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**ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC**

High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan  
of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)

9-11 October 2007  
Macao, China

**Country Report**

*Singapore\**

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\* This paper was prepared by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports of Singapore, for the High-level Meeting on the Regional Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), 9-11 October 2007, Macao, China. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations. The paper has been reproduced as submitted.

**Singapore Country Write-up for the High Level Meeting on the Regional  
Review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA),  
Macao, China, 9-11 October 2007**

**Preface**

In 2002, The Second World Assembly on Ageing concluded with the passing of a blueprint for international response to population ageing, known as Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) 2002. The document promotes the concept of Society of All Ages and was adopted by 159 UN Member States in 2002, including Singapore. The Plan was affirmed at the 57<sup>th</sup> UN General Assembly on December 2002.

Singapore was among the countries that witnessed the passing of the MIPAA blueprint, and has ever since affirmed the concept of Society of All Ages in all its approach to answering the challenges of an ageing population. Singapore adopts the three priorities of the MIPAA:

- (i) *older persons and development*, including creating employment opportunities for those who wish to work, encouraging education and training, involving elderly in decision making, etc.
- (ii) *advancing health and well-being into old age*, including elderly-focused health policy, development of primary healthcare services, strengthening primary and long term care services, health promotion, integrated palliative care, etc.
- (iii) *ensuring enabling and supportive environments*, including elderly-friendly housing and transport system, promoting positive view of ageing, supporting the care-giving role of older persons, creating support services to address elder abuse, etc.

This report is prepared by the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) to outline the policies and programmes on ageing in Singapore. MCYS also serves as secretariat to the Ministerial Committee on Ageing — the national high-level committee overseeing ageing issues in Singapore.

**Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports of Singapore  
October 2007**

## Country Report

### Background

1. In Asia, Singapore ranks third in population ageing after Japan and Republic of Korea. This is caused by high life expectancy and low total fertility rate<sup>1</sup>. The proportion of Singapore residents aged 65 and above is projected to increase from 8.5% in 2007 to 18.7% in 2030. In absolute terms, they will increase from about 300,000 in 2007 to 900,000 in 2030. The pace of ageing will increase notably around 2011, when the first baby boomer cohort reaches 65 years of age. The economic burden on society will thus escalate, with our support ratio<sup>2</sup> projected to increase from 1 elderly to 8.5 working-age residents in 2006 to 1 elderly to 3.4 working-age residents in 2030.

### Desired outcomes and policy principles on ageing

2. Singapore's vision for ageing is for all levels of society to be well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society. We seek to achieve the following desired outcomes:

- i) At the individual level, we want our seniors to be **healthy, active and secure**. They should age with respect and dignity, and lead independent and fulfilling lives as integral members of their families and communities;
- ii) At the family level, we want to see **strong, extended and caring families**. Family relationships of interdependence should complement the seniors' independence;
- iii) At the community level, we want a **strong network of community services**, opportunities for engagement and integrated communities. We want to foster a deep sense of community ownership and a high degree of participation in securing the well-being of the senior and the family; and
- iv) At the national level, we want to develop a **high level of national preparedness** for the ageing population, a competitive and vibrant economy as well as social cohesion and rootedness.

3. In our efforts towards addressing the issues of our ageing society through a financially sustainable system, we are guided by the following principles:

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<sup>1</sup> Total Fertility Rate was 1.26 in 2007 (Source: Department of Statistics, Singapore)

<sup>2</sup> Support Ratio is computed as the number of residents aged 15-64 years per elderly resident aged 65 years and over.

- i) **Contributions from Senior Citizens.** Seniors should be valued as contributing and participating members of society, and should be enabled to remain physically, mentally and socially active for as long as possible. Our national policies must cater to seniors who are well and healthy, not just those who are frail and ill.
- ii) **Care-Giving Primarily from Families.** We believe that the family is the primary care-giving unit and the bedrock of support for seniors. The family must be supported and strengthened in its ability to care for its older members to ensure that institutionalisation remains a measure of last resort.
- iii) **Collective Responsibility from All Sectors.** We should uphold the “Many Helping Hands” approach of involving the community, the family and seniors themselves in ensuring the holistic well-being of seniors. The starting point, however, must be individual responsibility to plan and prepare for old age. The family is the first line of care. The community is the second line of support to enable families in their care-giving role. The role of the State is to provide a framework that enables the individual, the family, the community, and the government to each play its part.

4. The issues of an ageing population are multifaceted and dynamic. Addressing the far-reaching and multi-disciplinary issues requires cooperation and coordination among various agencies and the community. Thus far, the Government has adopted the “Many Helping Hands” approach in tackling ageing issues from various angles.

5. Since the 1980s, there have been several ministerial committees formed to look at ageing issues at a national level. The current Ministerial Committee on Ageing is chaired by Mr Lim Boon Heng, Minister in the Prime Minister’s Office, signifying the importance of a high level inter-ministry approach towards developing holistic policy directions for ageing.

### **Policy framework on ageing**

6. Singapore adopts MIPAA’s priorities of older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and ensuring enabling and supportive environments, in formulating its national framework. At a policy level, we translate these into the principles of participation, health and security. Singapore pursues these principles under four strategic thrusts: Employability and Financial Security; Holistic, Affordable Healthcare and Eldercare; Ageing-in-Place and Active Ageing.

### **Thrust 1: Enhancement of Financial Security and Economic Participation**

7. Employment and employability of older persons are critical to give continued financial independence to seniors. Increasing employment of older persons will also reduce the economic burden and slow down the decrease in our support ratio.

8. A Tripartite Committee on Employability of Older Workers, represented by the government, employers and unions, was set up in March 2005 to recommend measures to enhance the cost competitiveness of older workers, redesign jobs, and shape public perceptions to accept older workers in the society. In 2006, the Employment Rate for residents aged 55 to 64 was 53.7%, a significant 6.7 percentage-points higher than that in 2004. In absolute terms, this meant there were 40,000 more older people in employment. Singapore aims to increase the employment rate of adults aged 55-64 years old further to 65% by 2012.

9. In May 2007, the tripartite committee released its recommendations on some of the concrete steps that would be taken to facilitate productive ageing. These include expanding employment opportunities, enhancing the cost competitiveness of older workers, raising their skills and value and shaping positive perceptions towards older workers. There will also be legislative changes in 2012 to facilitate opportunities for older workers to work beyond age 62, to 65 and subsequently 67 years of age. The legislation is intended to make reemployment of older workers a more flexible and mutually beneficial arrangement for both the employers and employees.

10. As life expectancy increases, there is a need for people to work longer and draw on savings later to last as long as possible. Singapore is progressively increasing the draw-down age from a mandatory savings scheme called the Central Provident Fund (CPF) from 62 to 65 years old. The government is also studying the introduction of compulsory annuities, which will ensure regular income streams for those who live beyond 85 years old. There will also be a scheme for the elderly to sell and lease back their public apartments in return for an income stream.

### **Thrust 2: Holistic, affordable healthcare and eldercare**

11. Singapore believes that family should continue to be the first line of care for older people. A Maintenance of Parents Act was enacted in 1995 to provide a legal avenue for elderly parents to seek maintenance from their children. To support the caregiving role of family, there is a range of affordable healthcare and eldercare services for older people in the community, provided by the private, people and public sector.

12. At the same time, Singapore is working to strengthen our healthcare infrastructure. There are efforts to raise the role of family physicians, particularly in managing chronic diseases. More allied health workers will be trained to care

for the elderly. Efforts are also being undertaken to better train and support caregivers, such as by promoting courses such as nursing, physiotherapy, etc. in the local universities and polytechnics.

13. Singapore is also moving towards an integrated healthcare model which is wellness-centric, senior-centric and adopting a community-based care approach. In this context, a pilot wellness program will be launched in 2008. This is intended to help improve preventative care and enable the elderly to age-in-place as an integrated part of their community.

### **Thrust 3: Ageing-in-Place**

14. Studies have shown that ageing in a familiar place is beneficial to older people psychologically and emotionally. A barrier-free and accessible environment and public transport system will also enable older people to participate in economic and community activities.

15. The Housing and Development Board (HDB) has introduced universal design features in its public housing, including elevators that stop on every level, less staircase and less steep ramps at open spaces. Studio Apartments with features like anti-slip tiles and grab bars have also been built for older Singaporeans. The government is also studying the experiences of other countries to explore the best means to incorporate technological solutions to enhance the quality of life of the elderly.

16. Progress has also been made in our public transport system. Since 2006, all subway stations have been retrofitted to be barrier-free. The first wheelchair accessible buses were also introduced in 2006. By 2010, 40 per cent of the public bus fleet will be wheelchair-accessible. More will be done to implement barrier-free accessibility in Singapore.

### **Thrust 4: Active Ageing**

17. In 1999, which was committed as the International Year of Older Persons, Singapore embarked on large scale public education on ageing. Since then, there has been much focus on promoting active ageing. Government funds are provided to encourage intergenerational bonding programmes and projects from the community.

18. An umbrella body overseeing active ageing in Singapore, called Council for Third Age, was established recently to further promote active ageing, maintain greater physical and mental well-being among seniors, and encourage seniors to be as independent for as long as possible. The Council for Third Age seeks to encourage elderly to live meaningfully through multiple fronts such as employment, volunteerism, lifelong learning, healthy lifestyle, sports and recreation and intergenerational bonding.