

Rome, 17 June 2022, 9:20-9:30

Speaking notes for Mr Edmundo Martinho, Chair of the UNECE SWGA

As Chair of the UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing, it is my honour to introduce the main elements of the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration, entitled “A Sustainable World for All Ages: Joining Forces for Solidarity and Equal Opportunities Throughout Life”.

The draft text in front of you is the result of more than a year of discussions, drafting, and informal and formal consultations between member States. Representatives of NGOs and civil society also actively contributed to it.

The UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing was in charge of negotiating the Declaration. The initial draft was developed by the Declaration Drafting Group of the Standing Working Group in the first half of 2021 and reviewed by National Focal Points on Ageing from member States ahead of the annual meeting of the Standing Working Group in November. Two full rounds of formal consultations followed between November 2021 and April 2022.

The three main goals of the Rome Declaration were agreed based on the experiences of the last 5 years, taking into consideration the achievements and emerging challenges since 2017. They were identified as the most pressing priority areas for action for the next five-year implementation cycle of MIPAA/RIS between 2022 and 2027. The **three goals** of the Rome Ministerial Declaration are the following:

- 1. Promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life;**
- 2. Ensuring access to long-term care and support for carers and families; and**

3. Mainstreaming ageing to advance a society for all ages.

With the Rome Declaration, Ministers acknowledge that **significant progress** was achieved during the last five years in *recognizing* the potential of older persons, *encouraging* longer working lives, and *ensuring* ageing with dignity. They highlight in particular the progress made with regard to age-friendly environments and mainstreaming ageing.

Ministers also stress that there are **many challenges** ahead of us in relation to social protection, long-term care, or the labour market, to mention only a few. More progress is needed in the area of health promotion, older persons' participation in society and policy making, age-friendly environments, intergenerational solidarity, combatting ageism, and recognising the role of older persons in emergency and conflict situations.

The **impact of the COVID-19 crisis** on older persons, and the challenges and opportunities highlighted by the pandemic, receive special attention in the Rome Declaration. Ministers acknowledge the disproportional negative effects of the pandemic on older persons' health, social connectedness, access to services, and human rights, including their right to dignity, self-determination, freedom of movement and social participation. They recognise that the pandemic highlighted the importance of solid and inclusive welfare and health systems; the crucial role of civil society, volunteers and family support networks; and the pivotal nature of multilateral cooperation during global crises.

With the 2022 Rome Declaration, the Ministers of UNECE member States aspire to realize a **sustainable world for all ages**, and pledge to work towards achieving its **three main policy goals** by 2027.

(1)

The *first goal* of **Promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life** is a proof of **continuity** with previous ministerial declarations adopted in Vienna and Lisbon. It demonstrates the continued commitment to advancing active and healthy ageing through policies and actions in a range of sectors. In the first goal of the Rome Declaration, Ministers specifically pledge to:

- *facilitate* older persons' participation in policy- and decision-making, in social and cultural life, and *combat* loneliness and social isolation;
- *invest* in health promotion and in the creation of more age-friendly environments;
- *promote* a positive image of ageing and older persons, *combat* ageism, and *foster* intergenerational dialogue;
- *protect* older persons from violence and abuse;
- *facilitate* the participation of older persons in the labour market;
- *develop* sustainable, inclusive, and equitable pension schemes, and *ensure* adequate pensions;
- *improve* participation in lifelong learning;
- *promote* age-friendly digitalisation, products and services, and *support* innovation for the silver economy; and
- *encourage* the establishment of independent bodies to mediate the rights, needs and interests of older persons.

(2)

The *second goal* of the Rome Declaration calls for **Ensuring access to long-term care and support for carers and families**. This is the first time that long-term care and caregivers are accorded such particular attention in a UNECE ministerial declaration. It is a testimony of Ministers' recognition of the crucial and increasing importance of long-term care provision in our ageing societies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has with no doubt contributed to this recognition. It also revealed the great dependence of our long-term care systems on the dedication of care professionals, and especially of informal carers and family members. In the second goal of the Rome Declaration, Ministers commit to learn from the pandemic and to intensify support to carers and families. Specifically, they pledge to:

- *work* towards integrated and person-centred care, which ensures independence, self-determination, and dignity in care, and which focuses on prevention and early intervention;
- *invest* in and improve long-term care systems, and *prepare* for the anticipated increase in demand for long-term care services;
- *improve* the terms of employment and working conditions of health and social care workers, including adequate staffing, and *invest* in their training;
- *support* informal and family carers by providing advice, relief, and social protection;
- *ensure* the high quality and continuous monitoring of health, social, and long-term care services;
- *expand* protection from neglect and abuse in care;
- *adopt, update and implement* policies addressing dementia and supporting the caregivers of persons with dementia; and
- *addressing* the growing need for adequate palliative care.

(3)

Finally, the *third goal* of the Rome Declaration lays out the **strategy to follow** to achieve all the objectives I mentioned before. In this third goal, Ministers pledge to **Mainstream ageing to advance a society for all ages**. To elaborate more, this is a commitment to:

- *developing or strengthening* national frameworks for mainstreaming ageing, and *building* capacity for implementing them;
- *coordinating* ageing-related policies across all levels of government;
- *developing* a participatory stakeholder engagement approach to mainstreaming ageing, involving all relevant actors, including older persons and their representatives; and
- *enhancing* age- and gender-sensitive research and the collection of disaggregated data.

There is also an important red thread running through all three goals of the Rome Declaration. It is the strong and repeatedly voiced commitment to ensure older persons' full enjoyment of **human rights**. In a similar vein, Ministers stress the importance of achieving **gender equality** throughout the Declaration.

In the **final part** of the Rome Declaration, Ministers express their appreciation for the UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing and pledge their further support to its intergovernmental work. They reiterate the important role of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and its Regional Implementation Strategy, and – importantly – Ministers entrust the Standing Working Group with the task of updating the Regional Implementation Strategy, and exploring the possibility of also updating MIPAA to adapt ageing policies to economic, social, and digital transitions and emerging challenges.

I would like to use this opportunity to inform you, that yesterday the Bureau met to review the draft Declaration and comments received at this point of time.

Delegations have until noon today to suggest any further changes if absolutely necessary, by informing the Secretariat in writing. Allow me to remind you once

again, that the draft text went through two full rounds of formal consultations and preliminary written consent was received from the majority of member States.

To close this presentation of the Rome Declaration, please, allow me to thank all National Focal Points on Ageing for their engaged participation in drafting this Declaration. I hope that it will serve as a solid guide for our efforts towards building a sustainable world for all ages in the next 5 years.

Thank you for your attention.