

Commission for Social Development, 45th session
Agenda item 3 (b) – Chairman's Summary

Panel discussion on Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing:
highlights of progress

1. Major challenges and progress in the area of ageing since the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in 2002 were debated by a panel of experts drawn from four regions: Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin American and the Caribbean. Although some countries are ageing quite rapidly while others are experiencing a slower process, all the panellists agreed that demographic ageing poses a major challenge, especially for developing countries. Among the particular issues raised were enabling older persons to play an active role in development, securing the health and well-being of people as they age, and building more supportive and conducive environments for an ageing population.
2. Panellists stressed that the impacts of ageing on societies are widespread, holding important implications for, among other things, economic growth, health care systems, social protection measures, the labour market, families and communities, and globalization. Hence, links need to be strengthened between the Madrid Plan of Action and key international policy objectives, such as poverty reduction strategies, the Millennium Development Goals, the decent work agenda, and the Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. Such linkages will also help to mainstream ageing into the policy discourse.
3. Three fundamental areas necessary for active ageing emerged. The first involves financial security, either in the form of non-contributory social pensions or more traditional contributory social protection schemes, so that older persons have a regular income on which to live. Rather than being viewed as a cost, social pensions should be viewed as an important investment in development, one which pays dividends to families, communities and the overall economy. The second deals with health promotion, including an emphasis on preventive care and effective management of chronic conditions, as well as adequate training of health care providers in geriatric medicine and an expansion of homecare services and support to family caregivers. Healthy ageing not only enhances the quality of a person's life, it is also far more cost effective and less draining on public health systems. The third area addresses issues of participation and empowerment of older persons so that they can have a meaningful voice in policies and programmes that affect them, rather than being sidelined and discriminated against. Organizations of older persons can provide an entry point for engaging in policy dialogue and also help to ensure that people receive the benefits and services to which they are entitled.
4. A general consensus was that successful implementation of the Madrid Plan of Action, particularly in developing countries, hinges on the development of national capacity in carrying out ageing policies. To this end, governments in developed countries, civil society, and international organizations can assist in providing training and advisory services during the review and appraisal process.