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Standing Working Group on Ageing

Thirteenth meeting

Geneva, 19 and 20 November 2020

Report of the Standing Working Group on Ageing on its thirteenth meeting

I. Introduction

A. Attendance

1. The thirteenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA) was held on 19 and 20 November 2020 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva and online. It was co-chaired by Edmundo Martinho, SWGA Chair (Portugal), Alexis Rinckenbach, SWGA Vice-Chair (France) and Aina Strand, SWGA Vice-Chair (Norway). The meeting was attended by a total of 94 participants.¹

2. Representatives of the following 36 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) participated: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and Ukraine. The Holy See attended as an observer State.

3. Representatives of the European Commission (EC), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) participated.

4. The academic and research community was represented by European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Vienna (Austria), Research Institute of Labour of the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Republic of Belarus, Croatian Institute of Public Health, Tampere University (Finland), INRCA - Centre for Social and Economic Research on Ageing (Italy), Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Poland), Andalusia School of Public Health (Spain).

¹ The list of participants is available on the meeting page: <https://www.unece.org/index.php?id=50641>

5. The following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the meeting: AGE Platform Europe, Association of Former International Civil Servants for Development–Greycells, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND), Gray Panthers, German National Association of Senior Citizen’s Organisations (BAGSO), International Federation of Associations of the Elderly, International Federation on Ageing (IFA), International Longevity Centre Global Alliance (ILC Global Alliance), International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA), NGO Committee on Ageing, New York, NGO “Ardager”, NGO Central-Asia Gerontology Center, Red Cross of Serbia, Turkey Retired Persons Organization.

B. Opening of the meeting and adoption of the agenda

6. The thirteenth meeting of the SWGA was opened by the Chair, Edmundo Martinho, and by the ECE Director of the Statistical Division Lidia Bratanova.

7. The Standing Working Group adopted the meeting’s agenda as contained in document ECE/WG.1/2020/1 without changes. The Secretary of the SWGA informed about member States’ inputs to Item 4 in the agenda: a presentation on policy developments in Italy, a presentation from Germany on the online Conference “Strengthening older people’s rights in the times of digitalization”, main event on ageing issues during the Germany’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union (EU) as well as a presentation from Austria, on the Webinar “20 years of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)” held on 12 November 2020.

II. Work of the Bureau of the Standing Working Group on Ageing and briefing on the outcomes of ageing-related events during 2020

8. The Vice-Chair (Norway) assumed the chairing of the morning session and presented the work of the Bureau of the Standing Working Group on Ageing. The twelfth meeting of the Bureau in April 2020 took place online as did the two subsequent ad-hoc meetings in June and September 2020. The latter two were mainly dedicated to the preparation of guidelines for national reports on the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA/RIS) during the fourth review and appraisal cycle.

9. The Bureau aims to take a more active stance in international events and to strengthen the visibility of the work performed by the SWGA. A side event was originally planned for the annual meeting of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in New York (OEWG-A) in spring 2020. Due to COVID-19, this event had to be postponed to 2021. The Bureau proposes to approach the OEWG-A Chairperson/secretariat to arrange for a time slot during the plenary discussion to present the finalized Guidelines on Mainstreaming Ageing. The Bureau also considers a side event on this occasion that is dedicated to the topic of strengthening older people’s rights in the digital era – based on the forthcoming policy brief and outcomes of the September 2020 Conference held under the auspices of the German EU Presidency.

10. The Vice-chair (France), reported on the 58th session of the Commission for Social Development that took place in February 2020, including the resolution on ‘Modalities for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002’. The prior theme of the session was on affordable housing and social protection systems for all as well as to address homelessness. Another highlight was the commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the World Summit for Social Development and the Ministerial

Forum addressing emerging societal challenges in implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development. The Commission for Social Development decided to focus the 59th session on “Socially just transition towards sustainable development: the role of digital technologies on social development and well-being of all”. The Secretariat suggested to consider organizing a side event during the session and present the SWGA policy brief on ageing in the digital era if ready.

11. The Vice-Chair (Norway) informed about the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) decision taken in July 2020 to transform the Working Group on Ageing to a Standing Working Group on Ageing and approve its revised Terms of Reference.

III. New and ongoing international initiatives in the area of ageing and the follow-up to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

12. Ms. Claudia Mahler, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, presented on “Upholding human rights and dignity of older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic”. Ms. Mahler took up the mandate of Independent Expert in May 2020. The mandate’s first report presented to the Third Committee of the General Assembly in October 2020 provides initial insights on the impact of COVID-19 on human rights of older persons (A/75/205). It highlights various human rights violations and shows widespread neglect, violence, abuse, ageism, lack of autonomy and decision-making or denial of self-services during the pandemic. The digital divide also contributed to older persons having been left behind. Ms. Mahler argued that the pandemic highlighted that existing protection arrangements are inadequate and that human rights gaps need to be closed. She also referred to the lack of a comprehensive international legal instrument to protect the rights of older persons, as the current human rights instruments do not sufficiently cover areas such as palliative care, independence and autonomy, adequate standard of living, among others. She expressed her willingness for future collaboration with the SWGA.

13. Ms. Alana Officer, of the World Health Organization, informed about the launch of the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2020-2030) by the 73rd World Health Assembly. She reported on the previously conducted online survey that was done before the launch of the Decade: 89 Member States had responded to it and had provided contributions. A special brief was developed to look at the relationship between COVID-19 and the Healthy Ageing Decade. Ms. Officer also presented a newly developed WHO portal for global data on the health and well-being of older people. The portal aims to provide a gateway for accessing all global data related to older persons produced by WHO, United Nations secretariat, other international organizations such as the ILO, the World Bank and the OECD, as well as academic institutions. WHO is currently working on a baseline report for the Decade as well as developing the Platform for the Decade of Healthy Ageing - a collaborative digital space supporting the knowledge sharing on ageing among all interested stakeholders.

14. Ms. Astrid Dentler, Member of the cabinet of the EC Vice-President on Democracy and Demography, informed about the European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change and the preparations of a Green paper on Ageing. The report identifies the major demographic trends in Europe and the impact they are/will be having across the European Union. It is an analytical report aimed to open discussion on projected changes in the labor market, growing demands on health and care systems, pressure on public budgets due to demographic changes and the differences of demographic change across regions. Ms. Dentler presented plans for a Green Paper on Ageing that is expected to cover elements, such as healthy ageing, care and long-term care, lifelong learning, senior entrepreneurship, sustainable social protection systems, intergenerational solidarity and fairness.

15. Ms. Alanna Armitage, Regional Director, UNFPA Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, presented on the UNFPA/WHO/UNECE/OHCHR and HelpAge International Joint programme on Ageing: Building forward better in light of COVID-19. Ms. Armitage informed that 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-centered 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. Ms. Armitage presented various examples of empowering initiatives from the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia.

IV. Country experiences: aligning policy measures and strategies on ageing with the Lisbon Ministerial Declaration

16. The representative of Italy provided an update on a three-year project for national multilevel coordination of active ageing policies in Italy. It aims to activate a shared intervention for policymaking and implementation and builds on the conjunction of MIPAA/RIS and the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development.

17. Germany's representative presented on the outcomes of the International Conference on Strengthening Older People's Rights in Times of Digitalisation that took place on 27-28 September under the auspices of the German EU Presidency. The conference was organised in collaboration with BAGSO and AGE Platform Europe. For the first time since 2010, the EU Council adopted a number of conclusions related to older persons and population ageing. Portugal and Slovenia announced their intention to include ageing and older persons on their EU Presidency Agenda in 2021.

18. The Austrian representative reported on the webinar "20 Years of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)" organized together with the NGO community. She also provided a brief historical overview of the intergovernmental engagement in advancing MIPAA implementation at the regional level, including the adoption of the ECE Regional Implementation Strategy for MIPAA in 2002 and three milestone ministerial declarations at the subsequent Ministerial Conferences.

V. Fourth cycle of review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy

A. Launching the fourth review and appraisal cycle of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy

19. The afternoon session started with the SWGA acknowledging the significant contribution to the Group's work since its establishment by Ms. Erika Winkler, the National Focal Point on Ageing of Austria and former Chair of the Working Group (2010-2017) who will be retiring in spring 2021. She then presented the Guidelines for National Reports² for

² http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/pau/age/Review_and_appraisal/Guidelines_for_National_Reports-final_EN.pdf

the fourth review and appraisal cycle of MIPAA/RIS. Member States are expected to hand in their reports to the secretariat by 30 September 2021. The secretariat will then work on a synthesis report. 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.).

20. In the subsequent discussion, the Italian representative stressed that the preparation of the national report and the building of the stakeholder network are important contributions in advancing the cause of MIPAA/RIS. The engagement and participation of civil society are perceived as most relevant instruments for awareness raising and ensuring a bottom-up approach. The representatives of NGOs – INPEA and AGE/BAGSO – encouraged the SWGA members to 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. This could be done through a series of webinars.

B. Preparations for the regional Ministerial conference in 2022: brainstorming sessions on the conference theme, structure and possible outcome document

21. The representative of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Italy announced Italy's proposal to host the next Ministerial Conference on Ageing in May 2022 in Rome. He briefly presented a draft concept note of the conference outlining its focus on MIPAA/RIS and consistent human-rights approach. In the concept note, the Italian team suggested three potential themes for the conference discussion: (1) "Promoting active and healthy ageing with a life-course approach", including aspects related to digitalization, as well as main-lessons learned from COVID-19; (2) "Ensuring equal access to services and long-term care for persons of all ages, and support to families and caregivers"; and (3) "Eradicating poverty for all ages: older persons' contribution to the 2030 Agenda".

22. During the breakout session, SWGA members, divided into three discussion groups, considered possible background and outcome documents of the 2022 Ministerial Conference and discussed the conference title and main themes suggested in the concept note. All three discussion groups voiced their support for a ministerial declaration as an outcome document of the Conference. Also, the SWGA members expressed support though not unanimous for preparing a MIPAA/RIS +20 report - analytical, short and future-oriented - as a background document for the conference deliberations. It may also lay the ground for a potential revision/update of the Regional Implementation Strategy. As for the Conference title and themes proposed in the concept note, the views were more diverse:

1. Conclusions from Discussion Group 1

23. Broad agreement with the themes was expressed, especially with the stress on the life-course approach. Use of 'active and healthy' ageing was questioned, acknowledging critical aspects related to the more medical paradigm with healthy ageing. The second theme title might include dignity and quality of life. It was argued that links to the 2030 Agenda could be more pronounced in all three themes.

2. Conclusions from Discussion Group 2

24. The discussion on main themes evolved around the third topic centred on poverty eradication. The group suggested to focus on the dimension of inequality rather than poverty. It was argued that overall, the theme messages could be sharpened. Regarding the format of the conference, the group considered a possibility to have expert discussions along the

proposed themes use the ministerial roundtables for aspirational discussion on going forward (e.g., COVID-19 or digitalization). This could be put forward in the titles.

3. Conclusions from Discussion Group 3

25. The proposed title of the conference was critically discussed: the multidimensional aspect and a notion of ‘rethinking old age’ were questioned by several participants. Sharper title/stronger message is desirable. This applies also to the main expert panel themes. For the first theme, renaming it to “A life-course approach to healthy and active ageing” seems to convey a call to invest in enabling environment for remaining healthy and active over the entire lifespan. The novelty /‘rethinking’ aspects were missed in the outlined themes. The group members stressed a need to put a gender dimension more prominently as well as the impact of ongoing technological/digital transformation. Several discussion group participants also pointed out that the lasting effect of Covid-19 pandemic will most likely be touched upon by each thematic panel, but the broader issues of older persons in emergency situations need to be considered.

26. The concluding discussion under Item 5(b) of the agenda took into account the deliberations of the ad-hoc Bureau meeting convened in the morning of 20 November 2020. The representative of Italy briefly summarised the Bureau decisions for the coordinated inputs to the preparation of the Ministerial Conference (tentatively planned for 25-27 May 2022). Italy also reiterated its support for a joint Civil Society and Researchers Forum preceding the Conference and nominated Mr. Giovanni Lamura, Director of INRCA Centre for Social and Economic Research on Ageing, as Italy’s coordinator for the organization of this forum.

27. The Bureau members representing respectively the research community and NGOs confirmed to the SWGA that they will be coordinating the preparation of a joint Civil Society and Researchers forum prior to the Conference. They welcomed nomination of the Italian academia representative who will join a small working group on organizing the forum. The NGO coordinator suggested to also invite an Italian NGO representative to the forum organizing group. Both NGOs and researchers are seeing this as a good opportunity to enhance their collaboration and support well-informed/ evidence-based policymaking. The Bureau members representing researchers and NGOs will also take part in preparatory activities of the Ministerial Conference.

28. The SWGA acknowledged Italy’s proposal to host the 2022 Ministerial Conference on Ageing. It was agreed that starting on 20 November 2020, the SWGA assumes the role of the Preparatory Committee for the Conference. The SWGA Bureau will work closely with the Italian counterparts and will facilitate in devising the content and structure of the Conference, identifying speakers and drafting the ministerial declaration. The SWGA also asked the secretariat to coordinate the preparation of the MIPAA/RIS+20 report as a background document for the Conference deliberations.

VI. The Standing Working Group on Ageing work programme for the fourth implementation cycle of the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing - implemented activities in 2020 and plans for 2021

A. International cooperation, exchange of experience and policy discussion

29. The secretariat provided a brief summary of the Policy Seminar on “Older persons in emergency situations: lessons learned from the Covid-19 pandemic” that took place online on 18 November 2020. SWGA members were invited to provide feedback and suggestions for a follow-up on the discussion and shared practices during the seminar. The next Policy seminar is planned for 24 November 2021. It will be dedicated to “Ageing in the digital era”, a topic that was second on the list in the questionnaire responses received by the secretariat from 37 countries in April 2020.

30. The secretariat informed participants about the recently issued Policy Brief No. 25 on older persons in emergency situations and thanked SWGA members for their country-example contributions. This was the third policy brief on ageing issued in 2020. The secretariat also presented an outline for a Policy Brief No. 26 on ageing in the digital era. Meeting participants were invited to comment on the outline and send national practice examples in this field to the secretariat until 4 December. The Policy Brief No. 26 will be finalized in spring 2021. The secretariat reminded participants that Policy Brief No. 27 will be on the topic “Mainstreaming ageing” as decided at the twelfth SWGA meeting while the following brief No. 28 may be dedicated to the theme of the 2022 Ministerial Conference.

B. Guidelines and policy recommendations, advisory services and capacity-building

31. The secretariat presented the revised draft of the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing prepared by a consultant in collaboration with the secretariat and the Taskforce on Mainstreaming Ageing, and outlined the follow-up activities including the launch event and development of a toolkit if the SWGA agrees to finalize and publish the Guidelines in early 2021. In the discussion that followed, both online verbally and through the event chat, the participants from Italy, Canada, Armenia, Norway, Austria, ECV, Central Asia Gerontology Centre, INPEA and BAGSO welcomed the revised draft, asked for clarifications and provided some suggestions regarding the finalization of the Guidelines and development of the toolkit. Suggestion to consider having a separate brief document that focuses on advocacy to get political support for mainstreaming ageing was voiced by NGOs. In response to the comments regarding the length of the Guidelines, the secretariat and the consultant who worked on the draft pointed out that the latest version is considerably shorter than earlier drafts and annexes account for nearly a third of it. The guidelines present a comprehensive strategic framework for mainstreaming ageing using five clearly defined stages; shortening the description and arguments further may compromise its logic.

32. The Chair noted that the SWGA agrees with the proposal to finalize and publish the Guidelines in early 2021 and invited the Group to discuss opportunities to launch and disseminate the Guidelines across the region and beyond. Germany indicated that they will translate the guidelines into German and invited other countries to support translations. The possible launch events at the 2021 OEWSGA session and during the Portugal’s Presidency of the Council of the EU were mentioned as well as eventual capacity-building workshops and seminars.

33. The Secretariat briefed participants on the activities completed in relation to the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing in Kazakhstan: a desk study and additional information gathered during the first field mission to the country in early 2020, review of ageing issues and older persons’ coverage in Kazakhstan’s main media outlets between 1 October 2019 and April 2020. However, further work on the Road Map document had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic and limited consultancy possibilities.

C Monitoring the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and building evidence base for policymaking

34. The secretariat reported that newly calculated results of the 2020 Active Ageing Index (AAI) for EU countries and most of AAI indicators for several other ECE member States will be posted on the AAI wiki before the end of December 2020. The current update will provide the basis for preparing a statistical annex of the Synthesis report. Representative of Italy informed meeting participants about successfully deriving the AAI from data collected through national surveys: the results were very close to those computed on the basis of harmonized European surveys. Computing AAI at subnational level remains however challenging due to limited access to microdata.

35. The secretariat provided an update on the Generations and Gender programme. Through its longitudinal surveys (GGS) and research it builds a strong evidence base on family, intergenerational and gender relations between people, expressed for instance in care arrangements and the organization of paid and unpaid work. The GGP 2020 round of data collection faced important limitations due to the Covid-19 pandemic and was postponed in several countries, while a few countries that started the survey in late 2019 managed to complete data collection. The representative from the Republic of Moldova informed that data collection was mostly completed although face-to-face interviews had been challenging due to COVID-19. A special module was added to GGS to assess COVID-19-related social indicators. The results of the survey will be used for specific policy documents to address the demographic concerns and track the progress, e.g., to achieve the SDGs. The second GGP data collection wave is planned for 2023.

VII. Programme of work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2021

36. The secretariat introduced the draft programme of work of the Population component of the subprogramme on Housing, Land Management and Population for 2021 as outlined in the document ECE/WG.1/2020/5. The major output for the coming year will be the launch of the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing and development of a related toolkit.

37. Deliverables for the year 2021 include the various official meeting documents to be prepared, organization of the annual SWGA and its Bureau meetings as well as the Policy seminar on ageing. Four publications are to be issued: two policy briefs, the Road Map on Mainstreaming Ageing in Kazakhstan and the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing. Moreover, a small brochure on the Standing Working Group on Ageing is planned.

38. The SWGA adopted and recommended to the ECE Executive Committee for approval the draft of the programme of work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2021.

39. The Secretariat thanked the member States for the active involvement in the 2020 evaluation of the ECE Population subprogramme carried out under the title “Advancing intergovernmental work towards the implementation of the 2017 Lisbon Ministerial Declaration and MIPAA/RIS commitments” and covering its activities since September 2016. The final evaluation report was published on the ECE webpage in September 2020. It assesses positively the work performed by the Standing Working Group and the Population Unit and provides six main recommendations to strengthen / sustain the effectiveness of the work.

VIII. Financing of the work programme

40. The secretariat informed the Standing Working Group about the availability and use of regular budget and extrabudgetary resources in 2020 and the financing of the programme of work in 2021. Secretariat's regular budget staff consist of two professionals and one programme assistant. Regretfully, the newly recruited staff member on P2 position will leave the organization on 3 January 2021. This will significantly reduce capacity of the Unit for some time since due to the liquidity crisis United Nations Secretariat has been facing throughout 2020, the recruitment freeze has been imposed on all vacancies financed from the regular budget.

41. The secretariat thanked Austria, Estonia, Germany, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland for their financial contributions amounting to USD 273,328 in total to the Ageing-Phase III fund established in December 2019. The funds received allowed to establish a temporary part-time P3 position and proceed with recruitment in November 2020. The secretariat also acknowledged in-kind contributions by France, Austria and Germany in the form of translating policy briefs. The secretariat also gratefully acknowledged in-kind contribution by the UNFPA Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, that over two crucial months supported the work on revising the draft of guidelines on mainstreaming ageing and arranged for the EN/RU interpretation for the Policy Seminar and first day of the SWGA meeting in 2020.

42. The Chair invited the SWGA members to inform about potential funding pledges or eventual in-kind contributions. Germany promised to provide a further contribution – amount still has to be decided - to the Ageing-Phase III fund by the end of the year.

IX. Other business, summary and conclusion of the meeting

43. The chair summarized the main items discussed, and the Standing Working Group confirmed the decisions taken at its thirteenth annual meeting. An overview of decisions is included in Annex I.

44. The fourteenth meeting of the SWGA will take place on 22-23 November 2021 in Geneva, Switzerland. It will be followed by the Policy seminar on 24 November 2021. The date of the thirteenth meeting of the Bureau will be decided later.

Annex I

Decisions taken at the thirteenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing

- SWGA adopted the agenda (ECE/WG.1/2020) without amendments.
- SWGA accepts and welcomes Italy's proposal to host the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in 2022.
- SWGA starts acting as Preparatory Committee for the Conference.
- The SWGA Bureau will work closely with the Italian team and facilitate in deciding on Ministerial Conference structure and speakers and drafting the declaration.
- Secretariat will support preparation of the MIPAA/RIS+20 report.
- Policy seminar in 2021 will be dedicated to Ageing in the digital era.
- Policy Brief #26 will serve as a background document for the Policy seminar.
- Policy Brief #27 will be on mainstreaming ageing.
- SWGA agrees to finalize, publish and launch the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing in 2021.
- SWGA agrees to commence preparations for the development of a toolkit and training materials to facilitate application of the guidelines at the country level.
- SWGA adopts and recommends to the Executive Committee for approval the draft Programme of work of the Population component of the Housing, Land Management and Population subprogramme for 2021.
- SWGA approved the list of main decisions of its thirteenth meeting as presented by the Chair.
- Date and place of next bureau meeting still to be decided.
- The fourteenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing will take place on 22-23 November 2021.
- Next Policy Seminar will be on 24 November 2021.