process and a possible outcome document of the intergovernmental meeting.

18. Following inputs from national focal points on ageing and representatives of United Nations entities, the voluntary national survey on the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in Asia and the Pacific was launched in June 2021. The survey incorporates questions on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), and requests information on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on older persons, as well as on emerging issues. In addition to the survey, ESCAP is currently supporting a number of member States in the region with collecting data and information for the national reviews, as well as holding broad national consultations on the implementation of the Plan of Action, including with different stakeholders.

19. ESCAP has been supporting Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members in preparing an action plan to implement the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Ageing: Empowering Older Persons in ASEAN⁶ by providing substantive inputs to the draft action plan and participating at relevant meetings of the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development with substantive inputs.

20. In addition, ESCAP is planning to hold consultations with stakeholders and United Nations entities in the region on closing the gap between policy and concrete actions in the implementation of the three priority areas of the Madrid Plan of Action, taking into account emerging issues and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

⁵ See www.unescap.org/events/2021/second-informal-consultation-escap-member-states-asia-pacific-fourth-review-and.

⁶ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Kuala-Lumpur-Declaration-on-Ageing-Empowering-Older-Persons-in-ASEANAdopted.pdf>.

21. The Asia and Pacific intergovernmental meeting on the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action is tentatively scheduled to take place from 29 June to 1 July 2022, with a preparatory meeting of ESCAP member States planned for the first quarter of 2022. ESCAP plans to issue a regional report on the situation of older persons on 1 October 2022, International Day of Older Persons.

22. ESCAP developed a website dedicated to population change in Asia and the Pacific, including population ageing.⁷ The site includes an up-to-date statistical assessment of the demographic, social and economic situation of older persons by country. All information related to the regional fourth review and appraisal will also be posted on the website, including information from the national surveys, which will be presented as part of a policy dashboard on ageing. In addition, ESCAP compiled country-level information on existing policies on ageing and older persons in line with the Madrid Action Plan. This information has been shared with member States to support their national reviews.

23. In 2020, ESCAP initiated the establishment of the Asia-Pacific informal regional network of focal points on ageing, consisting mostly of United Nations entities, including the International Labour Organization (ILO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNFPA and the World Health Organization (WHO), as well as the Asian Development Bank and HelpAge International. ESCAP serves as its secretariat and organizes regular meetings. The terms of reference of the network were adopted in May 2021. The network is intended to support member States in the review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action, as well as to support collaboration among its members on population ageing in Asia and the Pacific. The network has been recognized as a networking group of the Asia-Pacific issue-based coalitions.

24. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) launched the process of the fourth review of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in the Arab region in 2020 by requesting member States to appoint focal points on ageing and facilitated agreement on the methodology for the review at a capacity-building workshop for member States. ESCWA developed national reporting guidelines for requesting qualitative and quantitative data on older persons, ageing and the response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

25. A workshop was organized in April 2021, the first among a series of activities planned to follow up on the progress made in preparing national reports. A multi-stakeholder meeting convened by ESCWA in December 2021 will engage civil society organizations in the review and appraisal process. ESCWA has also responded to bilateral requests for assistance by member States in developing the national reports.

26. ESCWA will prepare a regional report that synthesizes the findings of the national reports and will present it at a high-level regional meeting, to be organized by ESCWA in the second quarter of 2022. The regional meeting will be attended by relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to ensure a whole-of-society, whole-of-government approach to the review and to identify regional trends, challenges, promising practices and priority areas for future work. ESCWA organized a meeting in September 2021 to jointly discuss and agree upon the modality and the thematic focus of the regional meeting with member States.

⁷ www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/.

Contribution of the United Nations system to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

27. The first United Nations *Global Report on Ageism*,⁸ was developed by WHO, in collaboration with OHCHR, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and UNFPA. The *Global Report*, launched on 18 March 2021, highlights that ageism against older people is prevalent across countries, with far-reaching impacts on our economies and on all aspects of health and well-being in older age. It presents effective intervention strategies to prevent and respond to ageism through policy and law, educational activities and intergenerational contact interventions. The *Global Report* signals a need to invest in these three interventions, to improve data and research on ageism and to change the narrative around age and ageing.

28. Providing evidence-based guidance on how to reduce or eliminate age-based stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination, the *Global Report on Ageism* makes a key contribution to the Madrid Plan of Action, in particular to article 5. Several regions are drawing on the findings from the report and actively encouraging countries to report on the implementation of strategies to reduce ageism in the fourth review and appraisal. The *Global Report* informs the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, which forms an integral part of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030.

29. ITU devotes particular attention to the digital inclusion of older persons to implement the overarching goal of inclusiveness in support to member States and other stakeholders. The 2021 report, *Ageing in a Digital World: from Vulnerable to Valuable*⁹ is the first report to be produced by ITU with the aim of raising awareness in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector of the importance of being prepared to respond to population ageing within an era of rapid technological innovations. The report is aimed at supporting ITU members, policymakers and stakeholders in recognizing digital opportunities and taking advantage of new possibilities for economic, social and political growth from increased digital inclusion and age-friendly digital environments. The report also focuses on the role that ICTs can play in ensuring digitally inclusive communities in which older persons are active participants and valuable contributors. On 1 October 2021, ITU launched the first online self-paced training course on ICTs for better ageing and livelihood in the digital landscape¹⁰ to mark the International Day of Older Persons.

III. Preliminary findings on prevalent and emerging issues and related policy options

A. Regional disparities

30. Population ageing is experienced by almost all countries, with the number of persons aged 65 years or over projected to more than double by 2050 globally. As shown in the figure, important regional differences nonetheless persist.¹¹

⁸ World Health Organization (WHO), *Global report on ageism* (Geneva, 2021). Available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240016866>.

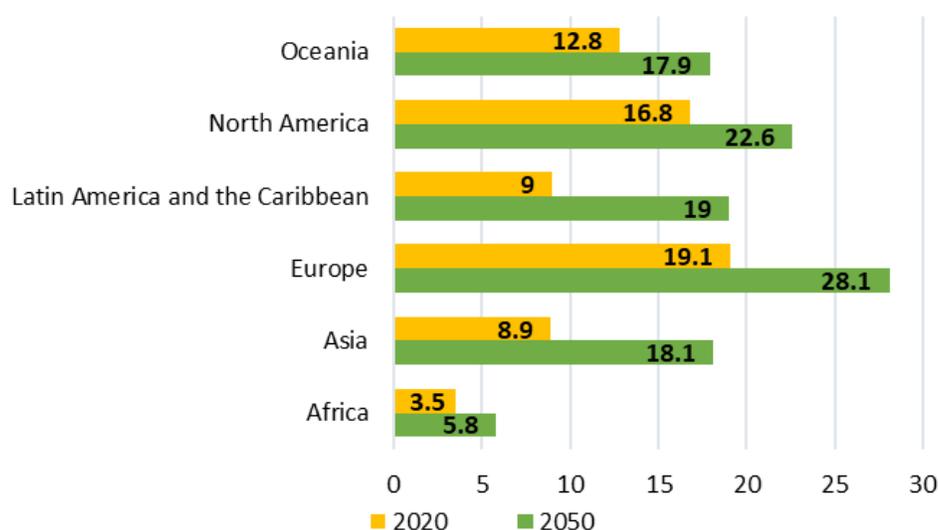
⁹ Available at www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Digital-Inclusion/Pages/ageing-in-a-digital-world/default.aspx.

¹⁰ See <https://academy.itu.int/training-courses/full-catalogue/icts-better-ageing-and-livelihood-digital-landscape>.

¹¹ Population data in the present section is based on Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2019: Volume II: Demographic Profiles* (New York, 2019).

Population aged 65 or over by region, 2020 and 2050

(Percentage)



31. While in sub-Saharan Africa the number of persons aged 65 or over will remain relatively small as a share of the total population, it is expected to triple over the next 30 years. Projections indicate that, in Northern Africa, the increment in the population at ages 80 and above by 2050 will be more than 250 per cent.

32. There are also important intraregional disparities in population ageing. In the Arab region, for example, while some countries are expected to complete the demographic transition towards an aged population by 2035, others will not begin this transition until 2060 or 2070.¹²

33. Likewise, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the shift in the age structure of the population is at very dissimilar stages in different parts of the region. This great variation in the pace of demographic processes is expressed in terms of the percentage of older persons in the population and differentials by sex in the region. In 2020, countries such as Argentina, Chile, Cuba and Uruguay, experienced advanced stages of the population ageing process in comparison with some Central American and Caribbean countries, including Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Nicaragua. Intersecting inequalities, including on grounds of gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, influence the quality of old age. Some countries in the region generally devote fewer resources to health care and are still in the process of organizing their health-care systems. They have less experience in providing care and support services for older persons, and the coverage of their social security and protection systems is more limited and unequal.

34. The Asia-Pacific region is ageing at unprecedented pace, without strong social protection systems in place, unlike other regions experiencing the same pace of ageing. According to ESCAP, several member States, including Australia, China, Georgia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation can be considered as “aged”, with the older population accounting for 14 per cent or more

¹² ESCWA, *Population and Development Report Issue No. 8: Prospects of Ageing with Dignity in the Arab Region* (2017).

of the total population.¹³ Other member States in the region are expected to be “aged” within the next five years, including China and Thailand. Older women outnumber older men, in particular in the oldest age group.

35. Worldwide, Europe and Northern America have the highest share of older persons in their populations, with 18 per cent of the population aged 65 years or over. Both regions are continuing to age rapidly. It is projected that, by 2050, one in every four persons living in Europe and Northern America will be aged 65 years or over.

36. While there are many commonalities among the regions, substantial regional variations are also evident in what each region considers to be prevalent and emerging issues in relation to population ageing and older persons, and consequently on the focus and policy approach towards promoting the well-being of older persons in each context.

B. Mainstreaming ageing

37. As recognized in the Madrid Plan of Action, the mainstreaming of ageing is essential for societies to adapt effectively to the implications of longevity and population ageing.

38. In the ECE region, realization of the need for and efforts to mainstream ageing are gathering momentum. To support the process and provide methodological guidance, the ECE Standing Working Group on Ageing developed the *UNECE Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing*,¹⁴ published in 2021, in which it outlines five stages that support countries in establishing a strategic framework for mainstreaming ageing and highlights the importance of age-sensitive research and analysis, multi-stakeholder engagement, cross-sectoral coordination and collaboration and alignment with relevant international frameworks. These include the Plan of Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing and other relevant frameworks for social and economic development and human rights.

39. ESCAP has taken stock of existing policies on ageing in the Asia-Pacific region and mapped the extent to which ageing is mainstreamed in other policies. A paper on the key elements of policies on ageing, in line with the Madrid Plan of Action and a paper on statistical indicators to measure progress in implementing the Plan of Action will be posted on the ESCAP website¹⁵ in 2021. Both papers will be the basis for capacity-building on mainstreaming population ageing, including the development of educational videos.

40. ESCAP is providing technical support for Bhutan, Cambodia, Fiji, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives and Mongolia in collecting data and information on existing policies on ageing, which will help identify policy gaps. ESCAP also provided technical cooperation to the Lao People’s Democratic Republic to draft a decree on older persons, including in conducting stakeholder consultations.

41. In the Western Asian region, the absence of inclusive policies to mainstream ageing across the different sectors and ensure Government-wide collaboration and coordination remains a common challenge. In response, ESCWA is providing technical support to Iraq, Sudan and Syria, in developing strategies and policies for older persons. The national strategy of Lebanon for older persons was launched in

¹³ See 2020 ESCAP population data sheet. Available at www.unescap.org/resources/2020-escap-population-data-sheet#. The increase from 7 to 14 per cent is generally referred to as the transition from an “ageing” to an “aged” society.

¹⁴ https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/ECE-WG.1-37_Guidelines_for_Mainstreaming_Ageing.pdf.

¹⁵ www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/population-ageing.

June 2021 with support from ESCWA and UNFPA. Efforts are under way to support the development of its action plan.

42. ESCWA support for member States includes the preparation of a policy toolkit in Arabic and English. An interactive web version of the toolkit will also be made available by the end of 2021. The aim of the toolkit is to inform policymakers of the major guidelines regarding older persons' rights and priorities as derived from the international and regional frameworks. The toolkit has already been used in a series of national capacity-building workshops targeting policymakers in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria, and will also be implemented in Jordan and Morocco. Similarly, a regional capacity-building workshop on ageing with dignity was organized in November 2020 for the network of focal points on ageing representing ESCWA member States.

43. ESCWA, in partnership with the League of Arab States and UNFPA, is developing a model draft law for older persons. A regional workshop was organized in November 2020 in partnership with the League of Arab States and UNFPA to raise awareness among parliamentarians in the region on their roles in protecting and promoting the rights of older persons and to discuss the initial draft of the law. A second workshop for parliamentarians is planned by the end of 2021.

C. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and older persons

44. The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted the work carried out by Governments and the international community towards supporting older persons and their human rights, including activities related to the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. While the Plan of Action does not directly address the impact of pandemics on older persons, policy efforts towards its priority directions were all severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its health, social and economic repercussions. In addition, the Plan of Action discusses the vulnerabilities experienced by older persons in human emergencies, offering specific objectives and recommendations in this area.

45. At the regional level, United Nations regional commissions have supported Member States in their response to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on older persons through analytical research and knowledge-sharing. Workshops and seminars organized by regional commission include, for instance, the ECE policy seminar "Older persons in emergency situations: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic",¹⁶ held in November 2020. ECLAC organized a virtual dialogue on challenges in protecting older people and their rights in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷ ESCAP, together with HelpAge International, UNFPA, the ASEM Global Ageing Center and the Japan Gerontological Evaluation Study, organized a webinar entitled "Older persons, communities and COVID-19"¹⁸ on 4 June 2020.

46. ECE published a policy brief entitled "Older persons in emergency situations",¹⁹ reflecting on the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and suggesting strategies to address the needs of older persons, who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic. ECLAC published several relevant publications, including "Challenges for the protection of older persons and their rights during COVID-19",²⁰ "General

¹⁶ See <https://unece.org/info/Population/events/17754>.

¹⁷ See www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/informe_dialogo_virtual_personas_mayores_08-10-2020.pdf (in Spanish).

¹⁸ See www.unescap.org/events/older-persons-communities-and-covid-19.

¹⁹ https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Policy_briefs/ECE_WG1_36_PB25.pdf.

²⁰ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/46488/3/S2000722_en.pdf.

recommendations for the care of older persons from a human rights perspective”²¹ and “COVID-19 and its impacts on the rights and protection of older persons in the subregion”.²² A chapter on good practices from Asia and the Pacific on the use of ICTs to address the health-care needs of older persons during the pandemic was added to the ICT Guidebook,²³ published by ESCAP in 2021. In addition, the Asia-Pacific Madrid Plan of Action survey contains questions on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older persons, and responses by member States to the survey will be analysed for the regional review and appraisal in Asia and the Pacific in 2022. In addition to its efforts to further strengthen its research base on ageing, recognizing the multisectoral nature of issues affecting older persons, with particular focus on social protection and emergency and conflict situations, ESCWA issued a policy brief entitled “The impact of COVID-19 on older persons in the Arab region”²⁴ in 2020, highlighting the challenges faced by older persons during the pandemic and proposing recommendations in this regard.

D. Economic security in old age

47. Economic security in old age remains a priority and a challenge in many countries. Achieving it demands the removal of barriers to the participation of older persons in labour markets for those who wish or need to work, as well as improved access to adequate social protection.²⁵

48. In a context of constantly evolving employment trends, older persons should benefit and contribute to the same extent as other age groups to economies while, at the same time, societies should harness the potential of longevity. As stated by ILO in the Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work,²⁶ supporting older workers involves expanding their choices and optimizing their opportunities for decent work until their retirement and enabling active ageing. Removing barriers to the participation of older persons in the labour force is crucial.

49. Age-based discrimination in employment is one of the main barriers faced by older persons. In the Madrid Plan of Action, the elimination of age-based discrimination was identified as paramount to guarantee the well-being of older persons and to enable them to contribute to their economies. Ageist practices can be manifested in unequal employment terms and conditions, in the lack of opportunities for promotion and professional development, in discrimination in the access to training and in pressure to retire, inter alia. Where other variables, such as gender or disability, coexist with old age, discrimination might be exacerbated.

50. Another barrier is inflexibility in labour markets. Provisions such as part-time work and flexible arrangements are particularly valued by older workers. Exploiting the potential of new digital technologies to support older workers can extend working lives, as can adapting jobs and workplaces to the differential needs of older persons, in particular those with a disability. Inadequate access to lifelong learning opportunities and professional training and development activities can also negatively

²¹ https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/45316/4/S2000271_es.pdf (in Spanish).

²² www.cepal.org/en/node/52469 (in Spanish).

²³ Available at www.unescap.org/kp/2021/using-information-and-communication-technologies-address-health-care-needs-older-persons.

²⁴ www.unescwa.org/sites/default/files/pubs/pdf/impact-covid-19-older-persons-arab-region-en.pdf.

²⁵ In addition to inputs from regional commissions, the present subsection is based on the report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing (A/75/218) and International Labour Organization (ILO), World Social Protection Report 2020–2022 (Geneva, 2021).

²⁶ Available at www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/mission-and-objectives/centenary-declaration/lang--en/index.htm.

impact older workers. Participation in insecure, low-productive work or informal or unpaid employment likewise constitutes a barrier to decent work for older persons.

51. Policies on employment in old age and active ageing need to go hand in hand with universal and adequate social protection systems. Worldwide, 77.5 per cent of people above retirement age receive a pension, but significant differences persist in effective coverage rates among countries. While in higher income countries 97.5 per cent of persons above statutory retirement age receive an old-age pension, the percentage is 39.6 and 23.2 in lower-middle-income and low-income countries respectively. Social protection will remain a key issue as Member States carry out the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. In the Latin America region, long-standing shortcomings in the area of social protection have recently been exacerbated by the health crisis created by the pandemic and its consequent deep economic recession. Action is urgently needed to ensure that older persons in the region receive their pensions, in particular the most vulnerable among them: those receiving pensions under non-contributory systems and those with no pension coverage. Urgent action is also needed to identify and locate vulnerable persons, and the establishment of distribution channels for providing assistance to them should be a political priority.

52. As is the case in other regional contexts, the weakness of social protection systems in the Latin America and the Caribbean region relegates many women to unpaid work. Women's greater caregiving burden, gender inequities and the longer life expectancy of women as compared with men must be taken into consideration in all policies and measures related to economic security in old age. A key challenge in the region is the need to reorganize caregiving systems, to ensure that Governments, the private sector and families share caregiving responsibilities equally. In most Asia-Pacific countries, long-term care systems largely rely on unpaid family care, whereas countries in East and South-East Asia are developing innovative community-care systems to reduce reliance on unpaid family care.

53. In the Asia-Pacific context, countries have had limited time to adapt their economies and societies to population ageing, because of its rapid pace. Coverage of contributory pensions is still low in most countries in the ESCAP region, for example, where less than one third of the working-age population pays into a pension system. Low coverage of pensions in Asia and the Pacific is linked to high informal sector employment, with 60 per cent of employment in some countries of the region in the informal sector.²⁷ Countries in the region have introduced policies on population ageing and are conducting pension reforms. According to the latest available data, half of the working-age population in the region was under mandatory coverage of pensions, or 45.6 per cent of women and 55.2 per cent of men. China has achieved universal coverage of pensions in the working-age population, contributing to the relatively high regional aggregate.²⁸

54. Limited access to pensions, in particular by older women, combined with changing family structures and declining capacity among younger generations to provide financial support to ageing parents, increases the risk of the next generation of older persons in the Asia-Pacific region being poor. The risk of falling into poverty in old age is particularly high for older women because of their lower labour force participation throughout the life course, and often lower pension benefit levels, even

²⁷ ILO, ILOSTAT database (<https://ilostat ilo org/data/#>), Sustainable Development Goal indicator 8.3.1 – Proportion of informal employment in total employment by sex and sector (%) – Annual (Economic Activity: Non-agriculture). Accessed 23 April 2021.

²⁸ ILO, World Social Protection Data Dashboards: Legal social protection coverage, by social protection function, latest available year. Accessed 14 July 2021.

when they have access to a pension. Older women in rural areas in low-income groups are at high risk of being left behind.²⁹

55. Acknowledging and in response to the importance of social protection for older persons in the western Asia region, ESCWA is devoting the ninth issue of its population and development report to social protection and the care economy for older persons in the Arab region in the light of lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. The report will be entitled *Building Forward Better for Older Persons in the Arab Region*.

56. While universal social protection systems are well established in the European region, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed challenges in many of these systems, in particular in the area of long-term care. In an effort to support building forward better for the rights and dignity of older persons, ECE, in partnership with UNFPA, WHO, OHCHR and HelpAge International launched a joint programme on ageing that seeks to support countries in improving health and social care provisions and enabling environments for older persons. One of the first activities of the programme was a rapid assessment of the impact of the pandemic on long-term care for older persons piloted by ECE in Kazakhstan.

E. Social isolation

57. The impact of social isolation and loneliness among older people is a growing public health and social concern. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified and shed light upon the harmful effects of social isolation and loneliness and emphasized the need for policymakers to address these issues in strategies relevant to the well-being of older persons. Social isolation and loneliness can shorten the lives of older people and impair their health and quality of life, and they might also impose a heavy financial burden on societies.³⁰

58. Research and data on social isolation and loneliness³¹ among this group is scarce and there are no global estimates on the proportion of older people that experience them, yet available data show that it is widespread. In China, Europe, Latin America and the United States of America, 20 to 34 per cent of older people are lonely.

59. In view of the many individual, social and societal factors that contribute to social isolation and loneliness among older persons, the response should be multifaceted and multilevelled. Measures range from those focused on the individual, such as cognitive behaviour therapy or social skills training, to those at the policy level, with laws and policies that address ageism, inequality and the digital divide, inter alia. Improving research and strengthening and broadening the available evidence is key to better understand how social isolation and loneliness among older persons operate and what strategies could be more successful in solving them. One example of such research is a multi-country survey, led by UNFPA in collaboration with University College London, currently taking place in Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo and Serbia. The survey covers nominally 1,000 older respondents per entity, enhanced by focus group interviews. The results from the survey will enable a better understanding of the extent to which older people

²⁹ ESCAP, *Addressing the Challenges of Population Ageing in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok, 2017).

³⁰ The present subsection is based on advocacy brief *Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older People* (Geneva, WHO, 2021), developed in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women). Available at <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240030749>.

³¹ The definitions of “social isolation” and “loneliness” are discussed in advocacy brief *Social Isolation and Loneliness among Older People* (2021).

are lonely in the selected countries in the region and the reasons for loneliness and inform the development and implementation of interventions to contribute to initiatives on healthy and active ageing.

F. Digital technologies

60. ICTs are now ubiquitous and can enable healthy ageing environments, as long as technological environments and relevant policies are safe, built with digital accessibility requirements and universal design, age-friendly and ageism-free. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and the use of technology globally. Realizing the opportunities of ICTs for all requires addressing the unequal access to digital technologies across and within populations and, in particular, the digital exclusion experienced by many older persons.³²

61. The latest ECE policy brief entitled “Ageing in the digital era” examines the digital divide between generations and highlights policy priorities for the digital inclusion of older persons. It includes strategies and good practice examples in the areas of ensuring access to goods and services that involve digital technology, enhancing digital literacy, leveraging the potential of digital technologies for active and healthy ageing and protecting the human rights and dignity of older person in the digital era.

62. Since the third regional review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Action Plan in 2017, ESCAP has prioritized the use of ICT in support of older persons’ health-care needs. With support from the Ministry of Health and Welfare of the Republic of Korea, ESCAP implemented a three-year project on the use of ICTs in support of health-care needs of older persons. At the end of the project, ESCAP published a guidebook entitled *Using Information and Communication Technologies to Address the Health-care Needs of Older Persons Managing Chronic Disease*, containing general information on ICTs and older persons, good practice examples from around the region and policy recommendations. In addition, a chapter on the COVID-19 pandemic was added to highlight lessons learned on using technology to facilitate access to health care for older persons during the pandemic and beyond. A policy brief³³ complements the guidebook. Another report, entitled *Leveraging Technology for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing*, showcases good practices on utilizing technology to support older persons and effective policy interventions in promoting the development of technology for ageing societies in China, Japan and the Republic of Korea.

63. The dynamic growth in ICT connectivity in the Asia-Pacific region provides an opportunity to enhance cost-efficient service delivery for older persons and to reduce inequalities in access to health care. ICT applications have been deployed in many segments of health-care systems, ranging from storing and managing patient information and health records, to providing telemedicine and teleconsultation, sharing health and lifestyle information and educational materials, as well as supporting optimal diagnosis and treatment decision through using artificial intelligence and automated computer-based systems, inter alia.³⁴

³² ECE, policy brief on ageing No. 26 “Ageing in the digital era” (July 2021). Available at <https://unece.org/policy-briefs>.

³³ Available at www.unescap.org/kp/2021/enhancing-role-information-and-communication-technologies-health-care-older-persons-asia.

³⁴ ESCAP policy brief, “Enhancing the role of information and communication technologies in health care for older persons in Asia and the Pacific: a call for action especially in times of COVID-19”.

64. The COVID-19 pandemic has spurred new ICT initiatives, enabling continued or enhanced access to quality health care through remote diagnosis, treatment and care, particularly for older persons. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific used ICTs to support older persons' health-care needs during the pandemic. Initiatives undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Korea and Thailand have allowed older persons in rural areas, nursing and health centres to receive better access to health care. In Singapore, the Ministry of Communications and Information launched health education and risk communication actions targeting older persons to keep them informed of evolving COVID-19 health information and to help them maintain their health and well-being. In Australia, a dedicated free national support hotline for older persons, their families and caregivers was set up, with a particular focus on ensuring that isolated older persons and those experiencing vulnerabilities receive mental health support during the pandemic.

G. Climate crisis

65. The climate emergency is already causing havoc around the world with rising temperatures, extreme weather events, including heatwaves, cold snaps, floods, droughts and hurricanes, among other events. All populations are affected by these events, yet older persons can face their impacts disproportionately, in particular those that experience intersecting forms of discrimination. The impacts of the climate emergency on older persons are aggravated by ageism, poverty and social exclusion (see [A/HRC/47/46](#)). As the climate emergency and its effects intensify, so does the need to better address the needs and challenges of older persons, as well as to harness their contributions to design a more inclusive policy strategy to the crisis.

66. The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most natural disaster-prone in the world. According to the Asia-Pacific Disaster Risk Report 2021,³⁵ disaster-related events are increasingly linked to environmental degradation and climate change. Many of the region's disaster hotspots extend across national boundaries. Owing to lack of social protection, many older persons in Asia and the Pacific are at greater risk of not being protected if affected by the climate crisis, which can negatively impact their access to health, clean water, sanitation, and food. Older women, who might have experienced a lifetime of inequalities, might be particularly affected by climate disasters. At a webinar on 4 October 2020, co-organized by ESCAP, HelpAge International and the Asian Development Bank, participants highlighted the relationship between ageing societies and climate change. Older people from different regions and a panel of experts shared their views on how older people can play an active role in ensuring the sustainability of the natural environment.

IV. Recommendations

67. The Commission for Social Development, at its sixty-first session, in 2023, will conduct the global segment of the fourth review and appraisal cycle of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. In the first three cycles, the review was carried out in the form of plenary panels with representatives of each regional group of Member States complementing the findings and outcomes of the regional review and appraisal processes conducted by the regional commissions.

³⁵ ESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Disaster Report 2021: Resilience in a Riskier World – Managing Systemic Risks from Biological and other Natural Hazards* (Bangkok, 2021).

68. In the lead-up to the global fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, the following suggestions are made to more fully highlight the outcomes of the regional processes, including the following:

(a) **Organize round tables, in parallel, to focus on key topics within the three priority directions of the Madrid Plan of Action, with gender and human rights concerns mainstreamed, and the impacts of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic and lessons learned addressed throughout and prepare recommendations to guide work in those area, including from the regional reviews and appraisals conducted by regional commissions in 2022;**

(b) **Focus on building complementarities and synergies, as well as bridging gaps between the Madrid Plan of Action, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing and the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in terms of frameworks, reporting and follow-up;**

(c) **Organize two panel discussions, with the panels comprised of Member States, representatives of regional commissions and other United Nations entities and stakeholders, including older persons, representing each region, to highlight: (a) regional perspectives, with a focus on taking stock, discussing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and identifying lessons learned and good practices; and (b) regional perspectives, with a focus on looking ahead and moving from declaration to action;**

(d) **End the session with the adoption of a resolution on the critical importance of ageing-related issues, the synergies between the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing and the 2030 Agenda and with a focus on a few key follow-up actions.**
