



Ageing – A challenge and an opportunity for the Countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia

Training Workshop
Chişinău, Moldova, 13-16 March 2007

REPORT

The Population Activities Unit of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE PAU) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) organized a training workshop on Ageing in Chişinău, Moldova from 13 to 16 March 2007. The workshop aimed at developing capacities for ageing related work of governmental and UNFPA focal points in countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) region. The workshop addressed the follow-up to the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA/RIS) and work on the related country reports. It provided a forum for exchanging experiences on national ageing situations in countries of the EECCA region and discussing feasible political strategies.

The presentations as well as other documents related to the workshop are available at

<http://www.unece.org/pau/age/capacitydevelopment>

Opening and Introduction

Mr Peer Sieben, UNFPA Country Director for Moldova, Mr Andres Vikat, Chief of the UNECE PAU and high-level officials from the Government of Moldova **opened** the workshop. Ms Valentina Buliga, Head of Parliamentarian Commission for Social Protection, Family and Health, Mr Vitalie Vrabie, Deputy Prime Minister and Mr Sergiu Sainciuc, Deputy Minister of Economy and Trade, attended the opening ceremony as representatives from the Government of the Republic of Moldova. They welcomed the participants and expressed their best wishes for the success of the workshop.

Mr Andres Vikat, UNECE PAU, made an **introduction** to the meeting programme and addressed objectives and expected results. He gave an overview over the preparatory events to the UNECE Conference on Ageing in León and provided basic information on the drafting of the national reports for the review of MIPAA/RIS.

Session I

After the introduction of the participants through a “tour de table”, a **team building exercise** was accomplished. The goal of this exercise was for participants to exchange views on challenges and opportunities of ageing in their respective countries; identify main topics of concern in the area of ageing and similarities and differences among their countries. After governmental and UNFPA counterparts of each country had identified two challenges and opportunities of ageing and two expectations for the workshop, groups of several people from different countries got together to discuss the items.

Commonly identified opportunities focused on the reform of pension systems and the adaptation of labour markets to demographic changes by the integration of older persons into the workforce. Another positive aspect of ageing was commonly seen in the possibility of increasing knowledge by actively incorporating the experience of senior citizens.

Challenges identified by the participants included the adjustment of social protection and health systems to the changing structure of society. The importance of ensuring accessibility of health and long-term care services to older persons was mentioned, an issue connected to the challenge of preventing poverty among the elderly. Furthermore, the need of awareness-raising activities related to the phenomenon of ageing was identified as a tool to increase the participation of the elderly in everyday life and to ensure dignity of life at all ages.

Participants' expectations from the workshop focused on sharing experiences and identifying good practices. Participants were also looking forward to receiving some guidance for drafting the country reports.

Session II

Session II focused on the UNECE Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA/RIS).

Mr Alexandre Sidorenko, UNDESA, made a presentation on “MIPAA: What is it all about?” He pointed out challenges and opportunities of ageing taking into account economic considerations, cultural aspects and social dimensions. He highlighted the achievement of a society of all ages as principal goal of MIPAA and then focused on the implementation process of MIPAA and its national review and appraisal.

Mr Holger Osterrieder, UNECE PAU, gave an overview of activities concerning MIPAA/RIS in the UNECE countries with a focus on the EECCA region. He presented the priority areas in national ageing policies that were identified by EECCA countries in the second questionnaire on MIPAA/RIS.

Ms Lidija Kozarcanin, Institute for Social Protection, presented a general overview of ageing related issues in Serbia. She explained the challenges demographic change is posing to Serbia as well as the progress over the past five years. The important role of both local NGOs and international cooperation was highlighted.

Session III

Session III was conceived as a learning session on demographic issues and related topics.

Mr Dimiter Philipov, Vienna Institute of Demography, presented demographic trends and prospects in the EECCA region and made an introduction on demographic long-term trends worldwide. He also focused on the question of how components of demographic change should be considered in policymaking.

Mr Joseph Troisi, UN-INIA, gave a presentation on social policies and population ageing. He pointed out that population ageing has become a worldwide phenomenon with manifold repercussions. In particular, Mr Troisi highlighted the responsibility of a society as a whole to face the changing situation and ameliorate the remaining negative image of ageing. In this context the importance of enhancing older persons' dignity as well as the role of the family plays a central role.

Mr Asghar Zaidi, European Centre Vienna, focused on economic policies and population ageing. The central question of his presentation was how pension systems can be reformed given the changing demographic situation.

Session IV

Session IV focused on individual commitments of MIPAA/RIS.

Mr Andres Vikat, UNECE PAU, started with an introduction to Commitment 7, focusing on the ways of ensuring quality of life at all ages and the maintenance of independent living.

The introduction was followed by a presentation by Ms Carmen Manu, Ministry of Labour, Social Solidarity and Family of Romania, on the "Legal Framework Regarding a Minimum Income, Health and Care Services for Older Persons in Romania". After providing information on relevant social and economic indicators, the legal framework of social services in Romania was outlined and national strategies of implementing MIPAA/RIS in Romania were addressed.

Mr Holger Osterrieder, UNECE PAU, outlined Commitment 4, dealing with the adjustment of social protection systems in response to demographic changes and their social and economic consequences.

After this introduction, Ms Nurgul Nurassylova, Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kazakhstan, and Ms Shynar Imangaliyeva, UNFPA Kazakhstan, made a presentation on "The Great Generation of Kazakhstan: insight into the future". Socio-economic and demographic facts on the current situation of the country were exposed and national strategies and reforms facing the demographic change outlined.

Mr Yusuf Yuksel, State Planning Organization Turkey, gave a presentation on “Social security systems in Turkey”. The need of a social security reform according to the change in the population structure was highlighted and the general framework for a reform in Turkey was presented.

Ms Irina Bondarenko, Ministry of Health and Social Development of the Russian Federation, provided a general overview of ageing-related issues in Russia.

Ms Amanda Heslop, Consultant, introduced Commitment 2, which aims at ensuring full integration and participation of older persons in society.

On the same topic, Ms Selma Zahirovic, Unit for Economic Planning and Implementation of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Medium Term Development Strategy, made a presentation on the “Support to pro poor development policies and social inclusion of elderly in Bosnia and Herzegovina”. The presentation emphasised the impact of poverty and migration of the young generation on the social exclusion of older persons. A strategic approach of Bosnia and Herzegovina to improve the socio-economic status of the elderly was outlined.

Mr Andres Vikat, UNECE, made a short introduction to Commitments 3, 5 and 6.

The national team of Tajikistan gave an overview of population ageing in this country. Statistical data and the implementation status of different RIS commitments in Tajikistan were presented.

Ms Olga Poalelungi, Moldova national expert on Population and Development, made a presentation on “Ageing in Moldova: challenges and opportunities for better life”, that addressed challenges regarding the demographic change and measures to improve the situation of older people in Moldova.

Session V

Session V was devoted to the country reports on implementing MIPAA/RIS.

Ms Amanda Heslop, Consultant, concentrated on the bottom-up approach and its implementation in the review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS. She highlighted the dual function of the approach as methodology for in-depth monitoring to involve older persons in policy development. Furthermore, concrete steps for the implementation of the bottom-up participatory approach were specified.

Mr Holger Osterrieder, UNECE PAU, gave an overview of the guidelines for the country reports. He explained main steps for compiling the country reports and how the guidelines can be applied in order to facilitate the drafting of the reports.

Mr Yusuf Yuksel, State Planning Organization Turkey, presented a case study indicating how Turkey has proceeded in compiling information for the country report.

Working groups on individual commitments

The four working groups were based on identified common priorities in MIPAA/RIS, the challenges and possibilities of dealing with them and on monitoring options. The objective was to provide in-depth analysis and discussion on individual commitments to further elaborate the previous discussions and presentations.

The working group on Commitment 1 was facilitated by Mr Laurian Arghisan. It focused on mainstreaming ageing in all policy fields to bring societies and economies into harmony with demographic change.

Ms Amanda Heslop facilitated the working group on Commitment 2. Common features concerning the integration and participation of older persons in society were considered, emphasising that the family provides the main source of support for older people and that older people's participation in economic, political and social life is ensured through the local structures of Elderly Councils, which link to wider administrative structures. It was mentioned that government interventions could in some cases have a negative effect by undermining traditional support mechanisms. A challenge was recognised in strengthening mechanisms to increase engagement of civil society in policy development.

Mr Bernd Marin was facilitator of the working group on Commitment 4, which focused on the adjustment of social protection systems in response to demographic changes. The group discussed the current situation, challenges and country responses regarding social protection systems. Some countries pointed out that the range of social services important for the elderly was reduced due to financial constraints. Ageing is also a more difficult issue to be addressed in countries where the portion of older people is increasing but still at a low level in relation to the total population.

Challenges were identified in ensuring financial sustainability of social protection systems and providing services for the elderly at home as well as creating more residential services. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the right balance between care provided by the Government and care provided by families has to be found. The focal points explained which measures have been taken in their respective countries in order to adjust the social protection systems to the demographic changes.

Ms Anahit Martirosyan facilitated the working group on Commitment 7, which dealt with challenges concerning health care and the insurance of well-being. Participants acknowledged a general lack of accessibility of public health services in the region. Another main obstacle was seen in the inequality of treatment citizens depending on their financial means (out of pocket payment).

In order to improve the situation, governments, local authorities and NGOs should collaborate. Through suitable laws and reforms on the one hand and public campaigns and media attention on the other hand, the accessibility and quality of health care should be improved. The maintenance of a basic medical service accessible to all citizens should thereby obtain first priority.

Session VI

Session VI addressed selected issues related to the development of National Action Plans on Ageing.

Mr Nikolai Botev, UNFPA Country Technical Services Team (CST) Bratislava, focused on "Mainstreaming ageing and the related capacities in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia". He discussed the issues that governments and other stakeholders are facing in regards to mainstreaming ageing, and drew parallels with gender mainstreaming. He argued that the conceptualization and operationalization of mainstreaming would be particularly challenging for the countries in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, due to a lack of capacities and resource constraints. He emphasized that both the macro- and micro-dimensions of ageing have to be considered, and that a balance between mainstreaming and

targeted actions needs to be reached. Three prevalent or emerging issues were identified and discussed from the point of view of that balance: the income security of older persons in the region, the development implications of the changing age structures in Central Asia, and the disordered cohort flows in Eastern Europe.

Ms Christina Stoycheva, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria, made a presentation on the “National demographic strategy of the Republic of Bulgaria 2006-2020”. The strategy mainly aims at slowing down the rate of decrease of the population and achieving its stabilization in the long run. At the same time high quality of human capital should be obtained and social cohesion in the country enhanced.

Ms Eppu Mikkonen-Jeanneret, HelpAge International (HAI), gave a presentation on “MIPAA+5 bottom-up review in South-East Europe”. She started with a general overview of the work of HAI. She then focused on the methodology for the review of MIPAA applied by HAI and challenges concerning the review. Her presentation was completed by recommendations of NGOs and older persons on how to handle the demographic change.

Working groups on future activities in the field of ageing

During a second session of working groups, participants were asked to reflect on the development of proposals on future activities and to clarify what kind of technical assistance was needed. To that end they discussed projects on how to promote ageing-related issues in their countries.

The groups were facilitated by Mr Alexandre Sidorenko, Ms Lidija Kozarcanin, Mr Joseph Troisi and Mr Nikolai Botev. As a result of their discussions, the working groups identified the following needs.

They underlined the importance of capacity building in ministries. In particular, the need to train experts on ageing in order to develop a holistic approach for population policies, to avoid a pure focus on ageing and economic issues was highlighted. Nevertheless, strategies to be implemented should not be too general, but specific and sustainable. While developing measures, regional disparities should always be taken into consideration. For countries with large quantities of younger population, information and literature on ageing should be provided in order to start raising awareness of demographic change.

Other general steps that should be undertaken to face challenges occurring through demographic changes were summarised as follows: providing information on population issues, collecting recent data, developing the technical capacities of specialists and sensitising policy makers and the public to the subject matter.

Conclusion

After a discussion on the outcomes of the working groups, Mr Boris Gilca, UNFPA Moldova, Mr Andres Vikat, UNECE PAU, and Mr Nikolai Botev, UNFPA CST Bratislava concluded the session by thanking the participants for their commitment and emphasizing the need to continue with the excellent cooperation. Warm thanks were expressed to the Moldova country office of the UNFPA for the hospitality extended to all participants and for the exemplary servicing of the workshop.

The closing ceremony was attended by the Minister of Social Protection, Family and Children, Ms Galina Balmos, who read a statement on behalf of the Prime Minister of

Moldova, Mr Vasile Tarlev. The statement emphasized the continuing commitment of the Republic of Moldova to the work of the UN in the field of population and ageing.

Evaluation of the workshop by participants

The general evaluation of the workshop was highly positive. Almost all participants agreed on the content of the workshop and positively evaluated the organisational and logistic efforts. Participants appreciated the well-organised reception in Moldova. The distribution of answers to the evaluation form is presented in Annex 3.

In their overall comments, the respondents highlighted the opportunity to develop networking and exchange experiences. Most participants underlined that the workshop increased both contact to colleagues and access to information, which they consider as crucial tools in the work on the implementation of MIPAA/RIS. The working groups were used as a vehicle for learning. In some cases, more active facilitation was asked for to keep the discussion closer to the topic.

A number of respondents stated that the workshop could have been even interactive and less theoretical. The time to further discuss the presented issues between the different sessions was perceived as too short. Some respondents noted that the presentation on country reports was short of focus on the process, projections and accomplishments.

Participants expressed their wish for a regular follow-up of the workshop. They suggested formation of sub-regional groups of collaboration between representatives from governments, UNFPA country offices and civil society. Participants also underlined the importance of continuing active work on ageing after the UNECE Conference on Ageing in León, Spain in November 2007, and suggested to set up a listserv for exchange of information and experience on a regular basis.

UNECE is grateful to the participants for their comments that help improve its service to Member States.

List of Annexes

Annex 1: List of Participants

Annex 2: Agenda

Annex 3: Distribution of answers to the evaluation form