

## **Workshop on the Social Integration and Rights of Older Persons in the Asia-Pacific region**

30 September - 2 October 2014  
Bangkok

Report of the Workshop



United Nations Secretariat  
Department of Economic and  
Social Affairs



## Note

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Social Integration and Rights of Older Persons in the Asia-Pacific region: Report of the Workshop (United Nations)

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## Explanatory Notes

The following abbreviations are used in this document:

ADB	Asian Development Bank
APF	Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions
AU	African Union
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DESA	Department of Economic and Social Affairs
DSPD	Division for Social Policy and Development
IFA	International Federation of Ageing
MIPAA	Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NHRI	National Human Rights Institution
NTA	National Transfer Account
OEWG	The General Assembly's Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN WOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
WHO	World Health Organization

## I. Background to the Workshop

Asia and the Pacific is the fastest ageing region in the world. It is expected that by 2050, one fourth of the total population in Asia and the Pacific will be 60 years old or older. Due to increased life expectancy and continuing fertility decline, all sub-regions in Asia and the Pacific are ageing. In East and North-East Asia, the fastest ageing sub-region, one third of the population will be above 60 and in South Asia, persons above 60 will make up almost one fifth of the population. But in spite of older person's increasing importance in the demographics of the region, rights of older persons are often inadequately considered in policies and programmes. For example in East Asia, only 18.5 per cent of the working-age population is covered by pension systems, and in South Asia the population is only 7.5 per cent. Therefore, a large number of older persons has to continue working or is dependent on family support.

The regional review of the Madrid International Plan of Action (MIPAA) in 2011/2012 led to the adoption of the Bangkok Statement on the Asia-Pacific Review of the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Member States identified the following prevailing and emerging issues related to older persons: the need to expand social protection and health-care coverage; address the gender dimensions of ageing; enact and enforce specific legislation to protect the rights of older persons; and promote employment opportunities for older persons. The social integration of older persons is a key element in combating the social isolation and ageism that can lead to discrimination. This includes, inter alia, access to work and employment, community and social participation, civil and political participation, access to goods and services, age-appropriate health care, housing and transportation and long-term care.

These challenges have also been at the forefront of global discussions at the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) on Ageing. The OEWG was established by the General Assembly (A/RES/65/182) on 21 December 2010, and is considering the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons and identifying possible gaps and how best to address them. In the deliberations within the OEWG, there is consensus amongst member States on the serious gaps that exist in protecting the rights of older persons, while consensus on the means to do so remains elusive. In 2012 the OEWG was therefore requested by the General Assembly to consider proposals for an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons. In the same resolution, the regional commissions, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) and other relevant parts of the United Nations were mandated to contribute to the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (A/RES/67/139, paragraph 3).

Against this backdrop, DESA, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF), with the support of the United Nations

Population Fund (UNFPA), HelpAge International and the International Federation of Ageing (IFA), jointly organized a Workshop on the Social Integration and Rights of Older Persons in the Asia-Pacific region, to foster a regional dialogue towards building consensus around promoting social integration and rights of older persons.

## II. Opening

Ms. Nanda Krairiksh, Director of ESCAP's Social Development Division, welcomed participants to the meeting on behalf of ESCAP, and expressed deep appreciation for the partnership with DESA, APF, UNFPA and HelpAge. Ms. Krairiksh noted the timeliness of the workshop both in terms of the ongoing demographic transition in Asia-Pacific and in terms of the current discussions on the framework for the rights of older persons in the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG). She concluded by saying that expressing hope that the Workshop will mark the first steps towards shaping a rights-based society for all ages in Asia-Pacific.

On behalf of DESA and the Division for Social Policy and Development (DSPD), Ms. Rosemary Lane, Senior Social Affairs Officer and Focal Point on Ageing welcomed the participants to a first-of-its-kind workshop on this topic in the Asia-Pacific region, which brought together Government experts, several United Nations entities - DESA, UNESCAP, OHCHR and UNFPA -, as well as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). Ms. Lane emphasised the importance of this pilot workshop to bring together various stakeholders to informally discuss social integration and rights of older persons, and if successful, to be replicated in other parts of the region.

Ms. Susan Ryan, Australia's Age Commissioner, addressed the participants on behalf of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (APF). Ms. Ryan noted that a meeting of the region's national human rights institutions held earlier that year to discuss the rights of older persons in the region had further reinforced the global and regional significance of the ageing population and produced practical proposals on the elements of a new international instrument to protect the rights of older persons. Ms. Ryan also noted that many developed countries supported the proposal for the new convention and expressed her hope that many would soon endorse the proposal. She had closed by reiterating the call for action to protect the rights of older persons in the region.

Mr. Eduardo Klien, Regional Director, speaking on behalf of the South-East Asia Office of HelpAge International, stated that in the twenty-first century, when a large proportion of older persons came into the later stages of life, their respective societies were not able to provide them with the space for the process of productive ageing. Hence, he highlighted the need to see a reorganization of societies with human rights at the core of this reorganization. Mr. Klien concluded

by reiterating the commitment of HelpAge International to promoting the rights of older persons in the region.

### **III. Objectives of the workshop and overview of ageing in Asia and the Pacific**

Mr. Srinivas Tata, Chief of Social Policy and Population Section, Social Development Division at ESCAP, presented an overview of ageing in Asia and the Pacific focusing on trends, challenges and gender dimensions of ageing in the region. He highlighted that the region was ageing fast in terms of the proportion of population, absolute numbers as well as the pace of ageing, and was characterised by strong gender dimensions. Older women in Asia and the Pacific outnumbered older men, especially in the oldest old category, and would continue to do so in the future. He noted that in Asia-Pacific, a much smaller proportion of older persons have income security than in any other region. The limited health coverage coupled with increasing demand for long term care also characterised the region, although large urban rural differences were present. Mr. Tata concluded with emphasizing that ageing and the rights of older persons were not on political agenda in the region, although older persons must be at the centre of any development process.

Ms. Amal A Rafah, Social Affairs Officer at DSPD/DESA presented an overview of the workshop, and introduced the participants to three milestones, namely: (a) the second review and appraisal of MIPAA; (b) the General Assembly's OEWG on Ageing; and (3) older persons in the post-2015 development agenda. The OEWG on Ageing moved discussions at the United Nations away from a medical/welfare assistance framework towards discussions from a human rights perspective. Interaction and dialogue with experts, non-governmental organisations and older persons themselves, contributed to presenting ample evidence of the practical bearing of ageist attitudes towards older persons, and generated a better understanding of the barriers they face in the full enjoyment of their rights.

### **IV. Review of National Experiences in Implementing Laws, Policies and Programmes for Social Integration and Protection of Older Persons**

Mr. Christian Curtis, Human Rights Officer at the OHCHR Regional Office for South-East Asia, presented an overview of the international human rights framework as it pertains to the rights of older persons. Mr. Curtis outlined the main components of the international human rights framework, highlighting the absence of a specific legal instrument for promoting and protecting the rights of older persons and the fact that the existent human rights treaties made very few references to older persons.

Mr. Courtis suggested there were two main ways to address the rights of older persons which were either through mainstreaming the rights of older persons in international human rights law or through establishing a new legally binding mechanism specifically devoted to the rights of older persons. The mainstreaming option had not been used effectively to date as existing treaty body work tends to exclude the rights of older persons, with the notable exceptions of the CESCR Committee and CEDAW who both issued a relevant General Comment on older persons. Mr. Courtis noted the general lack of specific data on the rights of older persons in the context of treaty body work rendering older persons invisible and unaccounted for. Using existing references to 'other status' in international human rights law instruments to address age-based discrimination had not worked.

Efforts to address this invisibility had been made by some of the special procedure mandate holders, the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, the Special Rapporteur on the right to health and the Special Rapporteur on the rights of women. A new mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (HROP) has been established by the Human Rights Council in 2014 and the mandate holder is currently planning country visits, which is an opportunity for the region to interact with the Independent Expert.

The weak protection of the rights of older persons in the international human rights framework suggests that either mainstreaming needs to be rendered significantly more effective or it may be worth to consider following the path of other special groups, such as women, children and persons with disabilities to secure their specific rights in a dedicated legal instrument. Mr. Courtis concluded by reminding the participants that legal instruments were legally binding only for the State parties and the rate of ratification of international human rights instruments in the region was low.

## V. Abuse, Violence and Neglect of Older Persons

Dr Dong Hee Han, Director of the Research Institute of Science for the Better Living of the Elderly in Korea, delivered a presentation entitled "Overview of abuse, violence and neglect of older persons in Asia and the Pacific: Toward an

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