United Nations Expert Group Meeting: "Measuring population ageing: Bridging Research and Policy", Bangkok, Thailand, 25–26 February 2019

Organized by:
Population Division and the Division of Social Policy and Development
Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), United Nations Secretariat, the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (IIASA), and Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

I. BACKGROUND

Population ageing is a well-established global demographic trend, with major social, economic and public health consequences, amongst others. The long-term shift of the share of the population from younger to older ages is driven mainly by declining fertility, and also by increases of life expectancy that are taking place almost everywhere. There is considerable international diversity in the onset and speed of population ageing, which, according to United Nations data, is most advanced in Japan and countries in Europe, followed by Northern America. Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania are projected to follow similar trends over the next few decades. Even in most of African countries, whose populations are still relatively young, the absolute number of older persons is growing rapidly, and is leading to long-term shifts in the age-structure.

Traditionally, the United Nations and most researchers have used measures and indicators on ageing that are mostly or entirely based on people's chronological age, which provides a simple, clear and easily replicable way to measure and track various indicators of ageing. At the same time, there has been increasing recognition that the health status, type and level of activity, productivity, and other socio-economic characteristics of older persons have changed significantly over the last century, and even over the last several decades. This has led to the development of alternative concepts and measures of ageing, which provide different outlooks on the levels and trends of ageing, and a more nuanced appreciation of what ageing means in different contexts.

These changes and the various approaches to understanding and measuring ageing, have important implications for the design and implementation of national development policies and programmes, and for the follow-up and review of internationally agreed development goals that are related to or are affected by population ageing. These include those highlighted in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD), the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), and most recently, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Specifically, the different ways of measuring ageing affect the assessments of the evolution of the number of older persons, their living conditions, their contributions to the societies where they live and their needs for social protection. They have significant implications for labour markets, life-long education and health, and the interactions and mutual support of older persons with the younger generations.

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE MEETING

Recognizing the diverse stages and characteristics of ageing in various regions of the world, as well as the recent developments and innovations in measurement, this meeting will seek to take stock of different concepts and methodologies, and their applicability to and usefulness for various policy analyses and purposes.

Consequently, the Population Division the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (IIASA), and Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), are organizing an international expert group meeting on *"Measuring Population Ageing: Bridging Research and Policy"*, to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25 to 26 February 2019. The purpose of the meeting is to bring together experts to discuss key questions related to the measurement of population ageing, including discussion of traditional and new concepts and methods, and to assess their scope and limitations to support national policy design and implementation, as well as the regional and global review of progress in the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, as noted above. Experts from governmental and international organizations, from research institutions as well as civil society organizations will be invited to discuss the applicability of various measures of ageing in different contexts as well as their suitability to change the image of ageing in societies.

III. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

In line with the respective mandates of the United Nations entities and the IIASA, the meeting will contribute to an enhanced understanding of ageing and its implications for development policy at the national, regional and global levels.

The specific expected outputs and outcomes of the workshop are:

1. Increased awareness and knowledge of traditional and new methodologies to measure population ageing amongst Government officials, experts from academia and civil society, including the scope and limitations of the various measures and how they contribute to changing the image of ageing and older persons;
2. Enhanced and better-informed dialogue between policy analysts, decision-makers and researchers on best practices for evidence-based policies related to ageing;
3. Identification of possible future research/work on policy-relevant approaches and measures of population ageing;
4. A report of the expert group meeting, summarizing the presentations, discussions and recommendations made;