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Meeting with the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing
Report by the Chair

Report by the Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing

1. The Chair of the Standing Working Group on Ageing, Mr. Alfredo Ferrante, is pleased to submit his report to the 133rd meeting of the Executive Committee (EXCOM) on 25 March 2024.
2. The report presents highlights of the work undertaken in support of mainstreaming population ageing in national policy and regulatory frameworks and creating an environment that is conducive to the realization of the individual and societal potential of living longer lives. It covers achievements since the previous report presented in March 2023, and the major activities planned for 2024 and beyond. Further details can be found in the report of the sixteenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing, ECE/WG.1/2023/2, and the document ECE/WG.1/2023/4 on the implementation of the programme of work of the Standing Working Group on Ageing in 2023.

I. Introduction

3. In the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region today one in six persons is aged 65 years and older. By 2050, the proportion will be one in four, with every eleventh person being aged 80 and above. The ECE region is clearly at the forefront of the global population ageing megatrend. Guiding and strengthening policymaking by member States to adapt to population ageing and other demographic changes are among the core activities of ECE.
4. The work is governed by the Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA). Its current status and revised Terms of Reference were approved by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July 2020 (E/RES/2020/19). SWGA is composed of national focal points on ageing nominated by the respective Governments of ECE member States. The ECE Population Unit acts as the secretariat to SWGA and contributes to the preparation and implementation of the SWGA programme of work. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing older persons and/or working in ageing-related areas and the scientific community participate as observers to the Standing Working Group on Ageing and are represented on the SWGA Bureau. International organizations with programmes related to population ageing also take part in the Standing Working Group on Ageing as observers.
5. SWGA supports the realization of the policy goals and objectives set out in the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and its Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS), and the subsequent ECE Ministerial Declarations on Ageing. At its sixteenth meeting in November 2023, SWGA adopted a new Programme of Work for 2023–2027 (ECE/WG.1/2023/2, Annex II) which responds to the goals of the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration “A Sustainable World for All Ages: Joining Forces for Solidarity and Equal Opportunities Throughout Life”. The Programme of Work links the implementation and monitoring of MIPAA/RIS with activities addressing the regional/national follow-up on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and other international population-related frameworks. It also contributes to the programme of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021–2030.
6. Building on the core activities which proved helpful in implementing MIPAA/RIS in previous cycles, the Programme of Work for 2023–2027 proposes activities in six main areas: (a) raising awareness on ageing and its implications for sustainable development in the ECE region and creating synergies with related policy agendas; (b) advancing international cooperation and exchange of experience and knowledge; (c) providing guidelines and policy recommendations, advisory services and capacity-building; (d) monitoring the implementation of MIPAA/RIS and strengthening the evidence base for policymaking; (e) preparing for the fifth cycle of review and appraisal of MIPAA/RIS implementation; (f) updating the ECE Regional Implementation Strategy for MIPAA.
7. The SWGA work is based on international cooperation, exchange of experience and policy discussion on ageing and intergenerational relations, taking into account ongoing and

emerging challenges in an increasingly interconnected, dynamic and digitalized environment as well as in the face of climate change.

II. Achievements over the past twelve months

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

8. The fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA concluded with a high-level panel discussion on 8 February 2023 at the sixty-first session of the Commission for Social Development in New York. The ECE region was represented by the Chair of SWGA (Italy). To mark the twentieth anniversary of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Standing Working Group on Ageing also organized an in-person side event “MIPAA at 20: fit for the Future?” on 8 February 2023, co-sponsored by Germany, Italy and Türkiye as well as the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), and contributed to a second side event “Leaving no one behind at the regional level: adopting an age-sensitive lens to policymaking”, co-organized by all regional commissions on 13 February 2023. The ECE Secretariat shared findings from the Fourth cycle review and appraisal at a third side event “Prioritizing the rights of older persons for decent work, productive employment, and full participation in society” that took place on 9 February 2023.

9. A resolution on the fourth review and appraisal of MIPAA (E/CN.5/2023/L.6) was recommended by the Commission for Social Development to ECOSOC for adoption. The resolution was adopted by ECOSOC in June 2023 (E/RES/2023/15).

10. The Commission for Social Development events reflected the conclusion of the fourth review and appraisal cycle, which culminated in the ECE region with the fifth Ministerial Conference on Ageing hosted by the Government of Italy in Rome in June 2022 and attended by 44 member State delegations. The regional synthesis report summarizing trends and achievements in implementing MIPAA/RIS in the ECE region between 2017 and 2022 was launched at the Conference. The outcome document of the Conference, the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration “A Sustainable World for All Ages: Joining Forces for Solidarity and Equal Opportunities Throughout Life” defines the policy priorities for the fifth implementation cycle of MIPAA/RIS (2022–2027) under three broad policy goals: (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.

11. SWGA and its Bureau were instrumental in preparing the regional review, the Ministerial Conference and its outcome document.

B. Follow-up to the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration

12. Paragraph 47 of the Rome Ministerial Declaration entrusted SWGA with the task of “updating RIS and exploring the possibility of also updating MIPAA to adapt ageing-related policy responses to economic, social, and digital transitions and emerging challenges, and developing further instruments to support them”. A task force to carry out this work was established in 2023 and is composed of member State representatives and representatives of civil society and the scientific research community. Terms of reference for the task force (ECE/WG.1/2023/INF.3) and proposed modalities of work (ECE/WG.1/2023/INF.4) were presented to and approved by SWGA in November 2023. In early 2024, the task force has and will focus its work on developing guidance for a national stakeholder engagement process using a participatory approach.

C. International cooperation, exchange of experience and policy discussion

13. During the last year, SWGA and its secretariat facilitated the exchange of insights and good practices between Governments, research, and civil society networks. The Standing

Working Group on Ageing further pursued its commitment to mainstreaming ageing in policy and regulatory frameworks and supported capacity-building activities to operationalize the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing, launched in March 2021.

1. Policy briefs on ageing

14. In 2023, a new policy brief on ageing was published on the topic of “Older persons in vulnerable situations” (No. 28, June 2023). Policy Brief No. 28 was issued with a new design and accompanied by a short summary version entitled “Key Messages”.

15. The launch of the policy brief was accompanied by an online event on same topic. The event presented key messages of the policy brief, and featured good practices from member States and civil society as well as perspectives from research. A report of the event is available online.¹

16. Policy briefs on ageing are prepared on topics selected by the members of SWGA.² They suggest policy measures and promote the exchange of good practice examples among member States. To enhance outreach, many of the briefs are translated into national languages by the member States.

2. Policy discussions on ageing

17. An in-depth policy discussion dedicated to the topic of addressing inequalities in older age took place during the annual meeting of SWGA on 22 November 2023. Representatives of 27 member States as well as participants representing international and non-governmental organizations and the academic and research community attended the event. The discussion focused on the policy implications of regional trends in inequalities among older persons and concrete policy responses to prevent and mitigate such inequalities. Speakers from Belgium, Czech Republic, Portugal, Slovakia, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the International Labour Organization, AARP, Red Cross Serbia, and Ukrainian Charity “Turbotra pro Litnih v Ukraini” shared experiences and innovative policy solutions. Presentation slides are available on the meeting page.³

18. A side event to the Regional Forum on Sustainable Development 2023 entitled “Towards age-friendly sustainable cities and communities” was co-organised with the World Health Organization (WHO) to demonstrate how investments towards age-friendly environments contribute to the 2030 Agenda’s ambition to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable (Sustainable Development Goal 11). Representatives of the WHO Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities from Ireland, Poland, and Spain as well as leaders in healthy ageing from Tajikistan shared concrete actions being taken in their countries and communities to foster the abilities of older persons and create better environments to grow old. Sixty-six participants from 30 countries attended the event.

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

1. Road maps for mainstreaming ageing

19. Road maps for mainstreaming ageing, developed at the request of member States, provide tailored policy recommendations for the implementation of MIPAA/RIS through mainstreaming ageing across broader national policies.

20. In 2023, the secretariat received a request for technical assistance with the development of a National Strategy and Action Plan for Healthy and Active Longevity in Uzbekistan. In collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and WHO, the secretariat will develop a situation analysis and policy recommendations based on the road maps for mainstreaming ageing methodology. The project started in the last quarter of

¹ See <https://unece.org/info/Population/events/379728>.

² See <https://unece.org/policy-briefs>.

³ See <https://unece.org/info/events/event/373307>.

2023 and continues in 2024. As part of the project, the secretariat participated in a week-long joint mission to Uzbekistan in November 2023 during which meetings with representatives of various government ministries and agencies, civil society as well as other international organizations were held. ECE also contributed to the conference “Sustainable development and demographic changes: national and international practices” organized by the Senate of Uzbekistan and UNFPA in Tashkent on 28 and 29 November 2023, drawing attention to the benefits of early adaptation to population ageing, even in relatively youthful societies.

2. Capacity development on mainstreaming ageing

21. To support the operationalization and dissemination of the ECE Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing issued in 2021, a short, interactive online training course was launched in 2023.⁴ The course, aimed at policymakers and the interested public, provides a brief introduction to mainstreaming ageing, to the main recommended stages in developing a strategic framework for mainstreaming ageing and to the proposed mechanisms to mainstream ageing in policies at the national level. The online course is currently being translated into other languages by member States and the secretariat including German, Russian, and Turkish.

22. On 23 and 24 February 2023, a training workshop on mainstreaming ageing into public policy through age-sensitive analysis was organized for 24 government officials at the request of the Government of Georgia and in collaboration with the UNFPA country office in Georgia. The workshop followed the methodology piloted during a series of training workshops for national and local policymakers held in the Republic of Moldova in 2022–2023.

23. Based on the insights gained from these workshops as well as an expert workshop on mainstreaming ageing organized in Germany in December 2022, the secretariat has developed a training package for workshops on mainstreaming ageing. These new training tools were presented in an online event in September 2023. All resources are available online.⁵

E. Monitoring implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy and strengthening the evidence base for policymaking

1. Ageing Policies Database

24. The development of the UNECE Ageing Policies Database was initiated in 2023. The database will provide easy access to information on ageing-related policies in the ECE region that national policymakers can consult to inform policy formulation and development at the national level and monitor the implementation of MIPAA/RIS during the fifth implementation cycle. In the last year, a taxonomy of policy themes and instruments for the organization of database content has been developed. Policies submitted in country reports for the fourth MIPAA/RIS review and appraisal cycle are currently being reviewed for inclusion in the database.

2. Generations and Gender Programme

25. The ECE secretariat has continued to act as a clearing house for data administration of the Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) and coordinated the network of national teams’ representatives – the GGP Council of Partners. In this capacity, the ECE secretariat co-organized the annual meeting, which was held online on 27 June 2023, and participated in a Consortium Board meeting on 13 September 2023. SWGA was briefed on new developments in GGP and its relevance for evidence-based policymaking at the national level at its sixteenth meeting in November 2023.

⁴ See <https://unece.org/population/ageing/mainstreaming-ageing>.

⁵ See <https://unece.org/population/ageing/mainstreaming-ageing>.

26. GGP is a leading data source for policy-relevant research on demographic trends and processes in the ECE region. The data and research findings from GGP have been used for computing active ageing indicators in several non-European Union countries and supported some policy measures addressing low fertility and intergenerational equity concerns. The GGP data are also used in computing a number of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicators by several countries.

F. Partnerships and communication

27. The ECE secretariat has continued to contribute to the activities of the Joint Programme on Ageing, a regional initiative developed in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, WHO, HelpAge International and the NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva and has collaborated with other United Nations entities in the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Ageing to promote the system-wide implementation of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030).

28. The secretariat further facilitated the “Regional expert consultation on older persons in the context of climate change-induced disasters and building back better in Europe and North America” convened by the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (co-facilitated with OHCHR) in May 2023, a technical meeting of the Titchfield Group on ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data hosted by the ECE secretariat in Geneva in September 2023, and a launch event for the Progress Report on the Decade of Healthy Ageing Implementation organized back to back with the sixteenth meeting of SWGA with WHO.

29. The ECE secretariat also continued to engage with civil society and the research community. In 2023, the ECE Secretariat collaborated with the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva to commemorate the 2023 International Day of Older Persons through a co-organized event on the topic of the preparedness and response of older persons to climate induced disasters. The event was sponsored by the Permanent Missions of Portugal and Slovenia. Furthermore, the ECE Secretariat contributed to the kick-off event in a series of biannual meetings between 2023 and 2026 to empower civil society in policymaking, fostering a platform for meaningful exchange and contributing to an updated Regional Implementation Strategy for the ECE region. The event series entitled “Engaged Civil Society as an Engine for an Age-friendly Society and International Exchange”, funded by Germany, was organised by the German National Association of Senior Citizens’ Organisations (BAGSO).

30. To support the dissemination of the outputs of the Standing Working Group on Ageing and raise awareness of ageing, the secretariat has issued several news articles and social media postings throughout the year in addition to informing about meetings and activities via the ECE website and email dissemination lists.

III. Major planned activities for 2024 and beyond

31. In 2024, SWGA and ECE secretariat will continue to support the implementation of MIPAA/RIS in ECE member States as specified in its new Programme of Work for 2023–2027. In addition to regular activities around awareness-raising and exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices, SWGA activities and outputs will centre around follow-up to the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration, monitoring the implementation of MIPAA/RIS, strengthening the evidence base for policymaking and updating the ECE Regional Implementation Strategy for MIPAA.

A. Follow-up to the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration

32. The task force on updating RIS will continue its work in 2024, finalizing guidance for member States for national stakeholder engagement exercises. The guidance materials will be presented to the SWGA Bureau for approval at its April 2024 meeting. Once approved,

the guidance will be presented to the national focal points on ageing. At the 2024 meeting of SWGA, the task force and member States will present initial results of the implementation of the national stakeholder engagements, which will continue into 2025.

B. International cooperation, exchange of experience and fostering evidence-based policymaking

1. Policy briefs on ageing

33. Policy Brief No. 29 will be on the topic of “Mental health of older persons” and will be issued in the second quarter of 2024, featuring concrete policy examples from ECE member States.

2. Policy discussions on ageing

34. The topic for the in-depth discussion during the seventeenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing in November 2024 will be “Evidence-based policymaking”.

35. In addition to the in-depth policy discussion, three online multi-stakeholder policy dialogues on ageing will be held during 2024. The topics were agreed by SWGA at its sixteenth meeting in November 2023. The first dialogue, taking place on 14 March 2024, will focus on violence against and the abuse and neglect of older persons and will be organized as a side event to the 2024 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development. The second online policy dialogue will launch Policy Brief No. 29, presenting its key messages and highlight good practices from member States. In September 2024, the third online policy dialogue will focus on the coordination of ageing policy across the government. The events facilitate exchange between researchers, civil society, Governments, and international organizations.

C. Capacity-building – operationalizing the Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing

36. In 2024, SWGA will further promote the development of national strategic frameworks for mainstreaming ageing as recommended by the ECE Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing. Further translations of the guidelines and the online course on mainstreaming ageing will be promoted. So far, the guidelines have been translated with the support of UNFPA and Governments into Georgian, German, Portuguese, and Romanian. A translation into Turkish is in preparation. Several translations of the online course are in progress and will be published in 2024.

D. Monitoring implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy and strengthening the evidence base for policymaking

37. The UNECE Ageing Policies Database will be developed and launched in last quarter of 2024 and updated annually. The database will provide a useful tool for member States to share and monitor progress in implementing the goals and objectives of MIPAA/RIS.

IV. Any proposed change to the subsidiary structure of the Standing Working Group on Ageing

38. There are no proposed changes to the subsidiary structure of the ECE Standing Working Group on Ageing to report. During its sixteenth meeting on 20–22 November 2023, SWGA adopted the draft programme of work of the population component of the housing, land management and population subprogramme for 2024 (ECE/WG.1/2023/5). EXCOM is invited to approve this decision.

V. Follow-up to the 2023 session of the Economic Commission for Europe

39. One of the challenges highlighted at the 2023 session of the Economic Commission for Europe are persisting digital divides across age groups. The Standing Working Group on Ageing will continue to promote digital skills and literacy development among older persons and highlight the importance of leaving no one behind in an increasingly digitised world. Innovative policies related to digitalisation and lifelong learning will be shared through the new ageing policies database and will be among the themes to be specifically addressed in the updated Regional Implementation Strategy for MIPAA.

VI. Intersectoral activities: new activities and/or progress in existing intersectoral activities

40. The work of SWGA on population ageing contributes to numerous intersectoral activities of ECE and beyond. In 2024-2025, SWGA will collaborate with the Bureau of the Conference of European Statisticians in conducting an in-depth review on ageing-related statistics to identify and address gaps in age-disaggregated and ageing-related data needed for evidence-based policymaking.

41. As in previous years, SWGA will organize a side event on ageing at the Regional Forum for Sustainable Development, this year focusing on violence against and neglect and abuse of older persons in the context of SDG 16.

42. The Population Unit acts as the ECE focal point for matters related to the United Nations Commission on Population and Development and the Commission for Social Development and liaises respectively with the DESA Population Division and the Division for Inclusive Social Development. The Population Unit also acts as focal point for ECE's contribution to the activities of the newly established Global Coalition for Social Justice which provides new opportunities for intersectoral collaboration to promote combating ageism in the world of work.

VII. Technical cooperation activities

43. Enhancing the capacity of all member States, and particularly those in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, to mainstream ageing and align their policies with relevant international frameworks and initiatives such as MIPAA/RIS and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), and to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is at the core of the technical cooperation activities coordinated by the Population Unit.

44. In 2024, technical cooperation activities will focus on providing technical assistance towards the development of a National Strategy and Action Plan for Healthy and Active Longevity in Uzbekistan in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). A second planned activity is to conduct a data needs analysis on ageing-related data at the request of the Government of Georgia.

VIII. Cooperation with other organizations

45. The Standing Working Group on Ageing and its secretariat maintain good cooperation with other organizations active in the area of population ageing in the ECE region. Close relationships have been maintained with the European Commission, OHCHR, the UNFPA Regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (EECARO) in Istanbul, and WHO as well as research institutions and civil society, including the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research, AGE Platform Europe and HelpAge International, among others.

46. An example of close collaboration with UNFPA EECARO are the periodic regional reviews of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). In 2023, ECE and UNFPA EECARO organized the regional ICPD+30 review with a high-level regional conference on 19 and 20 October 2023 in Geneva.

47. ECE is an active partner in the “Joint programme on Ageing” launched in July 2020 by ECE, OHCHR, UNFPA, WHO, and HelpAge International in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This regional initiative aims to strengthen coordinated support on ageing including through the United Nations country teams.

48. ECE works cooperates with civil society organizations such as BAGSO and the NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva in the organisation of events highlighting the role of civil society in ageing societies and as agents for change.

49. ECE further collaborates with academic and research institutions, notably to raise awareness on ageing among doctoral researchers and to inform about the work of SWGA. The secretariat has partnered with the HOMEAge (Advancing Research and Training on Ageing, Place and Home) Doctoral Network and will contribute to a training event for doctoral researchers organized by the HOMEAge project consortium in Ancona, Italy, in April 2024.

50. At the global level, ECE is a member of the United Nations-wide Inter-Agency Group on Ageing and contributes to the system-wide implementation of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). Furthermore, ECE has joined in 2024 the Global Coalition for Social Justice, led by the International Labour Organization, to promote social justice at all ages, notably through combating ageism in the world of work and beyond.
