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REPORT

ON THE SECOND REGIONAL REVIEW MEETING OF THE MADRID INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING BEIRUT, 7-8 DECEMBER 2011

Summary

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the Second Regional Review Meeting of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing at the United Nations House in Beirut, on 7 and 8 December 2011. The meeting consisted of three sessions focused on the following objectives: (a) to review major developments related to older persons in the ESCWA region since 2002; (b) to discuss national reports on measures taken to implement the Madrid Plan of Action, and to assess the commitment of Governments to this plan and obstacles delaying its implementation; and (c) to present and discuss the outcomes and recommendations of the Second Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing.

The meeting concluded with a series of recommendations addressed to the Governments of member countries and to ESCWA. These recommendations were meant to provide the basis for drawing a road map to fully implement the Madrid Plan of Action. The recommendations emphasized the importance of commitment to the Madrid Plan of Action, calling on ESCWA to continue efforts towards its adoption, monitoring and evaluation at the regional level. This report presents the recommendations made at the meeting and the topics it addressed.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Introduction	1-5	3
<i>Chapter</i>		
I. RECOMMENDATIONS	6-30	4
A. Recommendations addressed to the Governments of member countries	6-25	4
B. Recommendations addressed to ESCWA.....	26-30	6
II. DISCUSSION TOPICS	31-50	6
A. Review of major developments related to older persons since 2002.....	34-44	6
B. National reports in the context of the second review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing	45-50	10
III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING	51-61	13
A. Venue and date	51	13
B. Opening	52-60	13
C. Participants	61	14
<i>Annex.</i> List of participants		15

Introduction

1. The Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) held the Second Regional Review Meeting of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing at the United Nations House in Beirut, on 7 and 8 December 2011. The meeting was held pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2010/14 of 22 July 2010, entitled “Future implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002”. Paragraph 17 of the resolution endorsed “the theme “Full implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing: social situation, well-being and dignity, development and the full realization of all human rights for older persons” for the second review and appraisal exercise”. The Council decided to conduct a global review and appraisal exercise for the Madrid Action Plan in 2013 during the fifty-first session of the Commission for Social Development, according to the same approach adopted in the first review exercise.

2. In the framework of the first review of the Madrid Plan of Action, ESCWA held a regional seminar on monitoring the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in Arab Countries in Amman, on 20 and 21 November 2007, to assess progress made in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, promote the exchange of experiences and success stories, and assist member countries and regional partners involved in their programmes for older persons.

3. In preparation for the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action, ESCWA carried out the following activities in 2011:

(a) ESCWA prepared the social policy brief entitled “Reinforcing Social Equity: Mainstreaming Ageing Issues in the Process of Development Planning in the ESCWA Region”, which highlighted challenges member countries face in their efforts to integrate the issues of older persons into national development plans, and outlined the necessary measures to promote the integration process as part of an equitable approach to social development;

(b) ESCWA published the “Demographic Profile of the Arab countries: Analysis of the Ageing Phenomenon”, as a reference tool for policymakers on demographic trends, patterns of change in the age structure of the population, and the accelerated ageing process and its implications on development;

(c) ESCWA guided member countries in the preparation of national reports required for the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action, and provided them with a detailed outline reflecting the contents of these reports.

4. The Second Regional Review Meeting of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing aimed to achieve the following:

(a) Review major developments related to older persons in the ESCWA region since 2002;

(b) Review and assess progress made in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in the region;

(c) Discuss national reports and assess the commitment of Governments to the Madrid Plan of Action;

(d) Identify institutional, structural and circumstantial obstacles to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action;

(e) Develop a set of recommendations as a road map for the full implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action.

5. This report contains a description of the topics addressed during the discussions and the ensuing recommendations.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE GOVERNMENTS OF MEMBER COUNTRIES

6. To take advantage of the demographic window in member countries undergoing demographic shifts, in which the growth rate of the working-age population exceed that of the dependent population (children and older persons), and which have the public and personal capacity to save increases. To this end, a number of economic and social policies need to be adopted with a view to turning such savings into developmental investments.

7. To adopt a modern scientific approach to the issues of older men and women, as follows: (a) develop policies, strategies and action plans specifically targeting older persons as a sociodemographic group facing unique challenges; (b) integrate the issues of older persons into development plans as an integral part of the formulation, implementation, monitoring and assessment process of plans and programmes, as is the case for issues of women, youth and children; (c) adopt a development approach which involves older persons in the development process and guarantees that they benefit from it, and a welfare approach which involves the provision of assistance to older persons; (d) involve older persons in all stages of the development, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of plans targeting them, to enable them to express their needs and priorities, and give their views on the impact of these policies on their lives; (e) adopt the life cycle approach developed by the World Health Organization and predicated upon the notion that investing in the development of individuals early in life helps improve their situation later in life. The illnesses of older women, for example, often result from poor nutrition and health risks they faced during childhood, youth and reproductive age.

8. To mainstream gender in national policies for older persons. Women constitute more than half the population of older persons and are the most vulnerable group under the prevailing social, cultural, political and economic circumstances.

9. To conduct a review every five years of progress made in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, through the preparation of periodic national reports and the organization of workshops and meetings on the situation of older persons.

10. To establish the appropriate institutional framework to address the issues of older persons and to formulate, implement, monitor and assess national policies targeting them, through the establishment of a national institution in charge of coordinating between different sectoral ministries and proposing national policies and a national action plan for older persons.

11. To provide accurate, reliable and timely data on older persons, to facilitate the process of identifying the problems and challenges they face and to propose measures to improve their situation. Such data need to be disaggregated by the following: age group, to show the difference between the needs and challenges of “the young old” (60-79 years old) and “the oldest old” (80 years and above); gender, to show the different situation of older women and men; housing, to clarify differences between older persons residing in rural and urban areas; and social, economic and family situation.

12. To address the issues of older persons in studies and research carried out by member countries on sustainable development.

13. To strengthen coordination between governmental, non-governmental and private sector bodies for the implementation of activities targeting older persons, and to promote private sector and civil society initiatives. Lessons could be drawn from the experiences of countries which have established advisory boards dedicated to issues of older persons and composed of individuals from the civil society, and thus capable of playing an oversight role over government policies.

14. To provide the required funding for the formulation, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of national policies for older persons from budgets earmarked for development, given that spending on older persons constitutes a human investment.
15. To promote support for older persons within their families, and enhance the capacity of relatives to care for them. Most older persons in Arab countries live with their families and rely on their care. However, nuclear family arrangements are gradually replacing extended family structures, and are threatening to weaken the family support system for older persons. It is possible to provide certain privileges, such as financial support or tax reductions for families which take care of older persons, and to provide older persons with home-care services.
16. To put in place necessary legislation to provide pension entitlements, social protection and health insurance for older persons, including preventive and rehabilitative health care.
17. To include geriatrics in the curricula of medical schools and gerontology in the training of social workers, and to train staff involved in providing care for older persons, with a focus on the needs of older women.
18. To improve the accommodation of older persons, especially those who live away from their families and lack support systems and the means of transport, and promote an enabling environment which conforms to their social, economic and physical needs. The design of residential units and public places should take the needs of older persons into account. In addition, older persons must be granted special treatment in transportation systems (by allocating special seats for them and reduced prices).
19. To promote social and cultural activities for older persons, through the establishment of homes and clubs for them, and to issue them an identity card which entitles them to such benefits as discounted admission to theatres and museums.
20. To establish two networks for older persons. The first, a "Senior Peer Network", consists of senior volunteers from inside and outside the country, dedicated to promoting communication between older persons of various age groups and different social, economic, and family backgrounds and geographic locations; raising awareness of their circumstances; and supporting the concept of a "culture of older persons" and enhancing their role at all levels. The second, a "Friends of Seniors Network", consists of young men and women volunteers from inside and outside the country, dedicated to supporting older persons; promoting intergenerational communication; and combating the marginalization of older persons and violence against them.
21. To provide income-generating job opportunities for older persons wishing to work; to involve them in public life, and to fight against their underrepresentation in the media and in civic and political organisations.
22. To raise awareness on issues and rights of older persons through the media and school curricula, and to turn the national or international day of older persons into an occasion to intensify action and awareness campaigns.
23. To establish mechanisms in order to protect older persons from all forms of discrimination, violence and exploitation within their families or by society; to criminalize such acts and to prosecute the perpetrators.
24. To devise an emergency plan to meet the growing needs of older persons in situations of political instability, security upheavals, natural disasters and other emergencies which intensify discrimination against older persons.

25. To secure the necessary funds to enable ESCWA to appoint a regional adviser who would help member countries implement the Madrid Plan of Action, formulate national policies for older persons and develop an integrated vision to ensure the integration of ageing issues into development planning.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS ADDRESSED TO ESCWA

26. To continue, in cooperation with national stakeholders, to raise awareness of the Madrid Plan of Action, through the following activities: preparing studies, organizing regional meetings, monitoring and assessing the implementation of the plan at the regional level; advising member countries on the preparation of national reports on progress made in its implementation; and providing training and technical support in relation to national policies and action plans for older persons.

27. To continue to integrate older persons into the programme of work of various Divisions and sections of ESCWA, to ensure that their specific needs are taken into account in its activities and publications, including human development reports.

28. To prepare a regional report on progress made in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, and to include the experiences of member countries in the report of the Secretary General of the United Nations to be prepared in the context of the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action.

29. To consult with concerned national, regional and international organizations on the possibility of conducting a survey on the social, economic and health conditions of older persons in Arab countries.

30. To conduct an open dialogue between representatives of different generations, under the auspices of ESCWA and with the participation of relevant national, regional and international organizations, to correct a number of misconceptions about the role and needs of older persons, bring the views of different generations closer and promote cooperation between them.

II. DISCUSSION TOPICS

31. The meeting consisted of three main sessions. During the first session, participants reviewed major developments related to older persons since 2002; analysed the demographic landscape and the ageing phenomenon in the region; and addressed the progress made in the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. Participants noted the impact of uprisings in Arab countries, the exclusion of older persons in the media and the need to integrate gender into policies targeting older persons.

32. At the second session, participants reviewed the methodology of the second review of the priority issues of older persons in the ESCWA region, the experiences of member countries and the reports which they prepared for this process.

33. During the third session, participants discussed and adopted the outcomes and recommendations of the Second Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. The session included final speeches delivered by the organizing party.

A. REVIEW OF MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING OLDER PERSONS SINCE 2002

1. *The demographic situation in the region: analysis of the ageing phenomenon*

34. Mr. Prem Saxena, professor at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in India, gave a presentation on “The demographic situation in the region: Analysis of the ageing phenomenon”. He pointed to the surge in the population of older persons (aged 65 years and above) in the region (from 5.9 million in 1980 to 14.5 million in 2010; which is expected to reach 27.5 million by 2025), due to a reduction in mortality rates and an increase in and life-expectancy at birth. He explained that the ageing of the population is still in an early

stage in the region, due to the slow-to-moderate decline in fertility rates in a number of countries. He addressed trends and prospects related to population in the Arab region; the population growth rate, the proportion of each gender by age group, the declining crude birth rates and total fertility rates, the declining crude mortality rates and rising life expectancy at birth.

35. He classified Arab countries into three groups, according to the pace of the ageing process by 2025, using the old age dependency ratio (65 + years old), the oldest old dependency ratio (80 + years old) and the Ageing Index. The results were as follows: (a) Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman and Tunisia are undergoing a fast ageing process; (b) Jordan, Djibouti, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syrian Arab Republic and the United Arab Emirates are undergoing a moderately paced ageing process; and (c) the Comoros, Iraq, Mauritania, Palestine, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen are undergoing a slow ageing process. The pace of the ageing process appears clearly when analysing population pyramid patterns over time.

36. He addressed the repercussions of ageing on the development process and stated that emerging social, economic and health challenges may be averted if countries adopt a bottom-up approach to planning, involving older persons in the development process (by extending retirement age till 70 years for example) and enabling them to benefit from it. He pointed to the importance of integrating gender into the planning process for older persons, as women constitute a majority in the age group and usually live alone and suffer from widowhood and deteriorating living conditions, and adopting a long-term plan which provides a sustainable solution for the poor conditions of older women. The plan consists of the following three points: investing in female education; allocating jobs for women in the public and private sectors; and offering vocational training for women to enable them to start small businesses. In conclusion, he called upon countries to take advantage of the demographic window to improve the quality of life of individuals by formulating appropriate policies and strategies to convert savings into developmental investments, and to develop long-term plans with a view to providing job opportunities for the growing numbers of young people.

2. Progress made in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

37. Ms. Madiha El Safty, professor of sociology at the American University of Cairo, gave a presentation entitled "Progress in the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing". She referred to the changing age structure of the population in the region and to the growing proportion of older persons in the population. She noted that older persons have different living standards; they consist of the young old (60-79 years old) and the oldest old (80 years and above); and they have health and gender differences. Nevertheless, she identified a number of common characteristics of this group, notably: low education levels; high illiteracy rates; low economic activity rates; rising poverty; and deteriorating health conditions differences to which women are the most vulnerable. Older persons in the region face challenges including: the decline of the extended family and the predominance of the nuclear family; inadequate social security and safety nets provided by the State; the shortage of trained workers qualified to care for older persons; and the shortage of public spending on services provided to older persons.

38. She also indicated that ESCWA member countries face a number of challenges in spite of their commitment to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. Concerning the first priority direction of the Madrid Plan of Action (older persons and development), economic conditions in most countries are an obstacle to job creation for older persons, as the official retirement age has been set at 60 years of age, with few exceptions. In addition, the proportion of older persons working without social insurance in the agricultural and informal sectors is very high and pension systems are available only to former civil servants. Concerning the second priority direction (advancing health and well-being into old age), health services for older persons are often inappropriate and geriatrics and home care are mostly unavailable. Concerning the third priority direction (ensuring enabling and supportive environment), older persons often suffer from the lack of arrangements made specifically for them in terms of transportation, housing, infrastructure and roads. Many ESCWA member countries have made strides in legislation targeting older persons including the

following: reducing taxes and costs imposed on older persons in transportation and in cultural and recreational activities; encouraging the creation of homes and clubs for older persons; widening the scope of coverage by health insurance and social security; providing financial support for needy older persons; and establishing national committees and specialized departments in the ministries concerned. There are still many shortcomings, however, including the failure to adopt policies for older persons; the failure to adopt a welfare approach to provide services to the most vulnerable older persons; the lack of data on the situation of older persons; the inadequate quantity and quality of health services made available to them; and the lack of coordination between parties concerned with policy development and implementation.

39. She made the following recommendations to enhance the progress in implementing the Madrid Plan of Action: (a) to provide data and carry out studies on the situation of older persons; (b) to establish networks between governments, civil society and the private sector in order to implement activities related to older persons; (c) to integrate older persons into development planning ; (d) to provide opportunities for older persons to participate in formulating policies concerning them; (e) to provide privileges for families caring for older persons; (f) to provide health insurance for older persons; (g) to provide privileges for older persons in public transport and housing; (h) to review employment policies and also pension and retirement systems to enable older persons to participate in the development process and benefit from its advantages; (i) to provide the necessary legal and institutional framework required to implement the Madrid Plan of Action in full.

3. The Arab uprising and media exclusion of older persons

40. Mr. Abdul Hussein Shaaban, managing director of the Documentation Centre for International Humanitarian Law in Beirut, gave a presentation titled “The Arab uprising and media exclusion of older people”. He pointed out that the media in general did not provide a positive image of older persons, as it portrayed them as recipients of social welfare services and not as active members of society. Media coverage of the recent uprisings in a number of Arab countries focused on the youth and disregarded the role of older persons who had, nonetheless, made substantial sacrifices.

41. He emphasized that a positive view of ageing is an integral part of the Madrid Plan of Action, and that the media should take the following steps to recognize the role of older persons in the recent uprisings in a number of Arab countries which called for change, reform and democracy: (a) raise awareness of their social, cultural, economic and political contributions; (b) provide a positive image of older persons as active participants in the development process who are eligible to benefit from it; and (c) emphasize family cohesion and promote solidarity and communication between generations. He asserted the need to establish an open dialogue between generations in order to redress misconceptions about older persons, bridge the gap between generations and create more synergy between them so that their roles will be complementary.

4. Gender mainstreaming in policies for older persons

42. Ms. Fahima Charafeddine, professor at the Lebanese University and president of the National Committee for the Follow-up of Women’s Issues in Lebanon, gave a presentation entitled “Gender dimension and its importance in policies for older persons”, which explored gender as a factor in the exclusion of older women in traditional patriarchal cultures. She explained that the Arab Plan of Action on Ageing provides a detailed analysis of the “feminization of ageing” phenomenon. Older women in the Arab region constitute a vulnerable marginalized group, as social and cultural customs and traditions do not encourage women to work away from the home and the family. Many women of working age do not participate in the labour force, and consequently will not enjoy health and social security benefits later in life. Thus, older women do not have access to health care on an equal footing with men or even with younger women.

43. She noted the importance of mainstreaming gender into national policies and strategies for older persons, as older women have different needs and face different challenges. To this end, the following

measures should be taken: (a) take the concerns of older women into account in the process of mainstreaming gender into development planning and secure the necessary institutional frameworks and disaggregate gender issues by age group; (b) create a database for older persons, disaggregated by gender, to reveal the situation of older women, the challenges they face, and to enable policymakers to identify the required action and interventions to improve their situation; (c) involve older women in all stages of the development, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of plans and policies targeting them; (d) adopt the life cycle approach which calls for investments in the development of individuals early in life to improve their situation later in life (older women, for example, often have illnesses that result from poor nutrition and health risks they faced during childhood, early age and their reproductive years); (e) adopt a development approach to ensure that older women participate in the development process and benefit from it, and a welfare approach to assist widows and needy women.

5. Summary of discussions held at the first session

44. Participants reached the following conclusions at the first session:

(a) The Arab region has witnessed a demographic shift which consists of a decrease in formerly high fertility and mortality rates and has thus affected the age structure of the population. The proportion of children (0-14 years old) has declined, while the youth and working-age population (15-64 years old) has increased, and the proportion of older persons (65 years and above) is increasing on a gradual yet accelerating basis. The repercussions of these shifts must be integrated into the development planning process, in order to give policymakers sufficient time to address the related challenges and also to take advantage of the demographic window;

(b) Although the Arab region is still in an early stage of the ageing of its population, the pace of the ageing process has been relatively fast, imposing social, economic and health challenges on countries in which resources are already scarce;

(c) The pace of the ageing process varies between Arab countries. In Lebanon and Tunisia, the proportion of older persons is expected to amount to 10 per cent of the total population by 2025;

(d) The pace of the ageing process of the rural population has been accelerating in Arab countries, as the youth and working-age populations migrate to the cities, while older persons remain in rural areas. Furthermore, upon retirement, older persons leave the cities and return to rural areas;

(e) In 2010, women amounted to about 54 per cent of older persons (65 years and above) and 59 per cent of the oldest old (80 years and above) in the Arab region. By 2025, these figures are expected to stand at 54 per cent and 61 per cent, respectively;

(f) Older women are the most disadvantaged group; they often live alone and endure widowhood and deteriorating financial circumstances, which compels them to work in informal sectors to meet their basic needs;

(g) Health problems often occur late in life as a result of the poor quality or lack of health care earlier in life, especially for women. Women face a number of health risks as a result of malnutrition, work conditions and childbirth, which trigger accumulated repercussions that appear later in life;

(h) The traditional role of the family in providing care for older persons is at risk because of social and cultural transformations; the decline of the extended family, the predominance of the nuclear family and the migration of young people have complicated care provision for older persons;

(i) In general, the media do not reflect the role of older persons in the development process. The media excluded them during Arab uprisings, and turned a blind eye to their social, cultural, economic and political contributions.

B. NATIONAL REPORTS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE SECOND REVIEW OF THE MADRID
INTERNATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION ON AGEING

1. Second review of the priority issues for older persons in the ESCWA region

45. Mr. Frederico Neto, director of the Social Development Division of ESCWA, gave a presentation on “The second review of the priority issues for older persons in the ESCWA region”. He asserted that the Madrid Plan of Action constitutes a milestone in international efforts aiming to meet the challenges of ageing populations; that it calls for a change in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels and in all sectors with a view to achieving “a society for all ages” in the twenty-first century. Therefore, it is fundamental that member countries systematically monitor the implementation of this plan in order to improve the living conditions of older persons. He also noted that the Commission on Social Development decided, at its forty-second session in 2004, to undertake a review of the Madrid Plan and to evaluate it every five years. The Commission requested the regional commissions of the United Nations to promote and facilitate, within their powers, the implementation, review and evaluation of the Madrid Plan of Action, and raise awareness of it at the regional level.

46. He stated that within the framework of the first review, ESCWA held a regional seminar on monitoring the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. In the context of the second review, ESCWA undertook a number of preparatory activities, including guiding member countries on the preparation of national reports on the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, by providing them with an outline of the content of these reports.

47. He highlighted the following points on which focus needs to be placed in the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action:

(a) The importance of integrating gender into the development of plans for older persons. Older women constitute the majority of this age group; they are often widows who endure poor living and economic conditions;

(b) The importance of adopting a developmental approach in planning for older persons, to engage them in the development process and enable them to reap its rewards; and of adopting the welfare approach that has been embraced by a number of countries in the region with a view to providing assistance for the most vulnerable (the poor, the disabled and persons who live alone);

(c) The importance of adopting a life cycle approach in planning for older persons, with a view to helping individuals face various challenges that emerge at different stages of their lives. Investing in women’s health, for example, early in life and during the reproductive years helps to avoid a substantial number of health risks later in life.

2. National reports

48. During this meeting, participants from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates presented reports prepared by their countries for the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action, in accordance with the following outline provided by ESCWA:

(a) **Overview.** The overview addresses the national strategy for older persons, including its date of adoption, and also the progress made in the preparation of an action plan for older persons;

(b) **Review and assessment of the situation of older persons.** This section addresses the following: (1) demographic trends among the elderly; social, economic and health indicators by gender, including life expectancy at birth, in addition to the dependency ratio, widowhood, economic participation and poverty rates; and (2) major achievements under the first review of the Madrid Plan of Action (2002-2007);

(c) **Review and assessment of national capacity to approach ageing issues and formulate national policies for older persons under the Madrid Plan of Action.** This section touches upon the following: (1) the institutional body responsible for monitoring the implementation of activities related to the Madrid Plan of Action; bodies concerned with older persons in the follow-up process to the Madrid Plan of Action; training and research activities addressing older persons; and statistical activities related to the collection and analysis of data concerning older persons; (2) obstacles to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, primarily the following: the institutional framework and its suitability for the development of plans for older persons; the structural framework, which consists of the knowledge of modern approaches to tackle ageing issues and of the availability of accurate data thereon; the circumstantial framework related to the particular circumstances of the country, such as security and political conditions which either facilitate or obstruct planning for older persons;

(d) **Review and assessment of policy and legislation for older persons.** This section addresses the following: (1) policies which have been developed for older persons following the first review in 2007, including the following: provision of income security and social protection; poverty reduction; active participation in society and development; solidarity between generations; improved access to health care and improved quality of life; the provision of training and support for health care providers and health workers; changing family structures and living environment; and the involvement of older persons in all aspects of life; (2) the integration of policies for older persons into social plans and policies; and the adoption of a bottom-up development approach which builds on the life cycle approach in planning for older persons.

3. Summary of discussions at the second session

49. Participants discussed the outcome of the review and assessment of the progress made in responding to the Madrid Plan of Action, as described in national reports presented at the meetings, commending the role of ESCWA in providing member countries with guidelines on drafting these reports. They noted the commitment of ESCWA member countries to implementing the Madrid Plan of Action and that significant progress has been made, especially in health and legislation. They pointed out, however, that these countries still face institutional, structural and circumstantial obstacles to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, which hinders the integration of older persons into development planning. Major points addressed in the discussions include the following:

(a) A number of member countries made significant progress in improving the situation of older persons and the services provided to them. For example, life expectancy at birth in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates increased to 78 and 76 years respectively in 2010. Nevertheless, results achieved during the period of the first review (2002-2007) were generally better than the results that have been achieved since 2008. This is due to the repercussions of the global financial crisis and the popular uprisings a number of countries witnessed recently;

(b) Most member countries lack a clear vision and a national policy which targets older persons as a separate sociodemographic group and not through sectoral and public plans;

(c) Most member countries lack the appropriate institutional framework to deal with the issues of older persons and devise special strategies for them. Older persons are often targeted through scattered efforts made by different sectoral ministries;

(d) There are a number of structural obstacles to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action in most member countries. Obstacles include a poor knowledge of modern approaches to the issues of older persons and the formulation, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of policies for them; and the lack of accurate, reliable, timely and comparable data on older persons, disaggregated by gender, place of residence (rural or urban areas), age group (to account for differences in needs and challenges facing the “young old” (60-79 years old) and “the oldest old” (80 years and above)), and social, economic and family situation;

(e) Some of the member countries, specifically Iraq and Lebanon, face circumstantial obstacles, such as instability and armed conflict, while Palestine suffers from the Israeli occupation and practices which exacerbate the problems of older persons, since ageing is not considered a priority in such situations. The marginalization of older persons is compounded by the popular uprisings that a number of Arab countries have witnessed;

(f) Most member countries do not allocate adequate funding to address the problems of older persons or to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate policies for them;

(g) Most ESCWA member countries adopt a purely welfare approach to the issues of older persons, based on the role of civil society and limited to the provision of material assistance or health services, rather than a development approach that seeks to enable older persons to participate in and benefit from the development process. In other words, care provided for older persons is based on assistance more than on development, whether at the governmental or civil society level;

(h) No policy has been specifically designed for older persons as a unique group. Policies that affect older persons are often fragmented and inconsistent, dealing with them as part of another marginalized group such as the poor, disabled or widowed. Furthermore, Governments do not provide any real support for families caring for older persons;

(i) Policies dealing with older persons generally focus on the provision of health services and sometimes on the improvement of their economic situation (such as providing financial support for the poorest older persons). Such policies fail to do the following: enhance the social participation of older persons; increase solidarity between generations; integrate older persons into all aspects of life; and enact necessary legislation to guarantee their rights and ensure their participation in and benefit from the development process;

(j) Health care provided for older persons remains inadequate, as geriatrics is not yet widespread and medical insurance does not provide full coverage for older persons. Health care in the region focuses on infectious diseases, and the training of specialists in health and social care for is rare.

50. Mr. Nabil Kronfol and Ms. Abla Sibai, representing the Centre for Studies on Ageing in Lebanon, gave an overview of the Centre, its objectives and activities. The Centre was established in 2008 to enhance intersectoral cooperation and promote the exchange of expertise related to older persons between researchers, policymakers and service providers. It includes a group of researchers from major universities in Lebanon; specialists in ageing issues; officials from the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Ministry of the Interior; members of the National Commission on Elderly Affairs in Lebanon; managers of care facilities and representatives of non-governmental organizations. The slogan of the Centre is “reflecting research outcome in policy and practice”, and its objective is to establish a platform for research and education and to develop policies and training courses on issues of older persons in Lebanon and the Arab region. Strategic tools adopted at the Centre are the following: (a) awareness-raising in relation to issues of older persons in Lebanon and the Arab world through research, the creation of a database, networking and conferences; (b) developing human resources and providing the knowledge and skills needed for self-care and health care for older persons; (c) mainstreaming older persons in economic, social and health processes and programmes, through the promotion of active partnership and coordination between Government, civil society and private sector organisations. Activities undertaken by the Centre include the organization of conferences and discussion groups, the publication of policy briefs and the establishment of a university for older persons which provides learning, creativity and entertainment opportunities in a favourable environment.

III. ORGANIZATION OF THE MEETING

A. VENUE AND DATE

51. The Second Regional Review Meeting of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing was held at the United Nations House in Beirut on 7 and 8 December 2011.

B. OPENING

52. Mr. Nadim Khoury, Deputy Executive Secretary of ESCWA, gave the opening speech on behalf of the Executive Secretary, Ms. Rima Khalaf. He began his speech by welcoming the attendees and underlining the objectives of the meeting.

53. He stated that the demographic shifts the region has witnessed have triggered a transition in the age structure of the population, that the ageing process is still at an early stage and that it is expected to accelerate. He noted that this will impose social, economic and health challenges on the countries of the region and require the development of policies to enable older persons to participate in the development process and allow progress towards “a society for all ages”.

54. He reaffirmed the importance of the commitment of member countries to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, warning that they face several structural, institutional and circumstantial challenges in their quest to tackle the issues of older persons and to formulate, implement, monitor and evaluate special policies for them. Such challenges include the lack of accurate, reliable, modern and detailed data; the lack of necessary funding; and the weakness of the institutional framework, given that efforts to care for older persons are often scattered between different sectoral ministries. He added that ESCWA placed the issues and policies of older persons among its top priorities, recalling the activities undertaken by the Commission under the first and second regional reviews of the Madrid Plan of Action. At the end, he expressed his hope that the outcomes of this meeting would form the contribution of the ESCWA region to the global review of the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, which will be held in 2013.

55. Ms. Batool Shakoori, head of the Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division of ESCWA, emphasized the importance of strengthening partnerships between the countries of the region in order to create an Arab society which encompasses all ages and invests in human beings throughout their life. She added that our world is witnessing “the era of ageing”, that is, the era of extended life expectancy. As a matter of fact, life expectancy at the regional level has increased by 19 years, from 51 years in 1950 to 70 years in 2010. She noted that older persons often suffer from difficult social, economic and health conditions, exclusion from public life and underrepresentation of their role in the media.

56. She underlined the importance of the Madrid Plan of Action to ensure that human beings everywhere grow old in safety and dignity, noting that the specificities of the Arab region have been addressed by the Arab Plan of Action on Ageing which emphasizes the role of the family in caring for older persons; the need to involve civil society; to establish equality between older men and women; to review and modernize legislation; and to develop policies in line with rapid social and economic developments.

57. She recalled that ESCWA held the first review meeting of the Madrid Plan of Action in 2007, during which participants underlined the common features between the conditions of older persons in the region. This sociodemographic group generally suffers from low education levels, high illiteracy rates, limited opportunities for participation in the labour market, the lack of old-age pensions and safety nets, a declining number of intergenerational households and an inadequate approach to care for older persons, which builds on assistance more than on development. She explained that the process of formulating policies for older persons in most countries is limited to scattered sectoral programmes that do not directly target older persons, that encompass the poor, persons with disabilities widows and other vulnerable groups.

58. In the context of the second review of the Madrid Plan of Action, she noted the following key issues: (a) assessing the performance of countries in key areas, notably providing services for older persons, improving their quality of life, integrating them into the development process and ensuring an enabling and supportive environment; (b) identifying discrimination against older persons and ways to reduce their exclusion; the violation of their social, economic, cultural and political rights; the marginalization and the underrepresentation of their role in Arab uprisings; (c) addressing discrimination against older women, which makes them the most vulnerable group; (d) finding ways to meet global and regional challenges, most notably the continuing repercussions of the financial crisis on the volume of investments generally, and particularly on investments in human beings. She warned against compromising social protection and long-term care for older persons and against obstructing their access to public health services and called for caution under the prevailing financial climate and for more efforts to integrate the needs and contributions of older persons into development plans.

59. Ms. Miriana Khayat Al-Sabouri, chair of the Public Relations and Conference Section of the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs and focal point between the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Population and Social Development Section of the Social Development Division of ESCWA, delivered a speech on behalf of the host country. She underlined the importance of integrating demographic transitions (including the changing age structure of the population) into the development planning process. She explained that although the ageing of the population is still at an early stage in the Arab region, the pace of this ageing process has accelerated considerably, imposing social, economic and health challenges, especially for countries already suffering from inadequate resources. In general, education levels are low and illiteracy rates are high among older persons. In addition, older persons have limited opportunities for participation in the economy; they lack access to pension and safety nets, and they suffer from widespread poverty. Older women represent the majority of this age group and often suffer from widowhood and deteriorating financial conditions that compel them to work in the informal sector to meet their basic needs.

60. She affirmed that member countries have committed themselves to the implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action. Nevertheless, they face several obstacles to its implementation that delay the integration of older persons into development planning. Such obstacles include the lack of an appropriate institutional framework to address the issues of older persons; lack of detailed data about them; inadequate funding; and the adoption of a welfare approach rather than a development approach. She spoke about the situation of older persons in Lebanon and concluded by thanking the Population and Social Development Section for its efforts in the area of population and development and on issues and policies targeting different sociodemographic groups. She also commended the Section for efforts within the context of the second regional review of the Madrid Plan of Action and in the preparation of several publications on the demographic shifts and on issues of older persons in the region.

C. PARTICIPANTS

61. The meeting was attended by a number of United Nations experts; government officials from ESCWA member countries; specialists in the issues and policies of older persons; leading experts in social sciences and economics; researchers from national and regional centres for population and development; and representatives of non-governmental organizations and academia. A number of independent experts participated in the meeting, in addition to experts nominated by their governments. The list of participants is annexed to the report.

Annex I*

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. ESCWA MEMBER COUNTRIES

Egypt

Ms. Aisha Azaban
Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs
for Social Welfare
Tel.: +202-27957868
Fax: +202-27945071
E-mail: Aisha-53@hotmail.com

Iraq

Mr. Mohammed Al-Ghrai
Director of Disabled
Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs
Tel.: +964-0770440459
E-mail: loaytoto@yahoo.com
Mohammed.abrism@yahoo.com

Jordan

Ms. Mohamed Khasawneh
Secretary-General
Ministry of Social Development
Tel.: +9626-5677352
Fax: +9626-776666205
E-mail: mohm.k@mosd.gov.jo

Kuwait

Ms. Abeer AlRefai
Head of the Elderly Section – Women
Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
Tel.: +965-24861860
Cell.: +965-50510018
E-mail: social_work2010@hotmail.com

Ms. Nadia AlShatty
Administrative Research Assistant
Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour
Tel.: +965-24878170
Cell.: +965-97938339
E-mail: social_work2010@hotmail.com

Lebanon

Ms. Diya Saleh
Director of the Department of Family Affairs
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tel.: +961-1-612849
Cell.: +961-3-101548
Fax: +961-1-612849
E-mail: dsaleh@socialaffairs.gov.lb

Palestine

Ms. Kawther Mughrabi
General Director of Family Affairs
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tel.: +9702-2405641
Cell.: +970-598-928279
Fax: +9702-2405642
E-mail: kawther_mu@yahoo.com

Qatar

Mr. Ghanim Al-Kuwari
Director of the elderly and persons with
disabilities
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tel.: +974-4241100
Cell.: +974-55555671
Fax: +974-4241133
E-mail: gkawwari@mosa.gov.qa

Ms. Fatma Al Obaidly
Family Policy Researcher
Supreme Council for Family Affairs
Tel.: +974-44040463
Cell.: +974-55841120
E-mail: fatma.qatar@hotmail.com

Mr. Hussain Al-Buhaliqa
International Relations Researcher
Supreme Council for Family Affairs
Tel.: +974-44040456
Fax: +974-44040423
E-mail: halbuhaliqa@scfa.gov.qa

* Issued as submitted.

Qatar (continued)

Ms. Wafaa Alyazeedi
Senior Consultant
Chairperson of Rehabilitation Medicine Dept.
Hamad Medical Corporation
Tel.: +974-55864555
Fax: +974-44397080
E-mail: points@hotmail.com
walyazeedi@hmc.org.qa

Ms. Fawzya Taresh Rahma
Director of Family Development
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tel.: +9714-6011294/6011288
Cell.: +971-506317977
E-mail: fawzya.taresh@msa.gov.ae

The United Arab Emirates

Mr. Hussain Al Shaikh
Assistant Deputy Minister for Family Affairs and
Social Welfare
Ministry of Social Affairs
Tel.: +9714-6011333
Cell.: +971-506576552
Fax: +9714-2610388
E-mail: hussain.alshaikh@msa.gov.ae

B. CONSULTANTS

Ms. Henrietta Asswad
Senior Consultant Communications and Strategy
Development
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-4-913218
Cell.: +961-3-080012
E-mail: aswad077@gmail.com

Ms. Fahima Charafeddine
University Professor
President, Committee for the Follow-up on
Women's Issues
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-5-950209
Cell.: +961-3-815820
Fax: +961-1-366238
E-mail: fahima@cfuwi.org

Ms. Madiha El Safty
Professor of Sociology
American University
Cairo, Egypt
Tel.: +202-22912938
Cell.: +20100-5013779
Fax: +202-27957565
E-mail: elsafty@aucegypt.edu

Mr. Ahmed Ghoneim
Associate Professor of Economics
Cairo University
Cairo, Egypt
Tel.: +20100-5376376
Fax: +202-35689910

E-mail: aghoneim@gmx.de
Mr. Prem Saxena
Chair Professor
Tata Institute of Social Sciences
Mumbai, India
Tel.: +91-22-25525652
Cell.: +91-9322687544
Fax: +91-22-25525050
E-mail: premsaxena2004@yahoo.com

Mr. Hussain Shaban
Documentary Center for Humanitarian and
International Law
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-1859081
Cell.: +961-3-140065
Fax: +961-1-822379
E-mail: dr_shaban21@hotmail.com

Ms. Abla Sibai
Professor
American University of Beirut
Beirut, Lebanon
Cell.: +961-3-646688
E-mail: anisbai@aub.edu.lb

C. EXPERTS

Ms. Mariana Al-Khayat Al-Sabbouri
Liaison Officer between ESCWA and Ministry of
Social Affairs
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-1-612285
Cell.: +961-3-450801
Fax: +961-1-611245
E-mail: mkhayat@socialaffairs.gov.lb
drmariana@hotmail.com

Mr. Toufic Osseiran
Honorary President
Lebanon Family Planning Association for
Development and Family Empowerment
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-1-311978
Cell.: +961-3-617480
Fax: +961-1-302752
E-mail: tosseiran@lfpa.org.lb

Ms. Khairieh Kaddouh
Professor and researcher
Lebanese University
College of Education
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-3-428418
Fax: +961-1-807617
E-mail: khairiehk@yahoo.com

Mr. Nabil Kronfol
Co-Founder and Treasurer
Center for Studies on Ageing in Lebanon
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-1-374337
Cell.: +961-3-682004
Fax: +961-1-374338
E-mail: dino@cyberia.net.lb

Mr. Abdel Mawla El Solh
Regional Representative for the Middle East
International Center for Migration Policy
Development (ICMPD)
Beirut, Lebanon
Cell.: +961-3-722717
Fax: +961-7-722717
E-mail: amelsolh@yahoo.com

Ms. Batool Yahfoufi
President of the Association for the Development
of Domestic Resources
(Creadel)
Beirut, Lebanon
Cell.: +961-3-871186
Fax: +961-8-373212
E-mail: creadel-lib@hotmail.com

Mr. Antoine Haddad
Expert
Social development issues and policies
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-1-752376
E-mail: haddadam@idm.net.lb

Mr. Taha El Kotob
Expert
President SMCA (Dar Al Salam)
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel.: +961-7-729900
Cell.: +961-3-379199
Fax: +961-1-646209
E-mail: mtelkotob@hotmail.com

D. ORGANIZERS

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Mr. Frederico Neto
Director
Social Development Division
Tel.: +961-1-978417
Fax: +961-1-981510
E-mail: neto2@un.org

Ms. Batool Shakoory
Chief
Population and Social Development Section
Social Development Division
Tel.: +961-1-978242
Fax: +961-1-981510
E-mail: shakoory@un.org