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Economic Commission for Europe

Working Group on Ageing

Thirteenth meeting

Geneva, 19 and 20 November 2020

Work of the Bureau

Report on the twelfth meeting of the Bureau of the Working Group on Ageing

I. Opening of the meeting and adoption of agenda

1. The Bureau meeting took place on 27-28 April 2020 and was held virtually via web conference w. Bureau members from the following member States participated in the meeting: Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Slovenia, and Spain. Mr. Kai Leichsenring, European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (European Centre Vienna), and Ms. Heidrun Mollenkopf, AgePlatform Europe, participated on behalf of research and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), respectively. The Chair of the Working Group on Ageing (WGA) joined the meeting on 28 April.

2. Ms. Lidia Bratanova, Director of ECE Statistical division greeted the participants and opened the meeting. The Bureau adopted the agenda of the meeting without modifications. The morning session of the meeting was chaired by Mr. Alexis Rinckenbach, France, Vice-Chair of WGA. The secretariat acted as moderator throughout the virtual meeting.

II. Brief exchange on (national) initiatives/responses related to Covid-19 and older persons

3. The roundtable discussion following the opening of the meeting was dedicated to national responses and civil society initiatives related to Covid-19 and older persons. Bureau members briefed about the recent developments, in particular as regards the situation in long-term care facilities for older persons pointing out to some recurrent challenges across countries: insufficient preparedness for dealing with such infectious diseases, lack of personal protection equipment and special protocols, and difficulties of (centrally) overseeing the situation in privately-owned facilities. While addressing home care issues, a number of positive developments were brought to attention: innovative local initiatives, including support telephone lines, special shopping hours or home delivery services for older persons and persons with disabilities; intergenerational solidarity and special volunteer centres, prominent IT sector involvement and digital solutions (i.e. telemedicine, age-friendly apps).

4. The representatives of NGOs and research community pointed also to some ageist practices that surfaced in the immediate response to the Covid-19, one of them ignoring the heterogeneity of older persons when in several countries all people 65+ or 70+ were considered as a risk group and ordered to isolate themselves irrespective of their health and activity status.

5. The Vice-Chair suggested that WGA members share with the secretariat relevant documents on their national/local initiatives and newly introduced policy measures the repository of which could be a useful resource for future discussions by the Working Group. The secretariat drew the attention to the UNECE Population website's 'In focus' section dedicated to Covid-19 and older persons that includes the links to numerous important resources provided by international agencies, research and civil society networks.

III. Policy Brief on older persons in emergency situations – how best to reflect the Covid-19 situation

6. The secretariat reminded the Bureau that the initial outline of the next policy brief on older persons in emergency situations was discussed at the WGA meeting in November 2019. At that time the focus was on emergency situations related to hazardous events and disasters without addressing situations that may emanate from a global pandemic. In the present environment, a policy brief prepared at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic would be expected to address it. Acknowledging this, the Bureau also noted the importance of striking a right balance in the policy brief between the current pandemic and other emergency situations that may have their own specificities in relation to older persons and persons with disabilities. Reference was made to generally good preparedness and clear protocols of national civil protection systems for emergency situations caused by earthquakes, floods, fires, and similar hazardous events that, however, showed to be hardly sufficient in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. Bureau members suggested that the policy brief draws attention to diverse national situations, approaches and methods dealing with emergencies and looks into the possibility for a global/international coordination of responses.

IV. Policy seminar 2020 – WGA questionnaire results and decision on the topic

7. Bureau members were invited to discuss and agree on the topic for the third Policy Seminar on Ageing to be held on 18 November 2020. The secretariat reported on the results of the questionnaire that was sent out to the WGA members in March 2020. The questionnaire listed four topics based on discussions at the WGA meeting in 2019. In total 37 responses were received (33 from member States and 4 from NGOs). The topic 'older persons in emergency situations – lessons learnt from the Covid-19 pandemic' was ranked first by 34 out of 37 responses.

8. The Bureau confirmed the choice of the topic and briefly discussed possible focus of the seminar. Suggestions ranged from addressing local as well as national responses to Covid-19, looking at the mental health and general well-being of older persons during and post lockdown, and at how responses and imposed regulations impact on the rights/dignity and autonomy of older persons, recognizing the contribution of older persons versus seeing them as victims or as a burden. The general need to re-examine present systems of long-term care (in institutions and at home) was stressed and may be proposed for an in-depth discussion by the WGA.

9. The secretariat will prepare a concept note for the seminar before the end of May and will share it with members of the Bureau for their suggestions regarding the seminar's programme and potential speakers.

V. Guidelines for mainstreaming ageing

10. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the work done by the Task Force on Mainstreaming Ageing since November 2019 and presented an extended preliminary outline for the guidelines agreed by the Task Force. Bureau members received the outline and other background documents for the discussion prior to the meeting. The note on mainstreaming ageing definitions and suggested pilot module were prepared by Ms. Pytrik Oosterhof, the consultant, who was also invited to present them at the Bureau meeting.

11. The consultant presented main components of draft guidelines and explained in more detail the content of five suggested modules drawing attention to a dual approach attempting to merge process and content elements in each of them. She outlined the agreed principles for the guidelines: to be holistic and systemic; adaptable and accessible; outcome- and evidence-based; promoting efficiencies and offering practical approaches – and introduced a pilot structure for the first module.

12. In the discussion that followed, Bureau members acknowledged the thoroughness of the approach that the Task Force and the consultant employed and provided some comments and questions. The need to reflect on ageing policy development over the 20 years of MIPAA implementation and seeing that Covid-19 lessons are not overlooked were stressed as important, giving the timing of the launch of the guidelines in 2021. Addressing active ageing policies endorsed by Vienna Ministerial Declaration and other international frameworks that promote cross-sectoral approaches, such as the WHO Global Strategy on Ageing and Health, were among suggestions. The secretariat spoke about the premises for developing guidelines for mainstreaming ageing at this point in time and together with the consultant responded to the questions regarding stakeholder involvement and the aim of pursuing mainstreaming ageing not only in terms of needs of older persons but also in terms of population ageing in general in order to create a society for all ages.

VI. Update on other WGA work programme activities in 2020

A. Policy Briefs

13. The secretariat reminded Bureau members about the Policy Brief No. 23 on gender equality in ageing societies that was issued in March on the occasion of International Women's Day. The brief was prepared at the initiative of France and was a timely WGA contribution to the Beijing +25 review in addition to the WGA side event held in October 2019. Policy Brief No. 24 on ageing in sustainable and smart cities was ready to be issued in May 2020 and is seen as the WGA contribution to the ECE nexus on sustainable and smart cities for all ages. It was drafted with the support of a consultant. The Bureau was briefed about the opportunity to disseminate the brief to local policy makers at the first UNECE Forum of Mayors on City Action for a Resilient Future which is planned to take place on 6 October 2020 in Geneva.

14. Bureau members from France and Austria informed that translations of the Policy Brief #23 into French and German, respectively, were being prepared. France volunteered to translate some previously issued briefs in near future, and Spain is looking into the possibility to resume the translation of last few policy briefs shortly.

B. Roadmap project for Kazakhstan

15. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the first field mission to Kazakhstan on 26-31 January 2020 during which discussions with government representatives and various stakeholder groups were held to inform the preparation of the roadmap for mainstreaming ageing. A Russian-speaking consultant conducted a preliminary desk study of institutional setting and current strategic policy documents related to population ageing in the country. A local consultant fluent in both Russian and Kazakh languages has been contracted to retrospectively monitor print, online, radio and TV news content in view of the representation of older persons and policy discourse on population ageing in the country. The results will complement the desk review. The secretariat plans to work on drafting the roadmap recommendations during summer /early autumn but the second field mission to Kazakhstan and face-to-face discussions on draft recommendations with the Government and other stakeholders may have to be postponed to 2021 due to likely ongoing travel restrictions and lack of financial resources.

C. WGA visibility and communication activities

16. The secretariat thanked Germany, Austria and France for their efforts to organize a WGA side event in April during the annual session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) in New York. The OEWGA session was postponed to 2021 due to Covid-19 and preparation of a WGA side event may resume next year. The secretariat reminded the Bureau that the Working Group does not have a legal status and therefore cannot be represented as such at other intergovernmental parties., However, member States, in particular those holding the chairmanship and vice-chairmanship of the WGA may speak on behalf of the group about its activities and achievements on all suitable occasions, including sessions of functional commissions or their subsidiary bodies, such as OEWGA.

17. Ms. Aina Strand, Vice-Chair from Norway, raised the question of how to raise WGA visibility among relevant political circles in general and permanent country representatives to the United Nations and other international organizations in Geneva and New York in particular. The niche that the UNECE WGA occupies is important, however it is surrounded by global organizations such as WHO, ILO or other United Nations agencies that all our member States are part of. She also pointed to the rather passive role of many National Focal Points in terms of cross-sectoral reach out within the governmental structures.

18. Some Bureau members suggested to organize periodic WGA briefings to the permanent missions in Geneva and use all suitable occasions for engaging in panels, organizing side events or public launch of policy briefs and other activities. Further discussion on this question is needed at the Working Group. In the meantime, the launch of the next policy brief on older persons in emergency situations might be a good occasion to gather representatives of permanent missions for a briefing.

VII. ECE evaluation of the Population subprogramme activities (Sept. 2016-Sept. 2020) “Advancing intergovernmental work towards the implementation of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration and MIPAA/RIS commitments

19. The secretariat informed the Bureau about the ECE decision to undertake an evaluation of the Population subprogramme activities on advancing intergovernmental work towards the implementation of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration and MIPAA/RIS commitments. The evaluation will be carried out by an independent evaluator and will cover the period September 2016 – September 2020. The Terms of Reference for the evaluator were approved by the ECE Programme Management Unit and it is planned that the evaluator will start working in May 2020. The evaluation will be based on a desk review of all relevant reports and documents related to the WGA activities as well as on the information gathered through an on-line questionnaire and interviews with WGA members and other major stakeholders.

20. The results of the evaluation are expected to contribute to a longer-term vision for the ECE-led intergovernmental work in the area of population ageing and to raise the awareness of the impact of WGA activities.

VIII. National reporting guidelines on MIPAA/RIS

21. Mr. Edmundo Martinho, Chair of the Working Group, opened the second day of the Bureau meeting and provided his inputs to the first day’s discussions by briefing Bureau members about Portugal’s ongoing response to the Covid-19 outbreak in relation to older persons and reiterating his support for the work done on guidelines for mainstreaming ageing. Then he resumed chairing the meeting and opened discussion on Item 8 of the agenda.

22. Ms. Erika Winkler, Austria, presented the first draft of the national reporting guidelines on MIPAA/RIS for the fourth review and appraisal cycle. The draft was prepared with inputs from Aina Strand, Norway and Heidrun Mollenkopf (NGO). The Bureau stressed the importance of making guidelines easy to follow for the national focal points and other

stakeholders involved which would help to ensure that a participatory approach is followed. There was a general agreement on the proposed overall structure with Part 1 providing instructions on contextual information and method; Part 2 focusing on core elements of the review and appraisal of implementation– five years after the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration and 20 years since the adoption of MIPAA/RIS; and Part 3 reviewing lessons learnt from Covid-19 pandemic and linking future MIPAA/RIS implementation challenges with the member States commitments under the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development and WHO Decade on Healthy Ageing.

23. During the discussion, Bureau members strongly supported inclusion of a (post)-Covid-19 section in Part 3 and the need to reflect on relevant national advances/plans towards realization of the SDGs. To avoid the potential duplication of reporting, several Bureau members suggested to reduce emphasis on the WHO Decade on Healthy Ageing.

24. The secretariat pointed out that continuity of reporting on MIPAA/RIS implementation throughout the four review and appraisal cycles would depend on countries following the guidelines and providing information relevant for all ten MIPAA/RIS commitments. The information on mainstreaming ageing (commitment 1) is already being gathered through the country notes that the Task Force on Mainstreaming Ageing initiated. The indicators behind the Active Ageing Index, that were used for the statistical annex of the last Synthesis Report, provided a good quantitative picture on active ageing policy outcomes (gender-disaggregated) and might be worth continuing. It was suggested that national reporting guidelines include a question on what monitoring tools and indicators are used by country regarding the MIPAA/RIS commitments. Countries may provide available data in an annex to the report. The question of data availability for 2020, in particular as regards the section on Covid-19, was raised.

25. The Bureau agreed to provide additional comments to the drafting team in writing and organize a follow-up call in June 2020 to discuss the revised draft.

IX. Preparations for the fourth MIPAA/RIS review and appraisal

26. Mr. Alfredo Ferrante, Italy, confirmed Italy's candidacy to host the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in 2022 and informed that an official letter would be sent to the ECE secretariat soon. A national steering committee will be set up and will work closely with the WGA and its secretariat in preparing the conference. He also briefed the Bureau on the preparatory process for the national review of MIPAA/RIS implementation to be strongly based on multistakeholder involvement. Some 70-80 active stakeholders will take part in the process.

27. A few initial suggestions for a theme of the ministerial conference were communicated by the team working on national reporting guidelines. They will be discussed at the WGA meeting in November.

28. A proposal to organize a joint NGO and Academic forum instead of two parallel events preceding the ministerial conference was endorsed by the Bureau. Italy will nominate a contact person in charge of collaborating to the organization of the forum of research and civil society.

X. Draft agenda of the thirteenth meeting of the [Standing] Working Group on Ageing (19-20 November 2020)

29. The Bureau members reviewed the draft agenda for the thirteenth meeting of WGA. It was agreed that under Item 2 on the Bureau report, Chair will outline the suggestions to strengthen the visibility of the Working Group and its cooperation with the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in New York.

30. For the Item 3, the Bureau welcomed the secretariat's suggestion to invite Ms. Claudia Mahler, the new Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

to address the Working Group. The Bureau also agreed to invite a cabinet member of the European Commission Vice-President on Democracy and Demography Ms. Dubravka Šuica to present the recently issued report on demographic change and a Green Paper on ageing.

31. The two break-out sessions for group discussions will be held under Item 5 on the fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS. The discussions will focus (a) on proposals for a theme and structure of the 2022 Ministerial conference and MIPAA+20 report as a background document and (b) explore ideas for the ministerial declaration or other outcome document.

32. The Bureau also stressed the need to allocate sufficient time for presenting the work done on guidelines on mainstreaming ageing and policy briefs.

XI. Update on the United Nations financial situation and human resource implications for the secretariat

33. The secretariat shared information on the ongoing liquidity crisis faced by the United Nations secretariat and the measures undertaken by the Secretary-General to manage the financial situation of the Organization. At the core of it is a temporary suspension of hiring for all regular budget vacant positions and 90 per cent expense freeze on non-post items. This directly affects the P2 post in the Population Unit, the hiring for which through a Managed Reassignment Programme has been suspended until further notice while the contract of a staff member temporarily on the post is set to expire on 31 May.

34. The secretariat also reported on extrabudgetary expenses related to the development of the Road Map on Mainstreaming Ageing in Kazakhstan and thanked the member States for their voluntary contributions to the 'Ageing – phase 3' project fund in support of the WGA work programme in 2020-2022. The contributions were received in December 2019-January 2020 from Austria, Estonia, Germany, Norway Portugal and Switzerland and amounted to USD 270,000.

XII. Decisions, summary and closing of the meeting

35. The secretariat summarized the main elements of the discussions and reviewed all decisions and action points. The Bureau adopted the draft decisions.

36. The Bureau thanked the secretariat for preparing and moderating the virtual meeting.

37. The next ad-hoc Bureau meeting is planned to take place in Geneva on 19 November 2020 at 8:30 a.m. The room number will be communicated closer to the time.
