



NGO

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Theme: Population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development

### AARP Statement to the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the Commission on Population and Development

AARP is honored to be participating in the 41<sup>st</sup> Session of the UN Commission on Population and Development (CPD). We are pleased to join government delegations and civil society organizations for these important deliberations on the challenges of population distribution, urbanization, internal migration and development. AARP stands prepared to offer its experience, advice and expertise in meeting these challenges.

As global population shifts continue to re-engineer contexts of development and security around the world, the capacity of governments to provide fundamental quality of life for hundreds of millions of older citizens is certain to be tested in the decades ahead. A convergence of two demographic trends – a projected increase in the proportion of older people in the global population, and a gathering migration to urban areas – will recalibrate social compacts and transform the way support systems meet the needs of the aging. From AARP's vantage point, these emerging population shifts raise pointed questions about *how* older people will live: Will their communities be 'livable?' Will they have access to the health care they need? And how financially secure will they be?

Among the many notable population milestones to be reckoned with during the current century, two stand out. The first, to be reached *this* year, is that for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population – roughly 3.3 billion people – will be living in urban areas. By 2030, this figure will increase to 5 billion. The second, to be reached in a little more than 40 years, is that, again, for the first time in history, older people will outnumber children on the planet. Crossing both thresholds will have uncertain consequences for the quality of life of older people everywhere.

There is a blueprint that approximates how the international community hopes to be providing for older people. The 1994 Cairo Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) called on governments to strengthen formal and informal support systems and safety nets for seniors and eliminate all forms of violence and discrimination against them. Further, governments were urged to develop social security systems that ensure greater equity and solidarity between and within generations, and that provide support to older people through encouragement of multigenerational families. Finally, governments should seek to enhance the self-reliance of elderly people so that they can lead healthy and productive lives and can benefit society by making full use of the skills and abilities.

The question is how and to what extent this blueprint can be squared with the coming demographic 'facts on the ground.'

As the Report of the Secretary-General (SG) to this session of the CPD notes, all evidence indicates that people *do* benefit from living in cities/urban areas. Generally, incomes are higher and urban residents have better access to a wider variety of services such as education, health, communication, transportation, water supply, and sanitation, among others. This would seem to

bode well for the increasing proportion of older people who will be living in urban areas, particularly in developing countries.

But there are several wild cards in play. First, many of these new urbanites will be old and poor, and in most developing countries, a continuum-of-care infrastructure does not exist to absorb them. Second, urbanization tends to expand income inequality, increasing the number of urban poor who cannot afford urban housing. And third, the rate of urban growth in developing countries is outpacing the capacity of cities to provide for citizens, leaving millions in limbo. In short, the consequences of a large-scale urban migration on older people in developing countries are difficult to know, but seem tenuous at best.

In its work, AARP has defined a “livable community” to be one that has affordable and appropriate housing, supportive community features and services, and adequate mobility options, which together facilitate personal independence and the engagement of residents in civic and social life. Despite the fact that community design clearly impacts the aging, the special needs of older people are often ignored in the drafting of community plans.

On this point, AARP is pleased to note three recommendations in the SG’s Report that address aspects of urban community design. The recommendations highlight the need to ensure that the urban poor: benefit from improved service delivery, can access public health facilities, and are involved in property decisions that affect the quality of their housing. To some extent, these recommendations may offer a pathway to more livable communities for older people around the world.

AARP is equally concerned about the financial security of seniors as their numbers increase and as global population shifts alter support systems and traditional family structures. In developed countries, growing numbers of retirees will be dependent on shrinking workforces to support them. This shift in dependency ratio in many G7 countries poses challenges to their ability to fund pensions and social security schemes.

In developing countries, different issues are emerging. First, older men continue to work because they have no alternative income or pension benefits. And second, three-quarters of older people share living quarters with children or grandchildren, in part because they, again, lack pensions and social security. It is the urbanization trend that may put the financial security of older people in developing countries at risk.

While the SG’s Report correctly notes that rural-urban migration tends to support population aging by expanding the number of working age people and thereby lowering old-age dependency ratios, AARP suggests that projections for large-scale urban migration of *older* people may undercut this model long-term. It is vital that efforts to sustain economic growth – via diversification, employment generation, and increased productivity – are accompanied by investment in social pension schemes and other retirement savings vehicles. Such investments will pay off in reducing urban poverty and improving the overall quality of life for older people.

In conclusion, AARP would suggest that this session marks yet another opportunity for all of us to revisit the commitments made in Cairo, and examine them against new demographic realities that are rapidly transforming how we care for vulnerable groups such as older people. We are grateful to the Commission for shaping this ambitious agenda and we look forward to working with all stakeholders to address the challenges before us.