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Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/147. It provides an analysis of the extent to which commitments made at the World Summit for Social Development align with demographic realities as Member States prepare for the Second World Summit for Social Development, which is scheduled to be held from 4 to 6 November 2025 in Doha.

In the report, prominence is given to the pillars of social development: eradication of poverty, expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment, and social integration. In the context of those pillars, attention is drawn to policy considerations in such areas as strengthening care and support systems; adapting to rapid technological innovations, including artificial intelligence; strengthening preparedness and response to global shocks, in particular those driven by climate change, such as heat stress and food insecurity; addressing age-based discrimination and elder abuse; promoting lifelong learning, including digital literacy; creating age-inclusive and adaptable workforces; and enhancing participation and engagement in community life. All of those considerations should be addressed at the Second World Summit for Social Development from the perspective of population ageing, taking into account the needs and experiences of older persons and the contributions that they make.

The report includes recommendations on the follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing, in which Member States are encouraged to mainstream ageing in social development, with a view to strengthening implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2022; address issues affecting older persons that will not be explicitly addressed at the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development; and ensure that older persons are fully included in the follow-up to the outcomes of the Summit.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 79/147 on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing. In that resolution, the General Assembly underscores the importance of accelerating efforts to link ageing to social development and mainstream it into national policies at all levels of government, where appropriate. The Assembly furthermore encourages Governments to actively address issues affecting older persons, including through international efforts, and to ensure that their social integration and the promotion and protection of their rights form an integral part of development policies at all levels. In addition, the Assembly calls upon Member States to raise awareness of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and identify key priority areas for its implementation, such as the empowerment of older persons, while bearing in mind the importance of solidarity and reciprocity for social development.

2. With preparations under way for the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held from 4 to 6 November 2025 in Doha, discussions on ageing are expected to gain further prominence. Those discussions have built on the key outcomes of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, namely, the Political Declaration and the Madrid Plan of Action, which provide a comprehensive road map for Governments and the international community to better address the needs and aspirations of older persons while leveraging the potential of an ageing population for the future.

3. At the World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, participants emphasized the importance of an enabling environment for social development, highlighting the need for, inter alia, good governance, integrated policies, market access and financial stability. Those elements set the context for and continue to be relevant in addressing the specific contributions and concerns of older persons. As societies around the world experience demographic shifts, the role of older persons is not confined to being recipients of support; they are active agents of progress who foster intergenerational solidarity, strengthen societal resilience and enhance the well-being of society as a whole.

4. Social development in an ageing world is addressed in section II of the present report, with an emphasis on policy considerations in areas of the three pillars of social development.

5. Section III features selected work done by members of the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Ageing. Recommendations for consideration by Member States are set out in section IV.

II. Social development in an ageing world

A. Eradication of poverty

6. In the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, adopted at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, Member States recognized the importance of eradicating poverty and called for the strengthening of social protection and support for those at risk of exclusion, including older persons.[1] Building on that foundation, it is clear that the eradication of poverty cannot be achieved without addressing the fundamental role that access to healthcare, income security and care and support systems play in ensuring the well-being of older persons. As individuals grow older,

[1] A/CONF.166/9, chap. 1, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

many begin to work less or stop working altogether, owing to health reasons, caregiving responsibilities or retirement at a statutory age. As a result, individuals increasingly depend on public income support, affordable healthcare and family support, combined with personal savings, to maintain their economic security. Nonetheless, many persons, in particular women and those with informal or interrupted work histories, receive inadequate pensions or do not have pensions, leaving them especially vulnerable to poverty in later life.

7. Universal social protection systems, including non-contributory pensions and universal health coverage, are essential to prevent poverty in old age. In many countries, however, these systems remain incomplete or underfunded. Globally, only 49.2 per cent of women and 63.2 per cent of men above retirement age receive a contributory pension, and coverage through tax-financed pensions remains significantly lower at 34.2 per cent for women and 26.9 per cent for men.[2] At the same time, older persons face a higher risk of catastrophic health spending because of greater healthcare needs and lower incomes. Social protection floors that guarantee access to essential healthcare services and basic income security are a vital starting point. Without those, older persons are left to rely on limited family support or out-of-pocket spending, which exacerbates inequality and undermines well-being.

8. Investing in universal social protection and health coverage is essential for economic resilience. The cost of inaction includes deepening inequality, lost productivity and increased hardship among ageing populations. Advancing progress in social protection and health requires sustained political will and increased domestic financing, in particular in low- and middle-income countries, where large coverage and adequacy gaps remain.[3] Establishing resilient social protection floors can help prevent poverty across the life course, improve population health and ensure that older persons can live with dignity, autonomy and security.

9. Strengthening care and support systems is not only a matter of social protection, but also an investment in economic stability and poverty reduction. Within comprehensive social protection systems, care and support systems, including long-term care, are critical to ensuring the economic and social inclusion of older persons. As the global population ages and life expectancy rises, reaching 73.5 years globally in 2025 and a projected 77 years by 2050, the need for long-term care is rising rapidly.[4] By the late 2050s, more than half of all global deaths are expected to occur at age 80 or older, compared with just 17 per cent in 1995. Many countries, however, lack adequate frameworks to provide care and support services. Without sufficient public investment, older persons, in particular those living in poverty, face heightened risks of economic and social exclusion, exacerbating existing inequalities.

10. Care and support systems, despite their critical role, remain undervalued and underfunded. Much of the essential support provided within households and communities, in particular unpaid care, is invisible in conventional economic measurements and therefore excluded from economic planning and policy development. For example, women and girls alone perform unpaid care work valued at approximately $10.8 trillion annually, an amount three times greater than the worth

[2] International Labour Organization (ILO), *World Social Protection Report 2024–2026: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition* (Geneva, 2024).

[3] Ibid.

[4] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “World Population Prospects 2024”. Available at https://population.un.org/wpp/.

of the global technology industry, yet traditional indicators, such as gross domestic product (GDP), fail to capture this contribution.[5]

11. Women in particular bear a disproportionate share of unpaid care responsibilities, performing three times as much unpaid care work as men while also comprising 70 per cent of the paid care workforce. If current trends persist, by 2050, women will continue to spend an additional 2.5 hours per day on unpaid care work compared with men. The economic valuation of unpaid care contributions is estimated to account for a median of 10 per cent of global GDP.[6] The absence of formal care infrastructure not only limits economic opportunities for caregivers, but also forces many households to rely on unpaid family support, thereby increasing financial strain on families and informal caregivers.

12. A more equitable, person-centred approach to care and support systems that is tailored to the needs, values and preferences of both care recipients and caregivers is essential. While including funding in national and local budgets is vital to ensuring access to such systems, additional private and solidarity-based financing mechanisms are needed to meet growing demand.[7]

13. The increasing demand for care is especially evident among the oldest age groups. For example, in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, 53 per cent of those aged 85 to 89 experience limitations in daily living activities, compared with 13 per cent of those aged 65 to 69.[8] Workforce shortages remain a major barrier, however. Demand for long-term care workers in OECD countries is projected to increase by 32 per cent over the next decade, with population ageing alone accounting for 22 per cent of that growth.[9] Without improvements in wages, training and working conditions, many countries will struggle to recruit and retain long-term care workers, further increasing reliance on unpaid caregivers and deepening financial insecurity, in particular for women.

14. Governments should prioritize strengthening the long-term care workforce, expanding access to affordable home-based and community care services and recognizing unpaid care work through compensation and policy reforms. Integrating long-term care into social protection systems is critical for reducing poverty among both caregivers and older persons while improving economic stability.

15. Without adequate investment, the growing demand for care will exacerbate economic disparities, weaken social stability and leave millions of older persons without essential support. The economic cost of inaction, including lost productivity, rising healthcare expenditures and increasing poverty rates, will far exceed the investment needed to create sustainable care and support systems today. Expanding long-term care services is not only a public health necessity, but also a key strategy for poverty reduction, ensuring financial security for older persons and their caregivers while fostering more resilient and equitable societies.

[5] Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Financing Care Infrastructure: An Opportunity for Public Development Banks to Pave the Way for Tomorrow's Equality* (New York, February 2025).

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Beyond Applause? Improving Working Conditions in Long-Term Care*, (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2023).

[9] Ibid.

B. Expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment

16. In the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action, it is recognized that expanding productive employment and reducing unemployment are essential to fostering economic growth and social stability. In today's evolving labour market, demographic ageing, technological transformation and shifting workforce demands require renewed policy commitments to ensure that older persons have the opportunity to continue contributing, if they choose to and are able to do so. While longer working lives present opportunities for economic participation and intergenerational knowledge transfer, they also pose challenges related to skills obsolescence, workplace adaptation and employment security.

17. Lifelong learning is fundamental for sustaining employment in the face of technological change, including the acceleration of artificial intelligence development and automation. Many older workers, however, face barriers to continued education, including limited access to training, financial constraints and workplace discrimination. Despite the growing need for digital proficiency, younger workers are often prioritized in reskilling initiatives, leaving older employees with fewer opportunities to adapt. Without targeted investment, older persons face an increased risk of premature labour force exit, reduced financial security and social exclusion.

18. A person's occupation, job security and working conditions have a significant effect on well-being in later life. While the relationship between employment and health outcomes depends on job quality and access to social protection, unemployment is widely associated with increased risks of financial hardship, social isolation and psychological stress. In many countries in which social protection systems are not comprehensive, older workers face greater financial insecurity.[10] Globally, only 46.9 per cent of the population is covered by at least one social protection benefit, leaving 4.1 billion people unprotected.[11] Many older workers, in particular those in precarious or informal employment, have little to no financial security and remain excluded from stable job opportunities.

19. Digital literacy is increasingly a prerequisite for employment, from online applications to remote work and artificial intelligence-assisted collaboration tools. Many older persons, however, in particular those in lower-income or rural settings, continue to experience digital exclusion, limiting their ability to engage in an evolving digital economy. Fostering multigenerational workforces enhances productivity, drives innovation and strengthens business performance. Contrary to the misconception that hiring older workers limits opportunities for younger ones, evidence suggests that higher employment rates among older workers correlate with increased employment opportunities for younger cohorts.[12] This intergenerational cooperation strengthens workforce resilience, continuity and knowledge-sharing, with estimates indicating that inclusive workforces could increase GDP per capita by 19 per cent over the next three decades.[13]

20. While the digital economy holds significant potential for inclusion and empowerment, many older persons remain economically sidelined due to persistent gaps in digital and financial literacy. Research indicates that overall levels of digital

[10] *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World* (United Nations publication, 2023).

[11] Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, "*Intergenerational relations: creating a world for all ages so that no one is left behind*", LC/TS.2024/87, 2024.

[12] OECD, *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2020).

[13] Ibid.

and financial literacy tend to be lower in developing countries compared with those in developed countries.[14] Older persons, women, individuals with lower incomes and those with limited formal education face particular disadvantages. In many developing economies, persons aged 65 years or over have among the lowest financial literacy rates of any age group, making them especially vulnerable to online financial exploitation.[15]

21. In addition to limiting employment opportunities, digital exclusion also affects access to essential services, such as telemedicine, online banking and emergency alerts. The growing prevalence of online fraud can further discourage digital engagement, reinforcing cycles of exclusion. Concerns about financial loss may deter some older persons from adopting online services, while others who do engage may lack the skills to recognize and avoid digital risks. Many continue to rely on traditional communication channels and support from family networks, because they lack the digital skills needed to navigate online services independently.

22. Digital fraud is becoming more sophisticated, with artificial intelligence tools being used to generate scams, phishing attempts and social engineering tactics designed to deceive users, including older persons. Individuals experiencing cognitive decline or reduced psychological well-being, or those who have lower levels of financial and health literacy, may face heightened risks. Perpetrators often exploit trust and limited awareness of digital threats through impersonation and fraudulent schemes, resulting in financial loss and emotional distress.

23. Those challenges highlight the importance of coordinated action across sectors, in particular by employers, to promote inclusive, age-responsive work environments. The private sector plays a key role in advancing age-inclusive policies and fostering adaptable workforces that reflect the diversity of their customer base and society at large. Retaining experienced talent is as essential as attracting new workers. Programmes such as phased retirement, returnships and access to career and financial planning opportunities can support workforce retention. Flexible working arrangements help prevent burnout, accommodate caregiving responsibilities and promote lifelong learning. Structural disparities in access to training persist, however, with younger, more highly qualified and full-time workers more likely to benefit from such opportunities than older, lower-skilled and part-time workers.[16] Expanding lifelong learning and ensuring its accessibility across all skill levels and employment types will contribute to a more equitable and sustainable workforce.

24. The rapid expansion of artificial intelligence and automation is transforming industries and reshaping employment structures, raising concerns about job displacement and potential age-based discrimination. Older workers may face increased risks of unemployment and financial insecurity as automation reshapes the labour market. Artificial intelligence-driven hiring and workforce management systems may reinforce age-related bias and undervalue experience-based competencies, making it harder for older job seekers to compete.[17] Without targeted interventions, such technologies risk exacerbating workforce exclusion rather than advancing labour market participation for older persons.

25. Moreover, digitization and automation have contributed to the growth of short-term contracts, “gig work” and non-standard employment, which often lack stability,

[14] United Nations Development Programme, *Anti-Scam Handbook v1.0: Collective Response and Tools to Safeguard Development* (Singapore, UNDP Policy Centre, 2024).

[15] Ibid.

[16] OECD, *Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer.*

[17] Justyna Stypinska, “AI ageism: a critical roadmap for studying age discrimination and exclusion in digitalized societies”, *AI & Society*, No. 38 (April 2023), pp. 665–677.

benefits and social protection.[18] Older workers, in particular those in lower-skilled roles, may be disproportionately affected and face a greater likelihood of entering insecure work arrangements with unstable incomes and fewer social protections. These precarious work conditions not only increase economic insecurity but may also exacerbate existing age-related vulnerabilities in the labour market.

26. When effectively leveraged, technology holds significant potential to promote workplaces that enable broader participation for all workers. Artificial intelligence-powered tools can enhance flexibility and reduce physical strain, while assistive technologies that incorporate artificial intelligence can help promote independence and productivity, enabling older workers, including those with disabilities, to remain productive across a range of roles.[19] Similarly, artificial intelligence-based learning platforms can support personalized reskilling and upskilling, providing tailored training pathways that help older persons transition into new roles and maintain competitiveness in a changing labour market.

27. In order to ensure that older workers benefit from technological advancements rather than being displaced by them, Governments and employers should take proactive measures. Regulatory safeguards are needed to prevent algorithmic bias in hiring and workplace management, while investment in artificial intelligence-powered adaptive training and employment protections can facilitate smoother transitions for older workers. Expanding flexible employment options, including remote and hybrid work, in conjunction with the use artificial intelligence-assisted collaboration tools, can enhance workforce retention and support intergenerational knowledge exchange. Artificial intelligence should be designed as a mechanism for empowerment, ensuring that decent and productive employment remains accessible to workers of all age groups in an increasingly digital economy.

28. By prioritizing lifelong learning, equitable workforce policies and technology that is accessible and adaptable to different needs, Governments and businesses can help foster resilient, multigenerational labour markets. Ensuring that productive employment remains open to individuals of all ages is essential for advancing economic sustainability and reinforcing social cohesion in an ageing world.

C. Social integration

29. In the Programme of Action, social integration is defined as the "capacity of people to live together with full respect for the dignity of each individual, the common good, pluralism and diversity, non-violence and solidarity, as well as their ability to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life, encompasses all aspects of social development and all policies".[20] The aim of the Copenhagen Declaration and of the Programme of Action is a society for all, making that the primary goal of social integration. In 2002, seven years after the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action, the Madrid Plan of Action laid the foundation for a society for all ages and specifically addressed the needs and contributions of older persons.[21]

30. As the global population becomes older, frameworks aimed at promoting social integration must be adapted to incorporate the age perspective in order to remain

[18] *World Social Report 2023*.

[19] United Nations Regional Information Centre for Western Europe, "Building an accessible future for all: AI and the inclusion of persons with disabilities". Available at https://unric.org/en/building-an-accessible-future-for-all-ai-and-the-inclusion-of-persons-with-disabilities/.

[20] See A/CONF.166/9, chap. 1, resolution 1, annex II, para. 2.

[21] A/CONF.197/9, chap. 1, resolution 1, annex II.

inclusive and be effective. Although the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action prominently featured the elimination of all forms of discrimination as key for social development, they did not specifically address age-based discrimination and its consequences. At the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Member States recognized that tackling age discrimination is essential to ensuring the dignity of older persons and creating inclusive societies. They also noted that, when age bias intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as those based on gender or disability, older persons experience additional vulnerabilities that further hamper their full integration in society.

31. Age-based discrimination not only diminishes the quality of life of older persons, but is also likely to intensify social isolation and loneliness and increase the risk of elder abuse.[22] Despite the widespread prevalence of elder abuse, analyses show that very few countries provide clear and explicit guarantees of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of age. Evidence indicates that both international and national human rights systems have been less effective in addressing age discrimination compared with other forms of discrimination.[23] Eliminating discrimination against and removing barriers that exclude older persons, including prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices on the part of individuals and institutions, is critical to achieving the social integration of older persons in society. Accordingly, in effective social development policies, age should be considered a key factor in understanding discrimination and social exclusion.

32. In the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action, it is recognized that violence, in its many forms, poses a serious threat to the safety and well-being of individuals, families and communities. In those documents, the participants in the World Summit for Social Development called for the introduction and implementation of policies and programmes aimed at preventing all forms of violence, with particular attention to domestic violence, including against older persons. Addressing violence was identified as central to strengthening social integration of all individuals. The authors of the Madrid Plan of Action emphasized that neglect, abuse and violence against older persons can be physical, psychological, emotional, or financial in nature and can occur in all social, economic, ethnic and geographical settings. In addition, they emphasized that older women, in particular, face heightened risks of both physical and psychological abuse owing to persistent inequalities and discriminatory societal attitudes.

33. In many regions around the world, elder abuse frequently remains underestimated, overlooked and insufficiently addressed. Once regarded as a private matter and rarely discussed publicly, elder abuse continues to be a sensitive and often overlooked issue. There is increasing evidence, however, that elder abuse is a critical public health and societal challenge. Data reveal substantial disparities, both between and within regions, in the commitment of Member States and in the progress that they have made in addressing elder abuse. While Governments have adopted diverse responses, including the introduction of new laws and policies, many of these measures remain fragmented and undersourced, limiting their impact.[24] Strengthening the participation and social integration of older persons in ageing societies requires sustained and well-funded policy responses to prevent and address elder abuse in institutional, community and family settings.

34. As essential services, civic engagement and daily activities increasingly rely on digital platforms, access to technology and digital literacy has become vital for the safety, independence and engagement of older persons. Financial exploitation,

[22] World Health Organization, *Global Report on Ageism* (Geneva 2021).
[23] A/HRC/49/70.
[24] E/CN.5/2023/6.

including online scams, is an area of growing concern, in particular for those with limited command of the digital skills needed to navigate online environments securely. In addition to preventing fraud, access to technology also enables older persons to maintain social connections, access healthcare, manage finances and stay informed. Such barriers as unaffordability, lack of accessible design and ageist assumptions about technological abilities, however, continue to limit access. Promoting digital literacy, including fraud awareness, and user-friendly platforms and tailored training can help expand opportunities for older persons to participate fully in all aspects of social and economic life.

35. Supporting participation across all ages groups is important to advancing social development that is responsive to demographic change. In the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action, engagement in social, cultural, economic and political life are recognized as fundamental to social integration, but the structural barriers that may restrict the involvement of older persons are not fully addressed. In the Madrid Plan of Action, the importance of such participation to the health, growth and well-being of older persons is emphasized. Its authors promoted the inclusion of older persons in decision-making processes and called for the creation of representative organizations where they are absent.

36. Engagement in community life reinforces the inherent dignity of every individual, regardless of the perceived or actual value that the individual's contributions may have, and is vital for social cohesion and social development. The Madrid Plan of Action further underscored that the contribution of older persons went far beyond economic activities, highlighting their vital roles in families, volunteer efforts and unpaid care, in particular by older women. Advancing social integration in an ageing world entails a coordinated policy response that enables older persons to engage meaningfully across all areas of society. Doing so also involves addressing persistent stereotypes and updating indicators that may fail to capture the full scope of their contributions.[25]

37. In addition to fostering participation, digital access plays an increasingly important role in ensuring protection and resilience, in particular during crises, whether economic, environmental or health-related. Older persons who face barriers to connectivity may encounter challenges in receiving timely emergency information, gaining access to services or managing daily activities. Enhancing digital access is therefore not only a matter of improving participation, but also a key component of strengthening preparedness and response in the face of global shocks, including those driven by climate change.

38. Climate change presents growing challenges that affect all populations, with older persons experiencing specific risks owing to their health status, living conditions and economic circumstances. These risks are shaped not only by the immediate effects of climate hazards but also by their cumulative impact on health, livelihoods and access to essential services.

39. The health effects of climate change have intensified in recent decades. In the period 2014–2023, heat-related mortality among individuals aged 65 or over increased by 106 per cent when compared with the period 1990–1999. That increase far exceeds projections based on stable climate scenarios. By 2023, the number of heat-related deaths among older persons was 167 per cent higher than the 1990–1999 baseline.[26] These figures highlight the need for more targeted health protection

[25] A/79/157.

[26] Marina Romanella and others, "The 2024 report of the *Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change: facing record-breaking threats from delayed action", *The Lancet*, vol. 404, No. 10465 (November 2024).

strategies and stronger integration of ageing-related considerations in climate adaptation frameworks.

40. The economic effects of climate change are also particularly pronounced for older populations. Older persons engaged in subsistence agriculture, in particular older women, face heightened risks when climate-related disruptions or adaptation measures, such as planned relocation or agricultural land conversion, affect traditional livelihoods. For instance, households headed by older persons have experienced average annual income losses of approximately 3 per cent from flooding and 6 per cent from heat stress.[27] Older persons in disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions are more likely to reside in inadequate housing and face barriers in gaining accessing to comprehensive healthcare services, including preventive, promotive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative care. During climate related crises, these factors can result in comparatively greater effects on older persons than on younger individuals or those with more economic means. This dynamic may contribute to a cycle in which poverty further increases vulnerability to climate risks and deepens existing socioeconomic inequalities.

41. Climate-related shifts are also contributing to growing food insecurity, with the number of people experiencing acute food insecurity rising from 135 million in 2019 to 345 million in 82 countries by mid-2022.[28] Older persons, in particular those with limited income or living in poverty, face heightened risks of malnutrition, chronic illnesses and reduced autonomy. In times of scarcity, households may prioritize the nutritional needs of younger members, leaving older persons especially vulnerable. These risks are compounded by physical barriers and exclusion from relief efforts. Meanwhile, global warming, in the form of more frequent heatwaves, heavy rainfall and droughts, combined with unsustainable food production practices, which account for roughly one third of global greenhouse gas emissions and are major drivers of methane emissions and biodiversity loss, places increasing stress on food systems, disrupts supply chains drives up food costs and deepens health and nutritional risks for older populations.[29]

42. High temperatures also have significant negative impact on labour productivity, in particular individuals working in exposed environments. Older persons are especially sensitive to heat stress, owing to lower physiological resistance. This reality presents considerable occupational challenges for older persons, because they represent a growing share of the workforce, reflecting broader trends in population ageing. By 2030, it is projected that more than 2 per cent of total working hours globally will be lost owing to heat-related impacts or the need for slower work, with older workers disproportionately affected. In Southern Asia and Western Africa, productivity losses could reach as high as 5 per cent.[30] Heat stress is often accompanied by other vulnerabilities and is more prevalent in countries facing deficits in decent work, including social protection, high informality and working poverty. These challenges can intensify migration pressures and further strain economic stability and social cohesion, potentially limiting the ability of older persons to remain engaged and supported within their communities.[31]

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[27] Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The Unjust Climate: Measuring the Impact of Climate Change on Rural Poor, Women and Youth* (Rome, 2023).

[28] World Bank Group, “What you need to know about food security and climate change”, 17 October 2022.

[29] Ibid.

[30] ILO, *Working on a warmer planet: The impact of heat stress on labour productivity and decent work* (Geneva, International Labour Office, 2019).

[31] Ibid.

43. Integrating ageing into climate and development policies through a comprehensive and people-centred approach can help safeguard the well-being of older persons, support their participation in an increasingly interconnected society and ensure their inclusion in resilience-building efforts.

III. United Nations system: updates and initiatives to advance ageing issues

44. With a view to building momentum towards the Second World Summit for Social Development, the United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Ageing prepared a brief highlighting the importance of integrating population ageing and older persons and their human rights into the outcome document.[32] In parallel, a report entitled "On the road to the Second World Summit for Social Development: contributions from the regional commissions", prepared jointly by the regional commissions of the United Nations, brings together regional perspectives and policy recommendations to address persistent social development challenges. The need for strengthened social protection systems and intergenerational solidarity are emphasized in the report.

45. The seventeenth meeting of the Standing Working Group on Ageing of the Economic Commission for Europe, held in Geneva from 20 to 22 November 2024, served as a key platform for advancing discussions on population ageing in the context of the upcoming Second World Summit for Social Development. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs programme on ageing participated in the meeting and contributed to related discussions. Throughout 2024, the programme on ageing co-organized and took part in several events aimed at advancing attention to ageing-related issues, including side events at the sixty-third session of the Commission for Social Development and the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Population and Development.

46. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) contributed actively to preparations for the Second World Summit for Social Development through several initiatives focused on ageing and intergenerational solidarity. It developed a publicly accessible repository of ageing policies and good practices covering 30 countries and territories in the region, on the basis of survey responses, additional research and inputs from national counterparts. The repository demonstrates that while most countries have ageing-related policies or action plans, gaps remain, in particular with regard to long-term care, income security and gender-responsive ageing measures. To bridge the digital divide, ESCAP launched a project entitled "Developing tools to increase digital literacy of older persons". As part of that project, a regional meeting that brought together policymakers, academia and older persons' associations was held in 2024, with a view to identifying effective strategies for strengthening digital skills. At the eighth session of the Committee on Social Development of ESCAP, held in October 2024, the Commission produced a background paper and organized a panel discussion on demographic trends and intergenerational relations, promoting life-course approaches to ageing. In February 2025, ESCAP co-organized a regional event linked to the twelfth Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development, fostering multisector collaboration and highlighting the region's priorities ahead of the Second World Summit for Social Development.

[32] United Nations Inter-Agency Group on Ageing, "Advancing the inclusion of population ageing, older persons and their human rights: Considerations towards the Second World Summit for Social Development outcome", 10 February 2025. Available at https://social.desa.un.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/FINAL_WSSD2_Joint%20UN%20IAGA%20Advocacy%20Brief_Feb2025.pdf.

47. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) undertook several initiatives to support preparations for the Second World Summit for Social Development, with a focus on regional priorities, including the well-being of older persons. It prepared a paper on the position of the Arab region that includes a section on ageing, and it developed a policy brief outlining key actions to empower and support older persons. ESCWA and the Executive Bureau of the of the Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf co-organized a preparatory meeting to strengthen engagement at the national, regional and global levels at which ageing populations emerged as a key theme. In addition, ESCWA organized a ministerial-level discussion at the 2025 Arab Forum for Sustainable Development and it is collaborating with the League of Arab States and United Nations entities, including the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, to convene an Arab regional high-level meeting to define shared priorities for the Second World Summit for Social Development.

48. In 2024, the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, in collaboration with nine other United Nations entities, Member States, civil society, academia and multi-stakeholder networks, marked the third year of the virtual round table series entitled “Mainstreaming knowledge on ageing” by holding five events exploring the quality of life of older persons. The focus of the fourth instalment of the series, which runs from May to November 2025, is advancing the human rights of older persons amid converging global crises. Special attention is being given to frontier issues, including demographic change, gender, human mobility, the digital divide and climate change.

49. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) contributes to broader efforts to promote social inclusion by addressing vulnerabilities and protection gaps affecting older persons. The Office supports Member States in reforming criminal justice systems, strengthening legal frameworks to combat organized fraud targeting older individuals and improving access to age-responsive legal aid. Recent activities include developing a legislative guide on fraud, organizing a regional workshop on legal aid in Southern Africa and collaborating with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the Model Protocol for Law Enforcement Officials to Promote and Protect Human Rights in the Context of Peaceful Protests, which emphasizes protections for individuals in vulnerable situations, including older persons, during peaceful protests.

50. The World Tourism Organization (UN Tourism) promotes tourism for older persons as a tool for social and cultural integration through the lens of universal accessibility, recognizing that older travellers often develop disabilities or have specific access requirements. Older persons are one of the key target groups of a UN Tourism series of publications on how to apply International Organization of Standardization standards on accessible tourism, which provides guidelines for mainstreaming accessibility across public administrations, tourism destinations and businesses, transport operators and other stakeholders involved in creating nature- and culture-based tourism experiences.

51. The World Health Organization (WHO) contributes to broader efforts aligned with objectives of the Second World Summit for Social Development by coordinating implementation of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030). As part of that effort, WHO is helping countries foster enabling environments by promoting age-friendly cities and communities, offering targeted training and establishing hubs to advance knowledge on ageism and social connection. In the area of poverty eradication, various WHO initiatives, such as the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism and Global Intergenerational Week, promote solidarity across generations. With regard to employment, WHO is developing global and regional

guidance to support unpaid carers and ensure that their needs are reflected in long-term care systems. To promote social integration, WHO is addressing social isolation and loneliness through the WHO Commission on Social Connection, which will soon release a flagship report on effective interventions. WHO is also identifying and helping scale up promising practices to prevent the abuse of older persons.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

52. Since the convening of the World Summit for Social Development and the adoption of its Political Declaration and Programme of Action, transformative changes have reshaped global priorities. Several global frameworks have addressed many emerging challenges and opportunities. However, they have often overlooked a critical trend shaping our world: population ageing. The global population aged 60 years or over has increased from around 541 million in 1995 to 1.2 billion in 2025, and it is projected to reach 2.1 billion by 2050. The most rapid increase in the older population is expected to occur in developing countries, which will account for the majority of older persons within the next 30 years.[33]

53. Amid uncertainties about the future, from the rapid pace of technological innovations, such as artificial intelligence, to the lasting effects of climate change, it is clear that, while much remains unpredictable, the ageing of all populations is a well-established trend. Marked by longer lifespans and changing age structures, population ageing demands a rethinking of national planning and policy approaches to fully harness its full potential and integrate it as a key aspect of social development strategies. The effect of population ageing on social development, whether as a catalyst for progress or a challenge to overcome, will be determined by the choices policymakers make today.

54. The adoption of the Madrid Plan of Action and the Political Declaration at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 marked a pivotal moment, placing population ageing, older persons and their human rights at the forefront of international efforts and coordination. As Member States prepare to convene for the Second World Summit for Social Development, integrating population ageing into political commitments is essential to bridging existing gaps, leveraging new opportunities and promoting healthy longevity alongside equitable social development in an ageing world.

55. Creating an enabling environment for social development requires explicitly considering the impact of population ageing. In this context, poverty eradication policies must be underpinned by disaggregated data that reveal the distinct circumstances of all societal groups, thus enabling policymakers to address them and ensuring that older persons are not left behind. The future of productive employment and decent work will inevitably look different in a world characterized by extended longevity and shifting age structures. Moreover, it is only by understanding how these demographic changes reshape our communities and our social fabric that we can foster genuine social integration.

56. In addition to the commitments already established under the Copenhagen Declaration and the Programme of Action, Member States can embrace the multifaceted opportunities and challenges posed by an ageing world by ensuring that policies are as dynamic and forward-looking as the changes that they are meant to address, incorporating population ageing not as an afterthought, but as a central issue,

[33] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects 2024*.

and recognizing older persons as a distinct group with specific characteristics and needs that require targeted interventions.

57. Ultimately, the success of these transformative policies hinges on the full participation of older persons in decision-making and policy planning. Confronting age-based discrimination and its far-reaching consequences head-on is not merely a policy imperative but a moral one, ensuring that all members of society are empowered to contribute to and benefit from sustainable social development.

58. **The General Assembly may, therefore, wish to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Encourage Member States to take steps towards mainstreaming ageing within social development efforts in order to strengthen the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002;**

(b) **Urge Member States to continue highlighting and advancing issues of importance to older persons within the framework of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and in the lead-up to the Second World Summit for Social Development;**

(c) **Emphasize the need for Member States to ensure that older persons are fully included in the implementation of the outcomes of the Second World Summit for Social Development, with the commitment that no older person is left behind.**