

GLOBAL AGEING: CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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2017 marks the fifteenth anniversary of the Second World Assembly on Ageing. The Assembly adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing which has been serving as the principal framework for designing international, regional and national policy responses to challenges and opportunities of population and individual ageing.

Relevance. The review article is devoted to the major challenges and opportunities of population ageing and corresponding policy responses.

Results. Emerging and continuing challenges and opportunities of population ageing. During the recent fifteen years the world has continued the process of demographic transition manifested in population ageing and caused by decline in mortality and fertility. Since 2002, the world population has increased from 6 billion to 7.5 billion, an increase by 25%. For the same period of time, the population of people aged 60 and above years has grown from 630 million in 2002 to 956 million in 2017, which is equal of 52%. The 60+ population is projected to grow to 1.4 billion in 2030, the target date for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and to 2.1 billion by 2050. Population ageing has advanced in all world regions, with Asia clearly leading the global process with 56% of all world older people (at 60 and above years old), followed by Europe with 19.6%. Demographic ageing is not simultaneous: while some countries are advancing in demographic transition, others remain demographically 'young'. Moreover, several European countries, including countries of the former Soviet Union, are experiencing both population ageing and population decline leading to 'demographic deficit'.

According to the United Nations, ten years are supposed to be added to the average lifespan (i.e., life expectancy at birth) by the middle of the current century. From 2000 through 2015, humanity has already gained 3.5 years, and it is projected to add another year or more by 2020. The largest gain in longevity has occurred in Eastern Africa – 12 years, and the lowest, 3 years, has happened in economically and socially advanced Western Europe. It is projected that the female life expectancy advantage over men is likely to shrink by 2030 in several industrialized countries, while there is more than a 50% probability that by 2030, national female life expectancy will break the 90 year barrier in Korea. While continued increase in longevity is postulated by various authors, there have been alarming findings coming from Europe, where decrease in healthy life expectancy during the first decade of the current century was reported, and from the USA, where the age-adjusted death rate had increased, possibly because of rising premature mortality in certain ethnic groups. International migration has emerged in recent years as the major demographic, as well as social and economic challenge manifesting itself in the refugee crisis. The effects of mass migration on population age structure and the corresponding demographic, social and economic consequences in both sending and receiving countries are being assessed and analysed. The issues of older persons in conflict and emergency situations have recently risen to the prominence owing to the violent conflicts and humanitarian crises in various parts of the world, and most notably in Western Asia.

Policy responses

The Madrid Plan of Action provides recommendation for addressing ageing issues in three policy directions: older persons and development; advancing health and well-being into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environment. Within the next ten months international community will be conducting the third cycle of the review and appraisal of the Plan's implementation. The preliminary assessment undertaken by the United Nations has revealed prevalent and emerging issues and related policy advancements around the world.

Social protection remains one of the major areas of public concern and policy interventions. The continuing challenges in this area include low level of coverage by pension schemes, particularly in developing regions of the world. In many countries, pension benefits are insufficient to meet basic needs and prevent impoverishment. While low-income countries are struggling to mobilize resources for providing social protection to their citizens of different ages, many high and middle-income countries are facing the declining number of working-age tax payers and thus the shrinking budget capacity to provide for support mechanisms for older persons. The ongoing global economic crisis has prompted many developed and developing countries to reduce budgetary expenditures. In spite of the above challenges, there have been important advancements in many countries aimed at introducing pension benefits; improving already existing pension benefits (e.g., through indexing and/or adding pension supplement); expanding pension coverage, including to informal sector workers; and strengthening sustainability of social protection system.

Health and social care have universally focused on prevention and treatment of non-communicable diseases and rehabilitation of older persons suffering from such diseases in order to prevent frailty and disability in older age. Dementia, including Alzheimer's disease, has emerged in recent decades as the major challenge for ageing individuals and formal and informal care systems. The prevailing policy content in health and social care has been policies of active and healthy ageing inclusive of promoting preventive measures throughout the life course; facilitating various forms of participation of older persons; and safeguarding their dignity and security, particularly in later stages of individual life. In more concrete terms, policy measures have included promotion of 'ageing in place'; de-institutionalization of care provision; expanding community and in-home care models; and introduction (improvement) of regulation of care services and care institutions.

Human Rights of older persons have become major policy priority at various levels: national, regional and global. Efforts of civil society to draw public attention to the issues of age discrimination in labour market, as well as neglect and abuse of older persons, particularly older women, in the family and in institutions, have urged policy makers to introduce new and amend existing national legislation to attend to the human, social and economic rights of older persons. At the regional level, two legally binding documents were adopted recently: the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, by the Organization of American States in June 2015; and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa, by the African Union in January 2016. At the global level, the United Nations Working Group on Ageing was established in 2010 'with the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons'. In 2012, the Working Group was requested by the United Nations General Assembly "to present to the General Assembly... a proposal containing... the main elements that should be included in an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons..." Until now, however, the international community has not reached a consensus on the desirability of elaborating an international legally binding document on the rights of older persons.

Conclusion. Most of the above challenges and opportunities and corresponding policy responses are traditional for international ageing. The SDGs adopted in 2015 provide an opportunity for mainstreaming the issues of ageing into global process of promoting sustainable development in ageing societies.

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