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SELECTED EMERGING ISSUES IN POPULATION AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Note by the secretariat

SUMMARY

The present document reviews selected emerging social issues which challenge the Asian and Pacific region. The focus will be laid on key issues such as population dynamics, ageing, youth, families, and persons with disabilities. For each issue, the paper examines recent trends and the overall situation. The paper then introduces key activities and programmes carried out by the ESCAP secretariat to assist members and associate members in addressing these emerging issues in support of the Millennium Development Goals, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development, the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, and other global and regional mandates.

Committee members may wish to share their experiences in addressing these critical issues and strengthening the social integration of vulnerable groups. The Committee may also wish to recommend to the Commission any future work in the area of emerging social integration.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Asian and Pacific region is one of the most dynamic regions in the world. The region has become an engine of the world economy due to robust economic growth in recent decades. It is often expected that such economic success is accompanied by social development in which all members of society can enjoy full access to both basic and essential services. Furthermore, that they can participate fully in society to improve the quality of their lives. However, given rapid demographic changes and the unprecedented transformation of societies in response to globalization, new social issues have emerged that affect the countries and areas of the region to varying degrees.

2. In support of achieving key regionally and internationally agreed development goals, ESCAP has identified emerging social issues which require urgent action by planners and policymakers. ESCAP is making an effort to increase awareness and to understand how these issues affect each country and area, as well as the region as a whole. This document sheds light on selected emerging social issues which are critical to the region, namely: population dynamics, ageing, youth, family and people with disabilities. For each issue, the paper reviews the recent trends and overall situation, addresses major concerns, and introduces relevant activities and programmes carried out by the ESCAP secretariat.

II. SELECTED SOCIAL ISSUES

A. Population dynamics

3. The Asian and Pacific region, with 4 billion people in 2006, represents over three fifths of the world population. The region has witnessed an impressive decline in the growth rate of population to 1.1 per cent per annum, down from 1.4 per cent per annum a decade ago. The slowing of population growth in the region is mainly due to a continuous decline in the total fertility rate, which is currently estimated at 2.3 children per woman. Almost all countries in the region have experienced fertility decline, but there is great diversity in the level of fertility and the speed of the decline. While the total fertility rate remains at a high level (5 or more children per woman) in countries such as Afghanistan and Timor-Leste, it has dropped to below replacement level (2.1 children per woman) in 17 countries and areas.

4. As with fertility, the ESCAP region has achieved considerable progress in the reduction of mortality in general and infant and child mortality in particular. According to the current estimate, the infant mortality rate for the region as a whole is 48 per 1,000 live births, down from 59 a decade ago. However, the region exhibits enormous differences in life expectancy at birth among subregions, countries and areas, highlighting the vast differences in the level of health development as well as socio-economic development. Generally, countries with higher levels of socio-economic development and lower levels of poverty tend to have a higher life expectancy at birth.

5. While some countries in the region have completed this demographic transition, that is, the shift from high to low rates of fertility and mortality, in most countries it is clearly still under way. It is important for these transitional countries to recognize the benefits of changing their population and age structure, as a decline in fertility and an increase in life expectancy at birth temporarily increases the relative size of the workforce. This opens a historic, one-time only “demographic window” that has the potential for stimulating economic growth if appropriate social and economic policies are in place. Between the 1960s and the 1990s, the “demographic window” was effectively taken advantage of in several East Asian countries. Projections indicate that several countries in South-East Asia, and other developing countries, will have a large segment of their population in the prime working ages, with the likelihood of high economic output and savings.

6. While socio-economic development has undoubtedly had a major impact in reducing fertility in several countries, effective government policies to promote family planning programmes have also contributed to a large decline in fertility. However, there has been some disagreement over whether Governments or international agencies should continue to implement programmes to effect demographic change. New ways of thinking have emerged since the International Conference on Population and Development was held in Cairo in 1994, and a large number of countries have redefined their policy and programme objectives and adopted approaches that aim to meet the individuals’ needs rather than national demographic goals. In this regard, there has been significant progress in the ESCAP region towards implementing policies and programmes for integrated health through primary health care. The priority has been given to reproductive health, which includes family planning, maternal and child health, HIV/AIDS and adolescent reproductive health.

7. There are also direct links between the Millennium Development Goals and reproductive health and fertility. Three of the eight Goals — reducing child mortality (Goal 4), improving maternal health (Goal 5) and combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (Goal 6) — are directly related to reproductive health. In addition, the enhancement of reproductive health is a prerequisite for the other Goals and most of the Goals are an integral part of any reproductive health agenda. Sustaining advances in the Millennium Development Goal agenda requires investments in reproductive health and associated rights. These advances, in turn, foster progress in reproductive health matters.

8. The increased international mobility of people is another emerging demographic feature in Asia and the Pacific. As of 2005, the stock of international migrants in the region totalled 58 million – 53 million in Asia and 5 million in the Pacific. A salient feature of migration flows in Asia is the large volume of labour migration. With a few exceptions, international migration in Asia is primarily orientated towards filling labour gaps rather than for settlement purposes. The oil-producing countries in Western Asia and the newly industrialized economies of East and South-East Asia continue to be the hubs of temporary labour migration. In contrast, Pacific island countries and territories experience high levels of out-migration to Australia, New Zealand and the United States of America, often

resulting in very low population growth or population decline. In addition, undocumented migration is prevalent in many areas of the ESCAP region.

9. International migration has been at the forefront of the policy agenda, as more countries in the region become involved as countries of origin, destination or both. International migration generates both positive and negative impacts on development. While migrant remittances have profoundly improved the livelihood of poor households, migration has resulted in many families and especially children being left behind by the departing worker. Migrant workers are likely to face discrimination, exploitation and abuse at the place of employment. The consensus has emerged, however, that international migration, if supported by proper policies and programmes, could be a positive force for development in countries of both origin and destination. To this end, there has been a call for the further strengthening of cooperation on international migration at all levels – bilaterally, regionally and globally.

10. The work of ESCAP in the subject area of population corresponds to the emerging needs of formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the field of population and development. The secretariat supports members and associate members in achieving the objectives of the Millennium Development Goals, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development¹ and the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty adopted at the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference,² held in 2002. In 2005 and 2006, the secretariat supported the first-ever United Nations High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development (held in September 2006) by organizing regional events and providing inputs from regional perspectives. The Committee may wish to consider recommending to the Commission that a meeting be convened in 2008 to review the level of progress in implementing the Plan of Action on Population and Poverty.

11. Among the research and analytical activities recently commissioned by ESCAP was the study entitled “Potential for reducing child and maternal mortality through reproductive and child health intervention programmes”.³ The secretariat also held the Regional Seminar on Social Implications of International Migration in 2005, jointly with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development. Scheduled for December this year in Bangkok is the Regional Seminar on Fertility Transition in Asia: Opportunities and Challenges. Published annually, the *ESCAP Population Data Sheet* provides the most up-to-date demographic and selected socio-economic development indicators for the region.

¹ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

² E/ESCAP/1271, annex I.

³ Minja Kim Choe and Jijian Chen, “Potential for reducing child and maternal mortality through reproductive and child health intervention programmes: an illustrative case study from India”, *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.99).

12. With a view to strengthening the capacity of policymakers to integrate population and development planning, the ESCAP secretariat also organizes training workshops, in close collaboration with the UNFPA Country Technical Services Team. A Training Workshop on Population and Development Planning in Central Asia was held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, in 2004. In 2005 a training workshop on population, poverty and gender was held in Bangkok. Most recently, a training workshop on population, poverty and development was held in Mumbai, India, in October 2006.

13. In advance of the High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development, the ESCAP secretariat organized jointly with the Ministry for Women's Empowerment of Indonesia a side event on the gender dimensions of international migration and regional preparation for the High-level Dialogue during the sixty-second session of the Commission, held in Jakarta. The secretariat also organized a session to debate key regional issues at a substantive level during the International Symposium on International Migration and Development, held in Turin, Italy, in June 2006. During the High-level Dialogue, held in September 2006, the Executive Secretary of ESCAP participated in both a roundtable discussion and panel discussions at two forums focusing on the regional dimensions of international migration.

14. In its efforts to strengthen knowledge sharing and act as a knowledge hub in the field of population and development in the region, the ESCAP secretariat also shares with its target audience key findings from its intercountry research and analyses as well as lessons learned through the *Asia-Pacific Population Journal*, the bi-monthly newsletter *Population Headliners* and e-mail alerts and websites. To mark the twentieth year of publication of the *Journal*, a commemorative issue was published in November 2006. The population website is attracting an increasing number of visitors as it becomes a valuable source of information on demographic data and population issues.

B. Ageing

15. Asia and the Pacific continues to age, owing to the long-term decline in fertility and an improvement in life expectancy. In the region as a whole, currently 10 per cent of the population is aged 60 years or over.⁴ This proportion is expected to rise and by the year 2050 approximately one in four people in the region will be 60 years old or over. However, there are substantial differences in the rate of population ageing by subregions. The age group 60 years or older accounts for 14 per cent of the total population in North and Central Asia as well as in the Pacific; this is followed by 12 per cent in East and North-East Asia. In contrast, because of relatively high fertility, older persons in South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia make up only 7 to 8 per cent.

16. The region is also witnessing a wide variability between countries in the level of ageing. Japan is foremost, with 26 per cent of the population already being over 60 years old as of 2006. A high proportion of older persons are found in other relatively affluent economies, such as Australia

⁴ ESCAP, *Population Data Sheet*, 2006.

(18 per cent), New Zealand (17 per cent) and Hong Kong, China (16 per cent), as well as in countries with economies in transition, including Georgia (18 per cent) and the Russian Federation (17 per cent). At the other end of the spectrum, older persons represent less than 5 per cent of the population in such countries as Afghanistan (4 per cent), Marshall Islands (4 per cent), and Nauru (3 per cent). In terms of absolute numbers, China leads the region with approximately 145 million persons over 60 years of age.

17. Feminization is another feature of population ageing. Gender disparity due to an improvement in life expectancy results in a higher percentage of females in the older age groups. Thus, as of 2005, the sex ratio of the population aged 80 years or over, known as the oldest old, was 25 men per 100 women in the Russian Federation, 44 men in the Republic of Korea and 46 men in Japan. In higher age groups, many elderly women are likely to be widows and more likely than men to be in poverty and less educated.

18. Population ageing means specifically a declining working age population and an increase in the size of the elderly dependent population. This creates serious issues which require urgent action by planners and policymakers. Many countries in the ESCAP region will face the challenges of providing income security and health security for the rapidly growing elderly population. The challenges concerning population ageing will be especially serious for many developing countries in the region in that they will have to face both a demographic shift and the need for economic development simultaneously. In developing countries, there will be a larger population of older persons in rural areas, where the provision of social services may be limited.

19. One of the key challenges facing the region is how to increase the coverage of social security systems in order to mitigate the risk of being exposed to poverty in old age. In societies where ageing has already advanced, continued employment of older persons in the labour force has been considered as a viable option to sustain the social security system. In order to advance well-being into old age, prevention through the dissemination of information about the risks of unhealthy behaviour has received increasing attention as a forward-looking strategy.

20. The well-being of older persons can be largely affected by living arrangements which differ among cultures and social norms. In Asia and the Pacific, parents and children traditionally live together in the same home throughout their lives and this still forms a basic means of ensuring support for their members. Recently, however, many countries and areas of the Asian and Pacific region have witnessed phenomenal social changes which may undermine the traditional caregiving role of the family. Such changes include: a trend towards nuclear forms of living arrangements, the growing geographical mobility of young people, and women's increasing participation in the labour force. When this is coupled with the rising costs of home and institutional care, many older persons are likely to suffer from neglect and mistreatment.

21. The creation of an enabling and supportive environment for older persons is a crucial element in formulating policies and programmes. “Ageing in place” or keeping older persons in the community is widely regarded as an important strategy to address ageing in the region. A growing number of Governments are promoting community social services by funding non-governmental organizations to provide older persons with basic social services, improving access to their services and encouraging participation in community activities.

22. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing,⁵ adopted by the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 and endorsed by the General Assembly in its resolution 57/167 of 18 December 2002, linked ageing with the development agenda and emphasized building “a society for all ages”. The Plan focused on three priority areas: (a) older persons and development; (b) advancing health and well-being into old age; and (c) ensuring enabling and supportive environments. It called for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels and in all sectors, so that older persons could age with security and dignity, and continue to participate in their societies as citizens with full rights.

23. The ESCAP secretariat is assisting the members and associate members of the Commission to implement the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing as well as the Macao Plan of Action on Ageing for Asia and the Pacific⁶ through the Shanghai Implementation Strategy.⁷ The review and appraisal framework of the Madrid Plan envisages a major role for the United Nations regional commissions in convening regional reviews and appraisal activities.

24. To this end, as recommended by the Regional Seminar on Follow-up to the Shanghai Implementation Strategy for the Madrid and Macao Plans of Action on Ageing, held in Macao, China, in 2004, ESCAP will convene a high-level meeting on the five-year regional review of the Madrid Plan in Macao, China, from 9 to 11 October 2007, which will address the challenges and opportunities of ageing. The report of the high-level meeting will be submitted to the first global five-year review of the implementation of the Madrid Plan, scheduled for 2008. As a preparatory activity for the meeting, the ESCAP secretariat held in June 2006 an expert group meeting in Shanghai, China. Bringing together over 20 experts and practitioners from government agencies, academic institutions and non-governmental organizations, the expert group meeting identified the priority areas of action for ESCAP with regards to ageing, and reached a consensus on the agenda of the upcoming high-level meeting.

25. The ESCAP secretariat has also made efforts to strengthen consultations between government officials and civil society and has facilitated multi-stakeholder dialogues. In March 2006, it held a workshop, entitled Roundtable on Rapid Ageing: Community Initiatives and Local

⁵ *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8-12 April 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

⁶ E/ESCAP/1132, chap. VI, annex, and Corr.1. See also Commission resolution 55/4 of 28 April 1999.

⁷ E/ESCAP/1280. The strategy was endorsed by the Commission at its fifty-ninth session (see *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2003, Supplement No. 19* (E/2003/39-E/ESCAP/1298), para. 253).

Government Response, in Tokyo. The workshop provided a venue for various stakeholders, including local government officials, civil society groups and academics, to discuss ageing issues and social inclusion.

26. In 2005, the ESCAP secretariat conducted a survey on the ageing situation in Asia and the Pacific. Based on the available information from 20 countries and areas in the region, the survey revealed that many countries in the region have policies and programmes to improve the quality of life of older persons. Many existing activities aim to empower older persons and encourage their continued participation in the development process. However, due to funding restraints and the lack of expertise and human resources, the development of national policies and programmes has not kept pace with the demands of ageing populations. In the future, income security, health security, long-term care for older persons, and raising public awareness of the benefits of active ageing will be among the most important issues that most countries in the region have to address.

C. Youth and development

27. The ESCAP region is home to approximately 716 million young people aged between 15 and 24, or 61.8 per cent of the world's total youth population of 1.2 billion. This represents an increase of about 4 per cent compared with figures for 2000.⁸ Youth in Asia and the Pacific are concentrated mainly in South and South-West Asia and East and North-East Asia. Given the different levels of fertility decline, the proportion of youth in national populations varies from one country to another in the region. In some countries, there is a growing cohort of working-age adults relative to the dependent population, leading to a situation termed as a "youth bulge" where 20 per cent or more of the national population are aged between 15 and 24. While a large young population offers many opportunities for economic development, it also gives rise to many challenges in terms of increasing investment in education and health, alleviating poverty, creating employment opportunities and meeting other development needs of young people.

28. Poverty among youth is a serious development problem faced by many countries in the region. The region houses 5 out of the 10 countries in the world with the largest concentrations of young people living on less than US\$1 a day. Girls and young women are much more likely than boys and young men to be disadvantaged though there may be significant intraregional variations.⁹

29. Despite the fact that the youth of today have more opportunity and better access to education, youth unemployment has increased to record high levels in the region. Youth made up 20.8 per cent of the labour force in 2004 but unemployed youth accounted for nearly half (49.1 per cent) of the region's jobless people. Within the region, South Asia has the largest unemployed youth population, numbering almost 14.5 million in 2004. In the last decade, youth unemployment in South-East Asia

⁸ United Nations, *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.XIII.5).

⁹ *Ibid.*, *World Youth Report 2005* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.05.IV.6).

more than doubled, from just under 5 million (9 per cent) in 1994 to nearly 10.5 million (17.1 per cent) in 2004.¹⁰ Youth unemployment represents the waste of an enormous human resource which is much needed for economic and social development. Unemployment deprives young people of the opportunity to participate in the economic, social and political life of society, and to secure resources for a decent living, social protection and other conditions necessary for the establishment of families. Long-term unemployment can lead to a range of social problems, such as delinquency and substance abuse, and often feeds political unrest and violence.

30. The processes of globalization, and urbanization as well as the use of information and communication technology (ICT) are having an impact on young people in the region in more than one way. They also face many challenges, such as those concerning access to and affordability of education, provision of social services, health care, HIV/AIDS, social exclusion and conflicts, making them more vulnerable.

31. The General Assembly, in its resolution 60/2 of 6 October 2005 on policies and programmes involving youth, reaffirmed the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond,¹¹ and called upon Governments, organizations and bodies of the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations to develop strong partnerships to scale up investment in youth and to encourage youth-led contributions to achieving the internationally agreed development goals. It also decided to add the following as additional priority areas for the implementation of the World Programme of Action: (a) the mixed impact of globalization on young women and men; (b) the use of and access to information and communication technologies; (c) the dramatic increase in the incidence of HIV infection among young people and the impact of the epidemic on their lives; (d) the active involvement of young people in armed conflict, both as victims and as perpetrators; and (e) the increased importance of addressing intergenerational issues in an ageing society. The Assembly requested the regional commissions, including ESCAP, to organize, within their existing resources, regional consultations with member States and youth organizations to evaluate the implementation of the World Programme of Action.

32. Youth employment was also given a high priority in the Millennium Declaration,¹² which included the commitment to “develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work”.¹³ Millennium Development Goal 8 refers explicitly to creating employment opportunities for young people in one of its targets. At the 2005 World Summit, held in New York from 14 to 16 September 2005, Heads of State and Government expressed strong support for fair globalization and resolved to make the goals of full and productive

¹⁰ International Labour Organization, *Labour and Social Trends in Asia and the Pacific 2005* (Bangkok, International Labour Organization, 2005).

¹¹ General Assembly resolution 50/81, annex.

¹² See General Assembly resolution 55/2 of 8 September 2000.

¹³ *Ibid.*, paragraph 20.

employment and decent work for all, including for women and young people, a central objective of their relevant national and international policies as well as their national development strategies.¹⁴

33. Many countries in the region have adopted national policies and legislation on youth and related issues which address a wide range of concerns from education, health, employment and participation in decision-making to poverty reduction and the use of ICT. Such policies and legislation have been enacted in Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, Viet Nam and Hong Kong, China. A number of countries in the region have made efforts aimed at tackling youth unemployment, increasing the employability of young people and creating employment opportunities in emerging sectors in their economies, such as tourism, ICT and environmental conservation. There are also special programmes targeted at young people and focused on strengthening vocational training, developing entrepreneurship, creating partnerships between educational institutions and industries, skill training for migrant workers, health education for youth and rehabilitation for drug users. Such programmes have been implemented in China, Indonesia, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation and Singapore, among other countries.¹⁵

34. Disadvantaged groups among young people, such as youth living in poverty or without access to social services, unemployed youth, youth living with HIV/AIDS, or girls and young women, deserve special attention. Issues relating to youth and intergenerational relationships as well as family development and protection are important areas that have an impact on the well-being of young people and broader societal development in the longer term.

35. In recent years, the ESCAP secretariat has conducted reviews and analysis of youth policy. It has also provided technical assistance through the implementation of technical projects to support children and youth affected by natural disasters and to promote drug rehabilitation for young people in various countries in the region. A compilation of national youth policies in Asia and the Pacific is being conducted with a view to analysing regional concerns and trends and supporting national priorities. Youth unemployment was given due emphasis in the *Economic and Social Survey of Asia and the Pacific 2006*.¹⁶ A workshop was held in March 2006 in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs to examine regional concerns and prepare regional perspectives for the *World Youth Report 2007*. The Workshop focused on four major areas, namely the impact of globalization on youth, youth and urbanization, youth and education, and the impact of ICT on youth. Technical support was provided to the Government of Indonesia in building community resilience to overcome the consequences of the 2004 tsunami disaster, focusing on orphaned or separated children and youth in Aceh province.

¹⁴ See General Assembly resolution 60/1 of 16 September 2005, paragraph 47.

¹⁵ See the report of the Secretary-General on the global analysis and evaluation of national action plans on youth employment (A/60/133 and Corr.1).

¹⁶ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.10.

36. In the coming years, the secretariat will continue to provide support for national efforts to enhance and/or develop national policies on youth and for the implementation of the priority areas mapped out in the World Programme of Action and General Assembly resolution 60/2. For this reason, consultations are planned with a view to evaluating regional priorities and the regional implementation of World Programme of Action. Linkages will be developed between activities for youth and those relating to: social integration, family development and protection, social services provision, intergenerational issues and youth unemployment, through collaboration with other United Nations agencies and institutions.

D. Family well-being

37. As the basic unit of society, the family in Asia and the Pacific is going through a transition. From a demographic perspective, the declining size and the changing structure of families are most notable. With the exception of the subregions of South and South-West Asia, the average size of a household continues to decrease in most Asian countries which implies a weakening capacity to provide care for family members. In the developed countries of Asia, the household size already averages less than three persons. As a result of declining fertility and increasing life expectancy, the relative proportion of elderly people is expected to grow, placing more demands and pressures on the family as the traditional primary care provider. While the extended family structure is still very common in much of Asia and the Pacific, the nuclear family type living arrangement has gradually gained popularity. Many countries in the region have witnessed an increase in single-person households or female-headed households for various reasons.

38. The function of the family in Asia and the Pacific remains resilient in terms of providing the emotional, financial and material support that is essential to its members. The family also functions as a steady provider of informal social protection. In lower-income countries with inadequate formal protection, the family provides the first line of defence and self-organized protection against risks, including life cycle risks (such as illness and old age), economic risks (such as unemployment) and social and environmental risks. However, this informal support mechanism is showing signs of weakening. It has been affected by rapid transformation, including globalization, urbanization, population ageing, greater mobility of family members, and delayed marriage and childbearing. Available data shows that young members of families are more likely to move out of their parents' homes to seek employment or economic and career opportunities. The growing volume of international migration in Asia affects the family members left behind.

39. Family-related issues need to be considered as part of the overall development policy, especially in enhancing social inclusion and economic development. Policies aimed at strengthening the family should also take into consideration the gender dimension of issues relating to poverty reduction, provision of social services, intergenerational issues, youth, ageing and disabilities. This

integrated approach will help to ensure that the well-being of the family is linked to the well-being of its members and also to broader developmental goals.

40. The ESCAP secretariat has paid increasing attention to family-related issues, particularly in strengthening national capacity in areas that have a direct impact on the well-being of the family. The secretariat and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs jointly held a workshop on HIV/AIDS and Family Well-being in Bangkok in December 2005. The workshop reviewed changes experienced by the family institution in the region, and examined the impact of HIV/AIDS on the family and existing Government policies and programmes. Noting that the family and its networks in Asia and the Pacific were instrumental in helping individuals and communities cope with disease and its consequences, as well as, helping members to weather other economic and social challenges, the workshop considered a policy framework for addressing the impact of HIV/AIDS on family well-being.

41. The secretariat plans to undertake activities to promote national commitments on family-related issues in the broader context of achieving the development goals agreed upon at recent global and regional conferences, including the development goals. Particularly, the secretariat plans to implement a technical project in 2007 or 2008 aimed at examining issues relating to social services and family well-being, depending on funding availability.

E. Persons with disabilities

42. Persons with disabilities are one of the most disadvantaged and least served groups in society. They are likely to be excluded and discriminated against, and their needs continue to be neglected. Many of them lack the opportunity to realize their potential through education, employment and other socio-economic opportunities. The international community has for a long time attempted to address the need to heighten awareness about the plight of disabled persons in all dimensions of society. Persons with disabilities are increasingly recognized as the most qualified and best equipped to support, inform and advocate for themselves and each other. Hence, as persons with disabilities are agents of change, their full participation in policymaking and programmes concerning disability is expected.

43. The number of persons with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region is likely to rise with population growth in addition to other factors, such as war and other forms of violence, traffic accidents, inadequate medical care and natural disasters. The lack of accurate data makes it difficult to fully assess the situation of disabled persons in the region. According to a recent ESCAP survey,¹⁷ the proportion of a nation's population living with a disability ranges widely, from 0.7 per cent in Cook Islands to 20 per cent in Australia. Such a wide range reflects the use of different conceptual approaches, definitions and categorizations of disability, methodologies and institutional capacities of data collection among countries.

¹⁷ ESCAP, *Disability at a Glance: A Profile of 28 Countries and Areas in Asia and the Pacific* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.24).

44. Natural disasters, such as the Indian Ocean tsunami of December 2004 and the tragic earthquakes of October 2005 affecting India and Pakistan, further increased the number of disabled persons in the region. The World Health Organization estimated in 2005 that, as a result of the tsunami alone, the region's disabled population might have increased by 20 per cent.

45. Traditionally, disability has tended to be regarded as an issue of social welfare or charity. Over time, emphasis has shifted to a rights-based approach, which aims to create a society based on the concept of human rights, including the right to development. The rights-based approach is evident in the legislative and policy frameworks of several ESCAP members and associate members, albeit a small number of them, with their constitutions making specific mention of disability. For example, in countries such as Bhutan, Indonesia and Timor-Leste, the constitution ensures the promotion of equal opportunities, non-discrimination and the removal of barriers for persons with disabilities. Governments have enacted anti-discrimination laws on disability in Australia, China, India, Turkey and Hong Kong, China. The available data shows that at least 14 countries in the region have a comprehensive law on disability and 12 countries and one area have a national action plan on disability.¹⁸

46. An ESCAP regional initiative on disability, the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, was continued in 2003 with the adoption of Commission resolution 58/4 of 22 May 2002.¹⁹ The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific²⁰ is a policy guideline for the Decade that promotes a paradigm shift from a charity-based to a rights-based approach to disability issues. The Framework provides proactive guidelines to tackle issues in seven priority areas, among which are education, employment, access to built environments and poverty alleviation. The regional decade framework enacted by ESCAP has proved successful and has most recently been embraced in Latin America, where the Declaration on the Decade of the Americas for the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities (2006-2016) was adopted by the Organization of American States.

47. In resolution 61/8 of 18 May 2005, the Commission requested the Executive Secretary, *inter alia*, to hold in 2007 a high-level intergovernmental meeting of three working days' duration on the mid-point review of the Decade. The meeting is expected to consider a document to further facilitate the implementation of the Framework during the second half of the Decade (2008-2012).

48. At the global level, a final agreement was reached at the eighth session of the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities, held in New York from 14 to 25

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ The first Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons was adopted by the Commission in its resolution 48/3 of 23 April 1992.

²⁰ See Commission resolution 59/3 of 4 September 2003 (for the text of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action, see E/ESCAP/APDDP/4/Rev.1).

August 2006.²¹ The agreement marked the end of a four-year drafting process to which many Governments and NGOs in the ESCAP region made significant contributions. The ESCAP secretariat had been supporting the process by holding a series of workshops on the subject and by submitting a regional draft in 2003. Upon adoption, the Convention will reinforce the principle of non-discrimination and equal opportunity, and a rights-based approach to development for addressing disability-related issues.

49. In the light of these developments, the ESCAP secretariat undertook a number of research activities, examining the extent of the commitment that Governments have made thus far on disability issues as well as the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. ESCAP conducted a survey on the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action, and, in early 2006, compiled its responses and additional data into a publication entitled *Disability at a Glance: A Profile of 28 Countries and Areas in Asia and the Pacific*.²² Another publication issued in 2006, *Moving Forward Post-Tsunami: Voices of the Vulnerable*,²³ revealed the difficulties faced by disabled persons in accessing health care and other services following the tsunami.

50. During 2006, the ESCAP secretariat held a number of meetings, covering different areas of disability. In July, a coordination meeting of Biwako Millennium Framework stakeholders was held, which produced valuable inputs for the mid-point review of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons, 2003-2012, scheduled to be carried out in 2007. A regional workshop concerning the draft convention on the rights of persons with disabilities was also held in July, just prior to the eighth session of the Ad Hoc Committee (see para. 48). The Biwako Millennium Framework for Action values self-help organizations of persons with disabilities, related family and parent associations and women with disabilities as essential agents of its implementation. A regional workshop held with this particular theme adopted a set of recommendations on government support for the sustainable development of self-help organizations of persons with disabilities and others, which are useful for the mid-point review of the Decade.

51. Collaborative workshops with the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability, the Asia Pacific Disability Forum and the China Disabled People's Federation were also held. These workshops contributed to South-South cooperation, enhanced partnership between Governments and civil society, and the promotion of barrier-free tourism, respectively. Furthermore, recognizing the serious paucity of reliable data on disability, the ESCAP secretariat provided assistance for members and associate members of the Commission by organizing four training workshops for capacity-building and the formulation of core disability question sets to be used in censuses and surveys between 2003 and 2006.

²¹ See A/AC.265/2006/4.

²² See note 16.

²³ United Nations publication, Sales No. E.06.II.F.19.

52. In 2006, the ESCAP secretariat began conducting the second region-wide survey on the implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action ahead of the midterm review in 2007. ESCAP will need to continue the momentum of promoting the ratification and effective implementation of the draft convention at the national level, including the development and implementation of anti-discrimination laws. This will go hand in hand with its efforts to promote further implementation of the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

53. Recognizing the major challenges in the area of population and social integration, the present document reviews selected key social issues which have emerged in Asia and the Pacific. In an increasingly globalized world, many countries and areas of the region are being challenged by rapid demographic changes which are the result of continued fertility decline and rising population mobility both nationally and internationally. Social protection for and integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, such as elderly people, youth and people with disabilities, also remain priority issues for many countries and areas in the region. Ensuring that the voice of those groups is heard at all levels of the decision-making process is central to the success of social development efforts.

54. The Committee members may wish to share experiences in addressing critical social issues and similarly in strengthening social integration of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. The Committee is requested to provide comments and suggestions on the implementation of the work undertaken by the ESCAP secretariat in the area of population and social integration of disadvantaged groups, and give guidance for any future work in this area.

55. The Committee is invited to consider the proposed strategies to be undertaken by the secretariat towards the review and follow-up to major regional and international goals, including the Millennium Development Goals, the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development,²⁴ the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific and other relevant global and regional mandates.

56. The Committee may wish to consider recommending to the Commission that a meeting be convened in 2008 to review the progress achieved in the implementation of the Fifth Asian and Pacific Population Conference Plan of Action on Population and Poverty held in 2002.

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²⁴ *Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.8), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.