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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: review of relevant United Nations plans and programmes of action pertaining to the situation of social groups: Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

Fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution [2020/8](#). It provides an assessment of the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, at the international level. The report gives an overview of the regional review and appraisal processes, together with a description of overall trends based on an analysis of the outcome of regional reviews and appraisals and the identification of prevalent and emerging issues and related policy options.

* [E/CN.5/2023/1](#).



I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2020/8, entitled “Modalities for the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002”.

2. The report presents the conclusions of the fourth review and appraisal exercise carried out by Member States and coordinated through the regional commissions, as requested in paragraph 7 of resolution 2020/8. The structure of the report aligns with the priority directions and corresponding issues of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002. It provides an overview of the review and appraisal process in each region and identifies progress and challenges in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. Conclusions and recommendations are provided for the consideration of Member States.

3. The full summary reports produced by the regional commissions are available online at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/fourthreview/regional-reviews.html>.

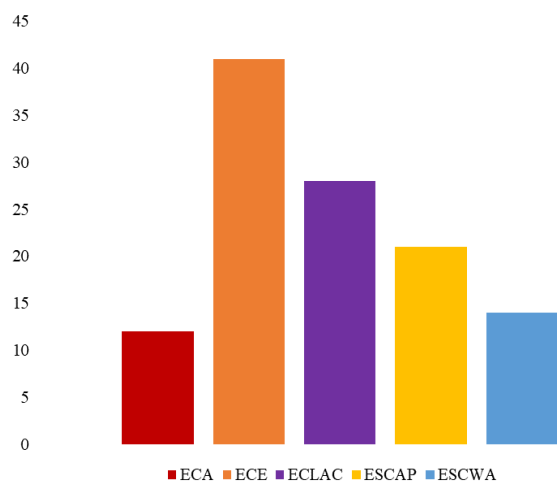
II. Overview of the fourth regional review and appraisal cycle

4. The fourth review and appraisal cycle took place against the backdrop of a devastating coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which directly or indirectly cost the lives of over 12 million older persons in 24 months, more than half of them in lower-middle-income countries.¹ Despite Governments operating in the context of uncertainty and increased pressure on resources as they responded to the crisis, four out of seven Member States participated in the fourth review and appraisal cycle, representing 84 per cent of the area where older persons reside worldwide (see figure I).

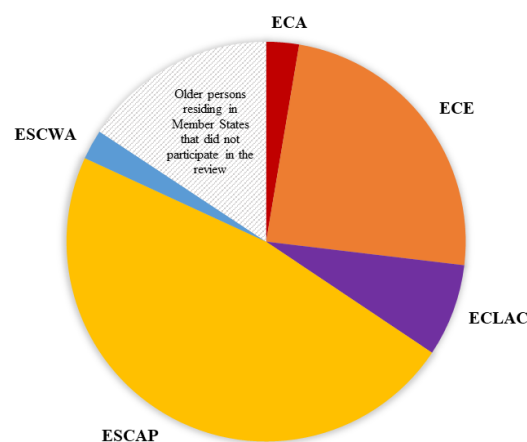
¹ World Health Organization, “Global excess deaths associated with COVID-19 (modelled estimates)”. Available at <https://www.who.int/data/sets/global-excess-deaths-associated-with-covid-19-modelled-estimates> (accessed on 1 November 2022).

Figure I
Four out of seven Member States participated in the fourth review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action, where 84 per cent of older persons worldwide reside (2022)

Number of Member States that participated in the fourth review and appraisal process, by regional commission



Total population (60+) in 2022, by residence in Member States that participated in the fourth review and appraisal process, by regional commission



Source: United Nations, “Total population (both sexes combined) by select age group, region, subregion and country, annually for 1950–2100 (thousands)”, World Population Prospects 2022.

Abbreviations: ECA, Economic Commission for Africa; ECE, Economic Commission for Europe; ECLAC, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; ESCAP, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; ESCWA, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia.

5. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) organized a regional expert group meeting on 12 and 13 July 2022. Policymakers, representatives from the African Union Commission and other stakeholders, including civil society organizations and older persons, participated at the meeting to review and assess national and regional progress towards the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in Africa. ECA presented a report on the fourth review and appraisal of implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in Africa, 2018–2022. The report contains an assessment of the progress, challenges and emerging issues related to the planning and implementation of ageing policies and programmes in the past five years. Inputs from Member States are based on questionnaires and guidelines developed to cover the three priority areas of the Madrid Plan of Action and adapted to the specificities and contexts existing in the region. The report benefits from secondary data, including household surveys and cross-country time series data from various sources.

6. The Ministerial Conference on Ageing in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region was held in Rome on 16 and 17 June 2022, in collaboration with the ECE Standing Working Group on Ageing and the Government of Italy. Preceding the Conference was the first Joint Forum of Civil Society and Scientific Research, which was held on 15 June 2022. ECE prepared a regional synthesis report on the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the ECE region in 2017–2022 (ECE/AC.30/2022/3), based on 40 national reports received, highlighting achievements and challenges in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. ECE also issued a report entitled *MIPAA/RIS+20: 20 Years of Action towards Creating Societies for all Ages in the UNECE Region* to mark the 20-year milestone in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action Regional Implementation Strategy. The 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration and the Declaration of the Joint Forum of Civil Society and Scientific Research were adopted at the

Conference, setting the policy agenda for implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in the region between 2022 and 2027.

7. In the run-up to the regional review conference, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) subregional office in Trinidad and Tobago produced a synthesis report for the Caribbean and held a virtual expert group meeting on the theme “The ageing Caribbean: 20 years of the Madrid Plan of Action” on 19 October 2022. Government representatives, civil society organizations and academia participated in the meeting to discuss the report and review the policies and programmes implemented for older persons. The report is based on national and international statistics, information collected about government policies, programmes and services for older persons and interviews with representatives of civil society organizations. Recommendations arising from the subregional review, in turn, provided input to assess progress in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action and subsequent regional agreements. The fifth Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing and the Rights of Older Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in Santiago from 13 to 15 December 2022.

8. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organized the regional review and appraisal of the Madrid Plan of Action in Asia and the Pacific, beginning in 2020. The process consisted of nominations of government focal points on ageing, consultations and capacity-building on a voluntary national survey, four consultations with non-government stakeholders and an intergovernmental meeting held in Bangkok from 29 June to 1 July 2022. At the intergovernmental meeting, ESCAP presented the outcomes of the review process, including the summary of the 22 voluntary national surveys, representing 85 per cent of the population aged 60 years and over. Relevant stakeholders participated in the meeting, which provided an opportunity for Member States to discuss progress, remaining challenges, gaps and new priorities. Long-term care, digital transformation, data, climate change and social protection were identified as some of the priority areas for the future. An outcome document was adopted at the meeting.

9. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in partnership with the United Nations Population Fund Arab States Regional Office, organized the fourth review of the Madrid Plan of Action in the Arab region. The review process was completed over the span of a year, during which ESCWA agreed with Member States on the review methodology, assisted Member States in developing their national review reports and organized several multi-stakeholder dialogues. The review process culminated in a regional review conference held in Beirut in June 2022. The review process resulted in a regional review report and an outcome document that assessed progress and identified gaps and challenges in implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action across the Arab region and highlighted emerging issues and success stories.

III. Older persons and development

A. Active participation in society and development

10. Protecting and respecting the right to participation by older persons in society and development is a key component of all steps and phases of policy. It is important to identify, understand and remove the legal, social, financial and other obstacles preventing willing and capable older persons from seeking and developing opportunities to participate in society and development.

11. Actions that seek to promote the active participation of older persons in society and development were reported by all regional commissions. However, this

information may be less useful, from the perspective of policymakers, when not accompanied by measures identifying the specific factors motivating participation (whether work is wilfully engaged or due to income generation) or impeding participation (owing to employment discrimination or lack of accessible transportation). When considering the financial contribution of older persons, it is important to avoid displaying a productivity bias. For example, if older persons choose not to participate in economically valuable forms of participation or are incapable of doing so, then placing negative notions on the lack of participation violates autonomy.²

12. Progress in implementing measures to enable the full and equal participation of older persons in decision-making at all levels is highly uneven across regions. The law in Denmark, for example, requires all municipalities to establish a Senior Citizens Council, elected by older persons in direct election. In the ESCWA region, some Governments reported on fostering volunteering in intergenerational settings. Older persons in Africa assume traditional roles in dispute resolution and lead the community in times of crisis, which is frequent in most countries in Africa. These important roles, however, are not well documented. While in some African States older persons are recognized as major stakeholders in policy formulation and review, others report a lack of consultation with and meaningful participation by older persons.

B. Work and the ageing labour force

13. In the field of work, acknowledging diversity in old age entails putting in place systems that support older persons who are unable or choose not to work, while enabling others who can and wish to work to continue doing so. In such systems, older persons can navigate future transitions with freedom from fear and insecurity. However, bottom-up reporting from Member States reveals a different reality for many older persons.

14. Findings from the ECA and ECLAC regions suggest that a significant number of older persons continue to work because they have no or inadequate pension income. Most African States do not have legislation to support employment opportunities for older persons, whereas in the ECLAC region the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons describes the scope of the right to work for older persons and provides standards specific to older persons.

15. In the European region, while many comprehensive action plans exist and are implemented across various fields of policy interventions that specifically target older persons and support their participation in the labour market, such plans are often not accompanied by comprehensive national laws specifically protecting their right to work and access to the labour market. In the ESCWA region, despite the lack of accurate statistics on the proportion of older wage earners, there is a general trend of initiatives undertaken by Governments to provide opportunities for older persons to continue to be economically active, but with discrepancies between different countries. Increasing employment opportunities for older persons is particularly relevant for Member States in the ESCAP region with shrinking labour forces.

16. With increased longevity, the persistence of gaps and deficiencies in existing pension provisions, and the increasing cost of funding pensions, many Governments will need more older persons to continue working for longer by implementing,

² Zachary Morris, Jennifer Madans and Daniel Mont, "Measuring the autonomy, participation, and contribution of older people," background paper prepared for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, December 2021.

inter alia, increases in retirement age. However, bearing in mind that low-income earners have lower life expectancy, indexing retirement age to increased longevity will have a regressive effect. Older workers with an expectation of shorter lives lose a larger proportion of their projected lifetime income from pensions than those who are expected to live longer. If gains in longevity benefit higher-income earners the most, as they have in many Member States in recent decades, this regressive effect will increase over time.³

C. Rural development and urbanization

17. Rapid urbanization and global ageing are intersecting trends that demand urgent attention from policymakers. However, reporting from Member States on this area is limited and outlines a diverse policy landscape, with some Governments highlighting regional development as an important policy area, with measures targeting small municipalities and rural areas, and others reporting on limited capacity to improve living conditions and infrastructure for older persons in underserved urban, rural and remote areas. There is insufficient reporting by Member States in all regions on measures to support older farmers, who often suffer from prevailing and oversimplistic views labelling them as unproductive and unable to adopt new technologies and practices. Many older farmers in rural areas depend on subsistence farming and usually find themselves in a vicious cycle of poverty due to the impact of climate change.

D. Access to knowledge, education and training

18. The United Nations Transforming Education Summit⁴ highlighted the importance of adopting a lifelong approach to education and learning to address the complex set of challenges faced by societies today. This approach was adopted in the Madrid Plan of Action and called for equality of opportunity throughout life with respect to continuing education, training and retraining, as well as the full utilization of the expertise of persons of all ages, recognizing the benefits of increased experience with age.

19. Actions that seek to promote access to knowledge, education and training by older persons were reported by all regional commissions and take place across different contexts. In a region where close to 40 per cent of older persons do not have formal education, some African Governments undertook efforts to improve literacy rates. Similarly, notwithstanding the development of literacy and education programmes for older persons in the ESCWA region, illiteracy rates remain high in Arab countries. In the European context, most Governments make explicit reference to efforts to further enhance digital literacy skills, taking into account that participation rates of older persons in education and training fell during the COVID-19 pandemic, when such services shifted online.

E. Intergenerational solidarity

20. Reports from regional commissions show that intergenerational solidarity is widely understood as social cohesion between generations. ECA highlights that intergenerational solidarity is key to the transfer of indigenous knowledge. ECE reports on various actions undertaken by Governments in the region, including the

³ *World Social Report 2022: Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World* (United Nations publication, forthcoming).

⁴ See <https://transformingeducationsummit.sdg4education2030.org/>.

promotion of multigenerational dialogue and intergenerational learning, knowledge and skills transfer, interactive digital skills training and cultural transmission. In the ESCWA region, older persons give awareness-raising, social and religious talks for young people.

21. It is not clear, however, whether reported measures on intergenerational solidarity utilize a rights-based approach to ensure people's dignity, voice and well-being. A recently developed guide for intergenerational solidarity builds on 10 country case studies and highlights that the rights principles of participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment and legality should guide all intergenerational activities.⁵ Such principles are crucial, particularly in the context of sustainable development, where intergenerational solidarity goes beyond relations among the currently living representatives of different generations to embrace future generations that do not yet exist (see [A/68/322](#)).

F. Poverty eradication and social protection

22. The prevention and reduction of poverty are prerequisites for the well-being and full participation of older persons in their communities. Rates of poverty in this group vary significantly among and within regions and often reflect systemic and structural gaps that affect the entire population. Crises, both climate- and conflict-related, result in higher poverty levels among older persons. For instance, in Lebanon, alarming data regarding the impact of crises on poverty show that the percentage of older persons experiencing multidimensional poverty stood at 78 per cent in 2021.

23. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis highlighted and exacerbated the economic risks faced by many older persons, as noted in several regional reviews. At the same time, it triggered successful government responses to tackle this problem. For instance, ECLAC reports that pension receipt during the pandemic might have mitigated an increase of 34.9 and 22.9 percentage points in poverty and extreme poverty, respectively, in the region.

24. Member States address income insecurity among older persons on several fronts. Employment support is identified as a relevant measure by several Governments. Social protection, including both contributory and non-contributory systems, is key to ensuring the economic security of older persons and is one of the fundamental policy actions that Governments around the world identify in relation to the functioning of ageing populations and the well-being of older persons. The coverage and adequacy of social protection systems vary greatly among and within regions and are closely linked to other systemic issues, in particular the incidence of informal employment. It is further noted in regional reviews that existing pension systems often reinforce gender inequalities, as well as gaps between different types of workers, such as public and private employees. Workers in the informal sector are unable to participate in contributory pension schemes and are therefore more likely to experience poverty in old age. Prevalent gender gaps in pensions continue to result in higher poverty rates among older women.

25. ECA reports that only a fraction of older persons in the region are covered under a pension scheme, with the general coverage of social protection in Africa in 2020 at 17 per cent of the population, although this masks diverse difference among subregions. In the ESCAP region, most Member States have some form of pension

⁵ HelpAge International, "Bringing generations together for change: learning from intergenerational approaches to address issues facing older and younger people", 2022. Available at <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/society-for-all-ages/bringing-generations-together-for-change/>.

system in place, yet coverage of contributory pensions is often low, and benefits vary substantially.

26. Progress in the social protection systems in the ECLAC region includes the extension of coverage and benefits, the creation and strengthening of infrastructure, the construction or expansion of contributory and non-contributory transfer systems and the visibility of the need to include care and support within social protection systems. Around 70 per cent of the population aged 65 years and older in the Latin American region receive a contributory or non-contributory pension. Progress is also observed in countries across the ECE region, which have taken steps to reform or update their pension systems in order to ensure their adequacy and long-term sustainability.

G. Emergency situations

27. Emergency situations invariably result in or exacerbate human rights concerns, including those of older persons, as age often compounds other forms of vulnerability or inequality that accumulate over the life course. Older persons are entitled to equal protection under international human rights and humanitarian law (see [A/HRC/42/43](#)).

28. African Governments report that needs assessments and policy responses to emergency situations usually target children, women and young people. While a few Member States included a special provision for older persons, there are glaring gaps in local disaster assessment and planning, which rarely target older persons. Insufficient policy progress is reported in Member States that experience endemic conflicts.

29. ECE and ECLAC reported on numerous innovative responses to address the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older persons. For instance, in Slovakia, several legislative amendments were adopted to facilitate remote access to health-care services by older persons.

30. In the Asia-Pacific region, the needs of older persons are often overlooked in humanitarian crises and even after disasters. A few Governments included older persons in their national disaster management and humanitarian relief plans. Only a few Member States recognized the contribution of older persons in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Similarly, in the ESCWA region, some Governments developed emergency response plans, with a few taking into account the needs of older persons in emergencies, but most have no plans for dealing with crises.

IV. Advancing health and well-being into old age

A. Health promotion and well-being throughout life

31. According to ECA, only 45 per cent of older persons in the region reside close to health-care services, and around 40 per cent have no access to medical care when needed. As a response, some Governments in the region have adopted relevant policy and legislative frameworks. However, limited financial and human resources, inadequate multi-stakeholder mechanisms of engagement and reporting, and the lack of sustainable and meaningful ways for older Africans to express their views may serve as barriers to implementation. ECLAC reported significant progress in the strengthening of institutions focused on health and ageing in the region, with programmes and policies that incorporate a more inclusive, people-centred perspective.

B. Universal and equal access to health-care services

32. Older persons are entitled to have access to health services, goods and facilities, in equality with other age groups. Progress in the implementation of measures to guarantee universal health coverage and equitable access to health services is reported by the ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA regions. In the ECLAC region, significant emphasis was placed on reducing out-of-pocket drug purchases. Several Governments in the region implemented measures to prevent discrimination against older persons in medical protocols and decisions on medical resources and treatment related to COVID-19. In the ESCAP region, some Governments subsidized health-care expenditures as part of ensuring the provision of affordable health care to older persons. Many countries reported using digital technology in health care.

33. Measures taken to provide health-care services for older persons in the Arab region vary by country. Progress in promoting access to health services in the region varies and includes, for example, the creation by Iraq of mobile medical teams for families of or with older persons. According to reports from the ECA region, access to health-care services is limited in most Member States. Some policy responses have included the application of a premium exemption policy for persons aged 70 years and older in Ghana, or the provision of free health services that include home care to protect older persons from injuries caused by falls in their homes in the Sudan.

34. ECE reports on multiple measures taken in the region to improve access to health-care services. For instance, some Member States reported on measures to apply safety standards aimed at preventing injuries to older persons at home and in transportation services.

35. New measures on the provision of palliative care were taken in several regions. In addition to Governments, there are other important actors, in particular non-governmental organizations, which provide support. Efforts in Latin America and the Caribbean region include the promotion of training programmes and the specialization of health professionals. Luxembourg, in the European context, is in the process of developing a comprehensive set of strategies related to increased longevity that includes an end-of-life plan that deals, among other things, with palliative care and the will at the end of life.

C. Older persons and HIV/AIDS

36. Marked inequalities, within and between countries, are stalling progress in the HIV response, and HIV is further widening those inequalities. According to the United Nations,⁶ new data reveal that approximately 1.5 million new HIV infections occurred in 2021, around 1 million more than the global targets. Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America have all seen increases in annual HIV infections over the past decade, yet only the African region reported updates on the implementation of actions to support communities of older persons living with HIV, or on actions to support older persons as caregivers of infected relatives and surviving family members.

D. Training of care providers and health professionals

37. Many health professionals and care providers lack the guidance and training to recognize and effectively manage declines in intrinsic capacity. It is therefore

⁶ Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *In Danger: UNAIDS Global AIDS Update 2022* (Geneva, 2022).

important to expand educational opportunities in the field of geriatrics and gerontology for all health professionals working with older persons, including those in the social service sector and informal caregivers. Given the prominence that long-term care has received in the fourth review and appraisal cycle, training of care providers is included as one of the many measures taken to address the issue of care and support for caregivers.⁷ Training of care providers and health professionals should highlight the importance of partnerships involving the older person, primary health-care workers, family and community to sustain people's well-being as they age.

38. ECLAC noted that disparities continued to exist in the training of specialized health professionals. For example, while Mexico reports that its 21 training sites for geriatric residents serve between 100 and 150 medical specialists per year, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Panama have 32 and 35 specialists, respectively, for the entire country. Some Governments in the Arab region introduced specialized educational programmes in the field of geriatrics. The State of Palestine reports the provision of trainings for caregivers, as do other countries around the world, such as Armenia, Belarus, Cyprus, Japan, Malta, Mongolia and Sweden, among many others. In the ESCAP region, examples of capacity-building include the introduction in Australia of initiatives to increase digital health adoption, for instance, through workforce training.

39. In the European context, expansion and reform of training capacities for health and social care workers were reported by many Governments. A number of them adopted a comprehensive approach to reach adequate levels of care professionals, moving beyond training to also include working conditions, which cover a broad range of issues from working time to remuneration, as well as the physical conditions and mental demands of the workplace.

E. Mental health needs of older persons

40. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, one out of every seven older persons in the world lived with a mental disorder,⁸ yet mental health services are not readily available for older persons in many countries. ECA, for instance, notes that mental health services in general are not commonly available in Africa and that the prevalence of mental health disorders is not well documented or understood in the region. As a result, the mental health of older persons is underrepresented in policies and programmes.

41. Both ECE and ECLAC bring attention to the impact of loneliness and social isolation on the health and well-being of older persons. Member States have adopted initiatives targeted to tackle loneliness and social isolation among older persons, in particular as this was exacerbated by COVID-19 restrictions. In the European region, systems to detect and signal loneliness were developed using local coalitions, for example at the municipal level in the Netherlands and community-based radars and patrolling in remote areas in Portugal.

42. ESCAP reports that the mental health issues of older persons have become a priority in only a few countries. In the Arab region, initiatives include a national multisectoral strategy for older persons in Tunisia, with the Government working towards providing health and psychological services to older persons, especially in times of crisis, loss of loved ones or exposure to violence.

⁷ Issue 2 under priority direction III (ensuring enabling and supportive environments).

⁸ Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, Global Health Data Exchange. Available at <https://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-results/> (accessed on 21 October 2022).

F. Older persons and disabilities

43. Ageing and disability are intimately related. The needs and risks experienced by older persons with disabilities and the challenges they face in gaining access to the assistance they require are poorly understood and often left unaddressed. Furthermore, older persons with disabilities are excluded from national and international social policies, owing to a lack of sufficient age-disaggregated data on disability.

44. Several African States took measures that target older persons with disabilities. For example, Mali introduced a law for the promotion and protection of older persons with disabilities to improve access to better housing environments, accessibility, transport and health-care services. ESCAP reports that some Governments provide rehabilitation services and assistive technology to older persons with disabilities but that only a few countries in the region have universal plans and programmes for persons with disabilities.

45. ESCWA reports that older persons can benefit from policies and initiatives for persons with disabilities but that the majority of such policies do not specifically take the needs and preferences of older persons into account. In Kuwait, older persons with disabilities enjoy special transport benefits, mobile service centres to reach them wherever they are, access to parking in all facilities they frequent, priority in their transactions at all institutions and accessible public transport to meet their needs.

V. Ensuring enabling and supportive environments

A. Housing and the living environment

46. The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons has drawn attention to the responsibility of States to promote inclusive, age-friendly communities and environments and to provide older persons with a range of support services that promote their dignity, autonomy and independence, so as to enable them to remain in their homes, taking into account their will and individual preferences (see [A/77/239](#)). It is also important to take into account living arrangements within housing, as they represent the most immediate social and physical environments of older persons and influence their economic well-being, psychosocial health and life satisfaction.⁹ Whatever the circumstances of older persons, they are all entitled to live in an environment that enhances their capabilities.

47. Actions that seek to promote age-friendly cities, age-integrated communities and ageing in place were reported by ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA. Ageing policies in many European countries are aimed at enabling older persons to remain in their homes for as long as possible and in as good health as possible. Some reported on investments in the research and development of products and services that increase the safety and security of older persons, support their independent living and enhance their social participation. In the ECLAC region, many Member States developed national programmes to adapt environments to meet the special needs of older persons, including through the creation of age-friendly cities and communities registered in the World Health Organization Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. Several Governments in the region also prioritize ageing in place with due regard to individual preferences and affordable housing options for older persons. Member States in the ESCAP and ESCWA regions highlight the key supportive role played by the family in the context of ageing in place. However,

⁹ *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights: Living Arrangements of Older Persons* (United Nations publication, 2020).

without Governments playing a central role in formulating and implementing policies, while engaging older persons themselves, and investing in local infrastructure to support multigenerational communities, creating inclusive and cohesive societies for all is not possible.

48. In terms of housing, ECLAC reports on multiple measures on accessible housing, including the allocation of resources, regulatory actions, and support for older persons in emergency situations. ECE member States also share examples of financial support for home adaptations and/or the construction of new housing units adapted to the needs of older persons. In the ESCAP region, affordable housing measures are generally targeted to priority subgroups of older persons, such as those without families or those experiencing financial hardship. In the African region, ECA warned that deficiencies in infrastructure resulted in many older Africans not having access to water from protected sources, with pervasive consequences for their health.

49. Public spaces enhance community cohesion, promote well-being and foster economic development and environmental sustainability. Many Governments in the ECE region have achieved progress towards barrier-free and accessible public transportation options. In the ECLAC region, measures on accessible transport are often linked to ensuring affordability. Likewise, measures in some ESCAP member States strive to provide available, affordable and accessible public transportation for older persons. Measures to promote age-friendly public spaces were also addressed in the regional reviews of ECE, ECLAC and ESCWA, including spaces created for care and participation, the establishment of green spaces, and the promotion of accessibility. In the context of accessibility, the ECE member States prioritized progress on universal accessibility in the digital space, along with providing digital training and assistance to older persons while maintaining non-digital services.

B. Care and support for caregivers

50. Care work, including long-term care and support services, has emerged as one of the most salient issues of the public agenda around older persons in all regions. Progress in this area is, however, highly uneven among regions, owing to unequal financial and institutional development and the impact of distinct cultural and social expectations regarding care work, among other factors. This is reflected in the specific policy issues that each Member State is currently addressing in its care system.

51. ECA and ESCWA remark on existing deeply rooted cultural expectations in both regions that family members, in line with customary norms of solidarity and obligation, are responsible for the provision of care and support for older persons. Similarly, in Asia and the Pacific, most long-term care and support is provided at home by unpaid family members and friends, many of whom are women, often older women themselves. Owing to changing family and labour market patterns and a shift in cultural norms around care for parents, there is a widening gap between supply and demand in care for older persons throughout the region. Some Governments reported offering support to caregivers, including through cash benefit programmes or training programmes, including certification and accreditation for informal and formal caregivers.

52. In the Arab region, it is noted that families are reluctant to move older relatives to care homes even in cases of severe disability. However, such arrangements disregard older persons who may wish to exercise their own autonomy and independence and prefer not to live with family members. Generally, in such contexts, an appropriate legal and policy framework that guarantees the right of older persons to gain access to all appropriate forms of long-term care and support is overlooked. Few of the frameworks address how to improve access and affordability for poor and

marginalized subgroups of older persons. Although the number of care homes in various Arab countries has increased, standards and codes of practice to monitor the quality of care delivered in such institutions, as well as in private homes, are absent.

53. In some Governments of the ECE region, the foundations of care services were laid during the fourth review and appraisal cycle, while in others, existing ones have been further developed through new regulations, protocols or manuals, and additional professional education and training. Common features of these developments include the ambition to expand long-term care systems, to improve the efficiency of their administration and to enhance the use of data, and a greater emphasis on ageing in place and home care as part of long-term care strategies. Ensuring the quality of care delivered across a broad landscape of care providers and settings is a challenge that Governments in the region are addressing through the introduction of quality standards, quality measurement tools and their enforcement, among other measures. The questions of affordability and especially of the financial sustainability of long-term care were raised by several European Member States, along with measures to address them.

54. The regional review in the ECLAC region showed visible advances at the legislative level through the regulation of care work, in addition to policy measures both in the training of caregivers and in the area of long-term care and support, as well as palliative care and information registry, which have laid the foundations for the creation of public care systems in many countries. Member States reported on strategies to provide information and training to caregivers, both formal and informal, which in many cases have been promoted in conjunction with international agencies, the health sector and universities in the certification of care competencies. ECLAC highlights the impact of care work on women, including older women, as they represent a disproportionate proportion of formal and informal caregivers. Pandemic control and mitigation within long-term care institutions was considered a priority issue in most countries of the Latin American and Caribbean region. Measures and protocols were established to prevent infections in long-term care centres.

C. Neglect, abuse and violence

55. Older persons have the right to freedom from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, in both private and public settings. Older women, older persons with disabilities, older Indigenous Peoples, older persons in rural and remote areas, older persons in culturally and linguistically diverse communities and older LGBTQ+ are at greater risk owing to overlapping inequalities that create and compound deprivation and disadvantage. Also experiencing higher risk of neglect, abuse and violence are older persons in forced displacement and conflict settings, hospitals, prisons, caregiving establishments and mental health institutions. Data show that large variations exist between and within regions in the extent to which Member States are committed and have been able to progress in combating elder abuse. While Governments have adopted diverse approaches in response, such as the introduction of laws and policies, they have been neither systemic nor transformative against a backdrop of persisting significant challenges in implementation and the provision of adequate resources.

56. In the African region, Kenya established a rescue centre for vulnerable older persons, while Nigeria put in place an anti-elder abuse mechanism. ECLAC emphasized progress on data related to the perception of discrimination and violence against older persons within statistical systems. In the Caribbean, a national anti-elder abuse programme coordinating committee in Barbados seeks to raise public awareness of elder abuse.

57. ECE noted that most actions in the region focused on awareness-raising and training. Governments organized information campaigns, published educational leaflets or increased awareness of violence and abuse through workshops or cultural events. Training on identifying violence and abuse against older persons was provided to various groups of professionals who interact with older persons. Some Member States, such as Canada, adopted stricter legislation with respect to fraud targeting older persons.

58. Some countries in the ESCAP region have enacted legislation to prevent domestic violence, which may advance the rights and safety of men and women of all ages, but often fall short in addressing several challenges experienced by older persons due to the prevalence of ageist stereotypes, prejudice and age discrimination within the justice system.

59. ESCWA emphasizes that most cases of elder abuse go unreported for a variety of reasons including shame and a common reaction that perpetuates a culture of silence, which contributes to sustaining a disconnect between cultural pretensions and the reality surrounding elder abuse. Mechanisms adopted in the region include awareness-raising sessions, criminal penalties and reporting mechanisms. As in the ESCAP region, despite progress, the protection of older persons generally falls under domestic violence laws or under general law, with no dedicated legal protection for older persons.

D. Images of older persons and of ageing in society

60. The Madrid Plan of Action highlighted public focus on the scale and cost of health care, pensions and other services related to older persons, and how they are disproportionately portrayed as a drain on the economy. The Madrid Plan of Action emphasized that images of older persons as attractive, diverse and creative individuals making vital contributions should compete for the public's attention and that promoting a positive view of ageing and of older persons is an integral aspect in the successful implementation of the Plan. Two decades later, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons drew attention to the manifestations of ageism in the lived realities of older persons (see [A/HRC/48/53](#)), all of which reinforce exclusionary practices at the local and national levels.

61. Appreciating the vast diversity in the situation of older persons, not only between countries but also within them and between individuals, is essential to directly inform policy actions by helping policymakers to identify the supports that older persons need to participate, such as access to assistive technologies, personal assistance, or changes to infrastructure and the built environment that improve accessibility.¹⁰ Programmes in this direction exist, but regional reviews show that greater effort needs to be devoted to this issue. In the ESCWA region, challenges include a lack of unified national information strategies geared towards breaking negative stereotypes around older persons. ECA highlights the absence of actions to improve the recognition of contributions of older persons to their communities. Older persons should be treated fairly regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, disability or other status, and be valued independently of their social and economic contribution.¹¹

62. Examples of actions in Africa include the establishment of a unifying framework for organizations of older persons in Senegal and the recognition of older persons in

¹⁰ Morris, Madans and Mont, "Measuring the autonomy, participation, and contribution of older people".

¹¹ See General Assembly resolution [46/91](#).

the context of communities and traditional leadership in Malawi. In the European region, various initiatives were undertaken, including awareness-raising campaigns, competitions, public dialogue and cultural events. Many of these received further impetus due to the stigmatization of old age during the COVID-19 pandemic.

63. Several countries in the Asia-Pacific region described actions towards increasing public recognition of older persons in society. Awareness-raising and educational programmes were also implemented by several countries in the ESCWA region, including Algeria and Oman.

64. Regional commissions emphasized the role played by the media in guiding public opinion, including images surrounding older persons and ageing, and several examples were put forward of efforts to counter negative stereotypes perpetuated by the media.

VI. Conclusions and recommendations

65. **Population ageing was introduced by Governments in international discussions at the first World Assembly on Ageing, held in Vienna in 1982. Once considered by many as a stand-alone issue, population ageing has since been recognized as a powerful demographic trend with profound consequences for every aspect of life and society. Twenty years ago, 159 Governments gathered in Madrid for the Second World Assembly on Ageing and adopted a bold agenda to reorient the ways in which Governments, non-governmental organizations and other actors respond to population ageing and to enable the full and equal participation of older persons in their communities. Today, the fourth review and appraisal of its implementation, with the engagement of Member States where a majority of persons in the world aged 60 and over reside, stresses that the Madrid Plan of Action serves as a guide to action in the field of global ageing. At a time when older persons grapple with old and new challenges, the principles and objectives of the Plan have shown themselves to remain valid.**

66. **The fourth review and appraisal cycle took place against the backdrop of a devastating COVID-19 pandemic, which directly or indirectly cost the lives of over 12 million older persons in 24 months, more than half of them in lower-middle-income countries. The crisis laid bare the multiple risks faced by many older persons and the ways in which these interact and are exacerbated by age-based discrimination. The pandemic was a wake-up call for many Member States, increasing their awareness of issues pertaining to older persons, and led to the adoption of targeted initiatives to address their needs during the pandemic, yet the fourth review and appraisal shows that much remains to be done to fulfil the goal in the Madrid Plan of Action of building a society for all ages.**

67. **One of the most salient conclusions from the fourth review and appraisal is that great disparities exist among and within regions in the rate of implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, in the focus of countries and regions around the issue of population ageing, and on what constitutes an emerging issue or an ongoing challenge in each context. Meaningful participation of older persons in recovery efforts from the pandemic and other crises, including the climate crisis, the energy crisis and conflicts, as well as the targeted inclusion of older persons in the digital revolution, are some of the emerging issues that the international community needs to consider in the context of the Plan's implementation. Other issues, such as poverty, weak social protection systems, limited access to health care and health services, and increasing concerns around long-term care and care work, are not new, yet they remain at the centre in many countries and need to be addressed as we embark towards the**

next cycle. The conclusion of the fifth review and appraisal exercise will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Second World Assembly on Ageing and is therefore a pivotal year for the accelerated realization of the Political Declaration and Madrid Plan of Action.

68. Progress in the implementation of different areas of the Madrid Plan of Action is reported by all regions but tends to vary significantly depending on the respective levels of implementation of the Plan and on the context. Nonetheless, the review and appraisal process at the national and regional levels has also revealed that many of the challenges in the implementation of the Plan, as well as progress on it, identified in the three previous global review and appraisal cycles persist and seemingly affect all regions to various degrees.

69. Inadequate national institutions and institutional mechanisms remain a concern for many Member States. A lack of human and financial resources, the absence of legal and policy frameworks or the failure to implement existing ones, and insufficient inter-agency cooperation and coordination hamper efforts at the national level to place older persons on the political agenda and to focus on their needs and aspirations. In some regional contexts, knowledge and use of the Madrid Plan of Action by policymakers and other stakeholders remain limited. There is a pressing need to mainstream issues relevant to population ageing and older persons across government and to adapt existing systems, services and infrastructure to the realities of population ageing. Synergies and collaboration need to be created between the Madrid Plan of Action and other institutional structures at the national and regional levels, including those devoted to economic development and human rights.

70. The lack of a strong knowledge base and high-quality age-disaggregated data clouds policymaking on ageing issues. The collection, analysis, distribution and use of age-disaggregated data at the national and subnational levels remains a key challenge in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. Good-quality age-disaggregated data that incorporate the intersectionality of age and other grounds of discrimination are crucial to tracking, monitoring and evaluating progress of policies and strategies for the ageing population and to identifying their needs and contributions for policymaking. Support for initiatives such as the Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data needs to be strengthened in order to address these challenges in an inclusive, more formal and systematic way.

71. Age-based discrimination in institutions, attitudes and practices continues to be rampant, as exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting deficiencies in the implementation of international and national frameworks for older persons. The intersectionality of age and other inequalities suffered by older persons is still not adequately addressed, resulting in further discrimination towards older women, older persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants and LGBTQ+, among other groups of older persons. In the absence of human rights norms and standards particular to the situation of older persons at the international level, the ability to unpack the complexities and changing nature of discrimination and intersecting forms of inequality across the life course is limited.

72. Calls to accelerate the implementation of existing United Nations agreements in view of anticipated demographic trends include improving knowledge and understanding of the interests and needs of future generations. By 2050, the number of older persons is projected to be more than three times the number of children under age 5, and to be almost two-thirds higher than the number of young people worldwide. Longevity has increased in almost all

countries. Globally, babies born in 2022 are expected to live 72.3 years on average, 25 years longer than those born in 1950, yet the gap between the countries with the highest and the lowest life expectancy at birth is around 32 years.¹² The global consensus and political commitment to build a society for all ages reached by Governments at the Second World Assembly on Ageing is now more vital than ever.

73. The successful implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action is first and foremost the responsibility of Governments. National strategies, plans, policies and legislation are crucial in achieving this. While there has been progress in the past five years, the persistence of the same challenges over the 20 years of the implementation of the Plan constitutes a failure of “business as usual”. The findings from the fourth review and appraisal of the Plan, together with the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, urge Governments to act boldly and inject political will that regenerates commitments, leverages policy and legislative change, optimizes resources and maximizes deliverables for older persons. The 2023 Sustainable Development Goals Summit provides an opportunity to better capture the reality of population ageing and the concerns of older persons in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

74. The implementation of, inter alia, the Sustainable Development Goals Summit, the Summit of the Future and the proposed World Social Summit invites Member States to come together with the goal of keeping the compass pointed to the 2030 Agenda, implementing existing commitments and forging a consensus on what the future should look like. In the future, societies will be confronted with the reality of the rapid growth in the number and proportion of older persons (see figure II); thus, action must be taken now to ensure that current and future generations of older persons are full participants in the development process and are not denied the opportunity to share in its benefits. The Madrid Plan of Action, still forward-looking at 20, offers a solid foundation to bring about the far-reaching social, economic, environmental and political changes that are needed to fully ensure the enjoyment of human rights by older persons. Supplementing the Plan with a policy framework that is more explicit in its human rights language and expectations for States can help to accelerate those changes. The development of an international legal instrument on the human rights of older persons, as noted by some Governments in the ECA, ECLAC, ESCWA and ECE regions in their regional processes, would complement and reinforce the Plan and would be key to promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of older persons, including in any successor policy frameworks on ageing.

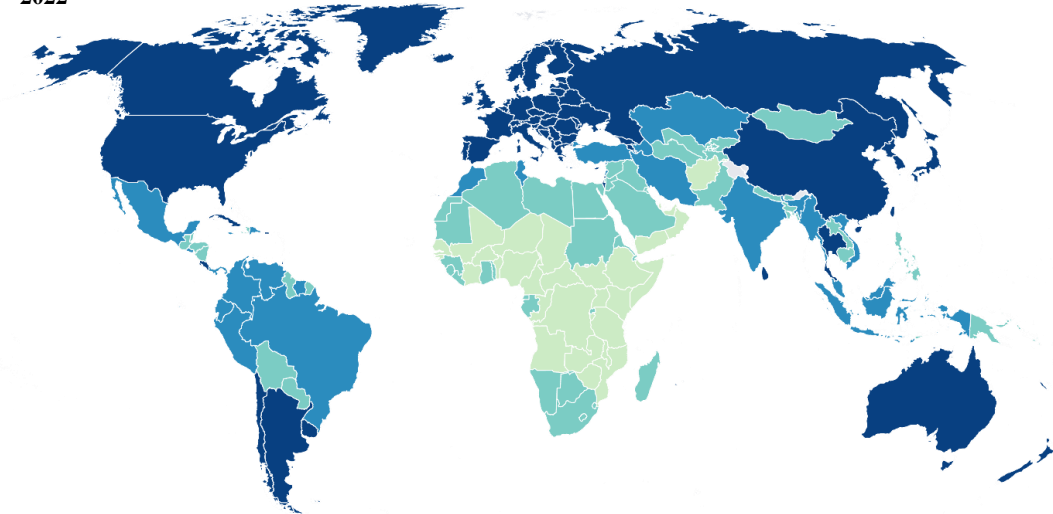
¹² United Nations, World Population Prospects 2022.

Figure II
Population ageing is a worldwide phenomenon; the number of persons aged 60 and over is projected to more than double by 2050 in about half of countries and areas

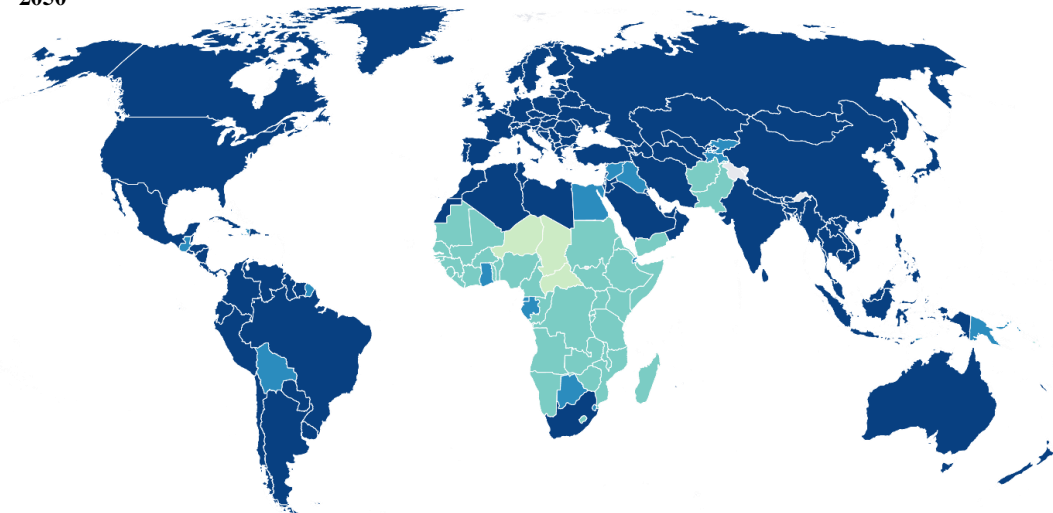
Percentage of population above 60 years old per country or area

■ <5% ■ 5% to 10% ■ 10% to 15% ■ >15% ■ No data

2022



2050



Source: United Nations, World Population Prospects 2022; visualization by the United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre.

Note: The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on the maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

75. Member States are encouraged to consider the following recommendations:

(a) **In response to the largely irreversible shift towards older populations and the collective actions and policy decisions needed to shape its impact, consider and make a recommendation on how best to utilize the year 2027, on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, so as to accelerate the realization of a society for all ages;**

(b) Consider the good practices and shortcomings identified in national and regional levels of review and appraisal in accelerating implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action;

(c) Work individually and collaboratively to promote and protect the human rights of older persons, including through efforts devoted to developing an international legal instrument;

(d) Request the regional commissions to continue to facilitate the accelerated implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action based on the priorities identified in the respective outcomes of the regional review and appraisal exercise, including through their intergovernmental bodies and the provision of capacity-building support to Member States, upon request, to ensure that ageing is mainstreamed into policy documents;

(e) The Madrid Plan of Action, the 2030 Agenda and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) complement each other. Member States are invited to focus on the synergies between them when reporting or reviewing and appraising the respective documents.
