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**Review of issues pertinent to the subsidiary structure
of the Commission, including the work of the regional
institutions: social development****Preparations for the third regional review of the
Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Asia
and the Pacific****Note by the secretariat***Summary*

Population ageing is one of the key challenges to achieving sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific region. Adequate policies to address population ageing must be adopted in time to prepare for this changing demographic situation.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, is the guiding document of the United Nations to address population ageing. The Plan of Action is complementary to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and it contains three priority areas of critical importance to meet the challenges associated with rapid population ageing: older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and ensuring enabling and supportive environments. The key objective of the Plan of Action is to promote a development approach to population ageing by mainstreaming the needs of older persons into international and national development plans and policies across all sectors, thereby ensuring that older persons are not left behind.

Since its adoption by the General Assembly in 2002, the Plan of Action has undergone review and appraisal every five years. In its resolution 2015/5, the Economic and Social Council mandated regional commissions to conduct comprehensive reviews at the regional level. As part of this process, the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific will convene a high-level intergovernmental meeting on the third regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing from 12 to 14 September 2017.

The Commission is invited to take note of the strategy for the review of the Plan of Action and the status of preparations for that review. Countries are also invited to inform the Commission of their priorities and emerging areas of concern as well as key actions taken to further its implementation since the previous regional review, which was held in 2012.

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I. Introduction

1. Population ageing is one of the key challenges to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development because it will have profound impacts on the well-being of people of all generations. Moreover, older people are one of the groups that require particular attention if countries are to ensure that no one is left behind. Providing income security for older persons, ensuring healthy lives in old age, ensuring access to health care for older persons and providing supportive environments to older persons will be among the key prerequisites to ensure that older people are not left behind.

2. As a result of a decline in fertility and increased life expectancy, all countries in the Asia-Pacific region are currently experiencing population ageing, which is defined as an increase in the number and percentage of older persons as a part of the total population. Therefore, all countries need to develop policies to address population ageing to achieve the 2030 Agenda.

3. Adopted in 2002, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing is the guiding document of the United Nations to address population ageing. The Plan of Action is complementary to the 2030 Agenda. It contains three priority areas of critical importance to meet the challenges associated with rapid population ageing: older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and ensuring enabling and supportive environments. The key objective of the Plan of Action is to promote a development approach to population ageing by mainstreaming the needs of older persons into international and national development plans and policies across all sectors, thereby ensuring that older persons are not left behind.

4. Within this context, the third regional review of the Plan of Action will take place at a most opportune time: countries are about to embark on a new development agenda at a critical time of demographic change. Every single country in the Asia-Pacific region is experiencing ageing, although the effects are manifested differently depending on the stage of the demographic transition in each country. As countries progress towards the creation and implementation of effective national policies for older persons to meet the challenges associated with population ageing, the Plan of Action regional review process allows the sharing of knowledge and experiences across countries and the development of joint regional positions on how to address population ageing.

II. Population ageing in the Asia-Pacific region

5. All countries in the Asia-Pacific region are experiencing profound and rapid demographic changes. The transition towards ageing and aged societies is occurring at an unprecedented pace, although its timing varies across the region. Overall, in 2016, approximately 12.4 per cent of the population in the region was 60 years or older, and this is expected to increase to more than 25 per cent – or 1.3 billion people – by 2050.

6. This significant demographic transition has critical social, economic and political consequences. For example, the ratio of working-age people to older persons is decreasing sharply, which means there will be fewer people of working age (defined as 15 to 64) who could support every person older than 65. This will have profound impacts on income security for older persons but also on the provision of care for older persons. According to United Nations' projections, the old-age support ratio will decrease by approximately 60 per cent, from the current 8.4 working-age persons per each older person, to the ratio of 3.4 to 1 by 2050. The most significant decrease

will be in the South-East Asia subregion, where the ratio will drop from 11.1 to 1, to 4.2 to 1, which corresponds to the largest projected increase in the proportion of older persons in the population in this subregion.

7. Population ageing has profound impacts on economies and societies. Those countries that are already aged, particularly countries in East and North-East Asia and some countries in North and Central Asia, are experiencing shrinking working populations. They will face the challenge of maintaining or even increasing economic growth with an increasingly ageing labour force and a smaller pool of people of working age. For other countries, such as most countries in South and South-West Asia and some in South-East Asia, the opportunity to harness the demographic dividend will end soon. Adopting adequate policies to address population ageing will be critical to maintain inclusive and sustainable economic development. Such policies could include increasing the labour force participation of women and using the potential of older persons themselves, but also creating decent jobs for young people and moving from labour-intensive economies to production structures with a higher technology intake.

8. An increasingly ageing population will also require adequate health- and long-term care systems. With an increasing number of people living longer, non-communicable diseases increase. In many countries, healthy life expectancy is significantly lower than overall life expectancy. This also means an increase in health-care costs – whether for public health-care systems, if they exist, or for private households. If health-care costs are mainly borne by private households, as is the case in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region, it can lead to catastrophic expenditures and cause households to fall into poverty. Thus, universal access to health care with an efficient health-care system and solid financing will be crucial in ageing societies. New models for the provision and financing of long-term care need to be developed, which would allow older persons to age with dignity and receive the quality care they require.

9. Therefore, countries must define priority actions based on the Plan of Action to address population ageing in a way that is appropriate to the specific situation of their country.

III. Global and regional mandates

10. The 2030 Agenda is a comprehensive development agenda for all, including those furthest behind. The Sustainable Development Goals address the needs of older persons, in particular those Goals related to social protection, health, reducing inequalities and ending poverty (1, 3, 10, and 11). Older persons are also mentioned under targets related to nutrition, resource use, health care, accessibility, safety and age-specific data collection and analysis.

11. In its resolution 70/164 of 17 December 2015 on measures to enhance the promotion and protection of the human rights and dignity of older persons, the General Assembly recognized that the Plan of Action remained the only international instrument exclusively devoted to older persons and that measures towards achieving its objectives should be strengthened so as to improve its positive impact on the promotion and protection of the human rights and dignity of older persons.

12. At the regional level, in the Bangkok statement on the Asia-Pacific review of the implementation of the Plan of Action, annexed to resolution 69/14 of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), members and associate members requested the Executive Secretary to

strengthen the role of the Commission in supporting them in implementing the Plan of Action; increase the regional knowledge base on ageing; support members in formulating forward-looking policies to prepare for and adjust to the social and economic implications of ageing; and assist them in building capacity to provide comprehensive social protection systems that support populations throughout their life cycle, including older persons.

IV. Mandates to conduct the third global and regional review of the Plan of Action

13. Since its adoption by the General Assembly in 2002, the Plan of Action has undergone review and appraisal exercises every five years. Two preparatory regional expert forums will be held in Nanjing, China, and Bangkok in March and June 2017, respectively. A high-level intergovernmental meeting on the third regional review will be held in Bangkok from 12 to 14 September 2017. Official letters of invitation to the meeting will be transmitted to member States in March 2017.

14. The modalities for the third review of the Plan of Action are contained in resolution 2015/5 of the Economic and Social Council. The regional commissions have been mandated to play a central role in facilitating the regional and national components of the third review and appraisal exercise. In the resolution, the Council requested the regional commissions to provide assistance to member States in organizing their national review and appraisal exercises; organize regional review meetings; use an inclusive and coordinated approach in relation to the participation of civil society in the process; promote networking and the sharing of information; and provide an analysis of the main findings and identify priority areas and policy responses by 2017.

V. The Commission's strategy to conduct the third regional review of the Plan of Action

A. Actions taken

15. ESCAP administered a questionnaire to assess progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action and sent it to all members and associate members with a letter dated 1 February 2016. The original deadline for responses was 1 December 2016. Survey results will inform the review.

16. ESCAP collaborated with partners from the United Nations system and civil society working on population ageing to guide and support the regional review process. A steering committee consisting of the International Labour Organization, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization and HelpAge International was established under ESCAP leadership to support the review process. A set of meetings has been planned, and several meetings have already been held, to inform the review.

17. ESCAP held the Regional Expert Forum on Population Ageing in Bangkok on 12 and 13 July 2016. At the Forum, experts reviewed good practices in the provision of long-term care services, agreed on a strategy to review progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action and suggested regional priority areas for its further implementation. The outcomes of the Regional Expert Forum can be accessed on the Commission's website (www.unescap.org/events/regional-expert-forum-population-ageing).

B. Upcoming activities

18. An intergovernmental meeting to assess progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action will be held in Bangkok from 12 to 14 September 2017. The objective of the meeting is to create a regional action plan that defines the region's priorities in addressing population ageing in the context of the 2030 Agenda.

19. Several expert-level meetings have been or will be held to prepare for the forthcoming review of the Plan of Action within the framework of the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

20. The Regional Expert Forum on Integrated Care for Older Persons will be held in Nanjing, China, from 17 to 19 March 2017. The Forum will discuss the key outcomes of analytical studies on three priority areas: human resource requirements for meeting the needs of an ageing society; availability and use of appropriate technology to enhance the access of older persons to services, including health-care and long-term care services; and gender dimensions of ageing in the Asia-Pacific region. The meeting is expected to highlight good practices and guidelines that policymakers may consider when formulating a comprehensive framework on long-term care for older persons that is financially sustainable and safeguards the rights of older persons. The outcomes of the Forum should also inform the recommendations to be discussed at the high-level intergovernmental meeting on the third regional review of the Plan of Action.

21. A second preparatory regional expert meeting on the third regional review of the Plan of Action will be held in Bangkok on 14 and 15 June 2017. It is expected that participants at the meeting will agree on a set of priority actions for policymakers to bear in mind while addressing population ageing in their countries. Those recommendations will be considered in the creation of an outcome document of the third regional review of the Plan of Action.

VI. Progress related to the regional review process

22. As of January 2017, 19 completed questionnaires had been received from the following members and associate members: Armenia; Azerbaijan; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Kyrgyzstan; Macao, China; Myanmar; Pakistan; Philippines; Republic of Korea; Russian Federation; Samoa; Singapore; Sri Lanka; Thailand; Tonga; and Turkey. The survey responses are currently being analysed and will be published in a progress report on the implementation of the Plan of Action. A summary of preliminary survey data analysis is included in the following section.

23. Fiji and Myanmar conducted national consultations in 2016 to review the progress, key priorities and further implementation of the Plan of Action, with the support of ESCAP and other stakeholders.

VII. Summary of preliminary findings related to survey responses

24. The 2016 third regional review survey assesses progress towards the implementation of the Plan of Action and is structured according to the commitments made by member States to work towards implementation of its objectives. The survey consists of 31 main questions, some of which are divided into detailed subquestions. The questions are grouped into four broad sections with a particular focus on considerations for issues of gender and persons with disabilities. In addition to the three priority areas of the Plan of Action mentioned above, the survey also considers questions related to national policy and Plan of Action implementation.

25. A preliminary analysis of the survey responses indicates that considerable progress has been made in mainstreaming the issues of ageing into the national policies of member States. A number of commendable initiatives are underway in the region to provide enhanced protection, care and support to older persons in the social and economic spheres of life. Nevertheless, the preliminary analysis suggests that age and sex-disaggregated data on key social and economic indicators related to older persons are only available in some of the countries under review.

26. However, several countries with rapidly ageing populations have yet to submit the completed questionnaire. Moreover, the methodology for qualitative and quantitative analysis is being developed. The preliminary findings are presented in a summary that follows the structure of the survey. The analysis of responses is ongoing and the scope of the review is expected to expand as more completed questionnaires are received. An advance copy of a regional report will be made available for further consideration at the intergovernmental meeting on the third regional review of the Plan of Action.

27. The first section on National Policy and Plan of Action Implementation solicits information related to the institutional arrangements in place to facilitate implementation. It includes questions about the institutional structures responsible for the coordination of ageing-related policies as well as the relevant legislation and associated policies, including budget allocations. Countries were further asked to include the results of any studies conducted in relation to ageing and older persons.

28. While the majority of countries have adopted national policies and plans on ageing, some countries have also established a corresponding legal framework. An increasing number of countries are forming interministerial (inter-agency) committees for a more centralized and harmonized coordination of ageing-related initiatives. Gender and disability considerations are predominantly addressed as part of universal human rights and freedoms recognized in state constitutions, while a number of countries have explicitly framed these considerations in legislation, policies and plans on ageing. Nearly all countries for which surveys have been received have demonstrated efforts to collect information and data on older persons through surveys and studies, although presently only a few countries systematically gather age- and sex-disaggregated statistical data on various ageing-related indicators. Surveys suggest that the spending on older persons in the region has continuously increased from 2012, with the main share of the budget normally allocated to the provision of old-age pensions, followed by access to affordable health care. The active preparations for the review and appraisal of the progress in the implementation of the Plan of Action are evident from many responses. Nonetheless, of the surveys received to date, substantial challenges have been repeatedly highlighted, particularly in coordination, budget and capacity for the implementation.

29. The section entitled “Older Persons and Development” is focused on the first priority area of the Plan of Action and covers the efforts to ensure the integration of older persons into social and economic development efforts. Countries were asked about their national policies and programmes on social security and protection of older persons as well as any steps taken to acknowledge and increase the contributions of older persons in economic and social realms. Further questions were asked about measures to accommodate the specific needs of older persons in humanitarian and disaster relief programmes, as well as the availability of government-collected statistical data on relevant indicators.

30. According to survey responses, different mechanisms are being used by countries to develop and monitor policies and programmes related to ageing in a more socially inclusive manner. Similarly, a range of initiatives are promoted to illustrate and support the contributions of older persons to the family, as well as in society and the economy across the region. All countries have some form of social protection mechanism in place, although in a range of countries these benefits apply only to very limited groups of older persons. Notwithstanding, many countries report remarkable progress towards advancing their contributory and non-contributory pension schemes through measures that increase and expand pension entitlements, broaden funding mechanisms and unify pension systems. Further efforts highlight improvements to social security programmes for vulnerable older persons, both in terms of budget volumes and the number of new programmes. A few countries have also created various employment opportunities for older persons able and willing to continue gainful employment.

31. The section entitled “Advancing Health and Well-being into Old Age” addresses the second priority area of the Plan of Action and specifically the measures taken by countries to enhance the standard of living of older persons. The respondents were asked to provide an overview of policies and programmes they had developed to enable healthy and active ageing, including measures to improve access to quality, affordable and specialized health care and social services, with a particular emphasis on addressing the needs of persons with disabilities. Additionally, surveys inquired about the availability of government-collected statistical data on relevant indicators, such as disability-adjusted life expectancy, older persons covered by health insurance and the prevalence of old-age mental illnesses.

32. Survey responses demonstrate remarkable efforts in the region in providing quality and affordable health care to older persons. Almost all countries have implemented some form of policy or programme that expands the availability and coverage of health care and social services for older persons, with an increasing emphasis on catering to persons with special needs. The majority of countries offer health insurance schemes, including to older persons, although coverage is still low in many countries and access often limited to the public sector or retirees from the public sector. Moreover, policies providing free primary health care and concessionary medication and medical devices to certain categories of older persons are becoming increasingly common. A number of countries have also focused on expanding geriatrics education and training, as well as promoting and enabling self-care among older persons. Nevertheless, only in some countries is engagement of older persons and persons with disabilities in the development of social and health-care programmes currently occurring, and specific mechanisms to record and prevent discrimination against older persons in access to health care are also limited.

33. The last section, entitled “Ensuring Enabling and Supportive Environments”, is focused on the third priority area of the Plan of Action and covers measures to create environments enabling older persons to utilize their full potential to participate in all spheres of life and addresses the importance of the family and of responding to changing family structures. Within this context, respondents were requested to comment on progress towards creating age-friendly and accessible communities, establishing adequate standards of public and home care, and measures to prevent abuse and violence against older persons, as well as the availability of government-collected statistical data on relevant indicators.

34. According to survey responses, measures to promote “ageing in place”, such as affordable public housing with age-friendly designs, are underway in some countries, while most countries provide free or concessionary transportation to older persons. At the same time, while accreditation systems and trainings for informal caregivers are limited to a few countries, most countries provide some form of training programmes for formal caregivers. Many countries report that universal measures for the prevention of neglect, abuse and violence have been institutionalized, although very few have already established tailored mechanisms for the protection of older persons. Lastly, initiatives have been highlighted throughout the region as an illustration of the efforts to promote public recognition of older persons, their authority, wisdom and other valuable contributions to society.

VIII. Conclusions

35. The third regional review of the Plan of Action will give countries in the Asia-Pacific region the chance to identify opportunities and create a strategy for its further implementation that addresses the specific needs of the region. The review is also an opportunity to ensure that older people are not left behind in strategies to implement the 2030 Agenda.

36. The Commission is invited to take note of the strategy for the review of the Plan of Action and the status of preparations for that review. Members and associate members are also invited to inform the Commission of their priorities and emerging areas of concern as well as key actions taken to further its implementation since the previous regional review, which was held in 2012.
