

Report on the Follow-Up to the Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in the Republic of Armenia

Abstract

Ageing and the situation of older persons in Armenia is of high concern to the RA Government and has been firmly placed on the political agenda.

The Strategy on Demographic Policy, adopted by the RA Government in 2009, analyses the main demographic developments and suggests policies to tackle the various challenges they pose. Among others, the document describes the situation with regard to population ageing and identifies strategic approaches and activities to response. Following the principles of MIPAA/RIS and in regard to the specific situation in Armenia, three priority areas of action are defined: (1) developing and implementing an effective policy in response to demographic ageing; (2) streamlining the social insurance system; and (3) developing social and healthcare services and improving older persons' quality of life.

Acknowledging ageing as one of the biggest challenges, the aforementioned document calls for the development of a more comprehensive policy addressing different aspects of ageing. Responding to this request, the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues has developed Strategy on Ageing Issues and Social Protection of older persons and an Action Plan on its implementation, which will be submitted to the RA Government for approval in December 2011. The main aim of the Strategy is to create decent life conditions for older persons in the result of consolidated and coordinated policy elaboration based on studies, facts, as well as national and international documents. The Strategy was developed by assistance of UNFPA and UNDESA.

Alongside the development of the Strategy on Ageing the development of the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing with UNECE support took place. The Road Map therefore fed into this strategy, helping to ensure that it was in compliance with MIPAA/RIS.

Although during recent years in the sphere of older persons' issues a number of documents have been developed and adopted, reforms and different activities were carried out there are still many unsolved issues and life quality of older persons in Armenia remains insufficient. Older persons in Armenia are economically and socially vulnerable. Employment rates are already low among those approaching retirement age and become virtually non-existent once retirement age has been passed. Older persons are not involved in any learning activities. The concept of lifelong education engaging representatives of all generations, including the most senior citizens is not yet implemented. Reasons for this are manifold and have to be addressed in a concerted effort.

Given the challenges faced by other population groups the overall challenge of ageing-related policies is to achieve an age-inclusive framework providing equal opportunities for all age groups.

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Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing in Armenia, developed jointly with UNECE in 2009 and published in 2011.

Strategy on Ageing Issues and Social Protection of Older Persons and an Action Plan on its implementation have been developed, are now in the process of finalization and will be submitted to the RA Government for approval in December 2011.

1. National Situation Related to Ageing

According to international standards Armenia's population is ageing. Socio-economic changes which took place in the Republic of Armenia resulted in drastic deterioration of the demographic situation. Insufficient birth rate, high involvement of working-age persons in migration outflows contributes to demographic ageing of the population. As of beginning of 2011 the population of retirement-age (63 years old and above) amounted to 11.5%.

In the result of the mentioned changes the number of lonely older persons living in bad socio-economic conditions, having poor health and being unable to satisfy their own vital, social and everyday needs increased drastically. While older persons with working-age children living abroad may profit from remittances, they also lack the support in daily life which they might receive from children living close by.

In such a situation the responsibilities of the state towards older persons are increasing dramatically. In order to protect older persons from the current socio-economic, ecological, political and other risks, feeling themselves neglected and useless there is a necessity to implement duly developed comprehensive plan of activities addressing solution of various issues of that social group.

One of the components of social policy is development of social protection policy of older persons, which includes social security, social assistance and social maintenance. Social

maintenance and social care services for older persons are rendered in the Republic of Armenia at 24-hour care institutions, at home or day care centres.

As of 2011 in Armenia there are 4 older persons' houses functioning under the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, 3 of them are of general type, one of special neural-psychological type and there is a centre rendering social maintenance services for lonely people at their homes. There are also 4 non-governmental older persons' houses in the country. In the mentioned 8 older persons' houses about 1250 pensioners are residing, only in the older persons' houses under the Ministry – 1090 pensioners.

With the view of improving quality of care and social maintenance services for older persons and persons with disabilities, in 2007 the RA Government approved standards on care and social maintenance at the institutions of social protection of population.

Starting from 2007 the Ministry also delegates rendering of social maintenance services to non-governmental organizations.

2. Methodology

In order to properly and comprehensively assess efficiency of the policy implemented in Armenia towards older persons, identify needs and problems which experience older persons and find ways to overcome the consequences of ageing, in 2008 the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues implemented a large-scale sample survey on ageing throughout the country, the aim of which was to investigate among 50 years old persons and above, as well as their spouses family relations, health, life style, well-being, employment, pension and financial security levels. This group was chosen to find out those issues which are faced not only by older persons but also who are coming close to that age, with the purpose to take necessary preventive measures.

All those areas which were necessary to understand the existing situation, problems, gaps and needs were covered by the survey. Quite an extensive questionnaire was developed both by local and international experts including the following chapters:

- Household economy roster,
- Housing conditions,
- Property and monetary flows of household,
- Expenses, monetary transfers,
- Social demographic description,
- Health, care,
- Employment, pension,
- Children,
- Participation in organizing the household,
- Social assistance,
- Financial transfers,
- Values and attitudes.

The survey was carried out by using quantitative and qualitative methods.

The quantitative method included two types of questionnaires. The first type of questionnaire was designed for the household and used in 1250 households, where there were 50 years old persons and above. The interview was carried out with the master – the main decision maker of the household. The second type - individual questionnaire was used to interview members of the same household who are 50 years old and above and with their spouses even if they were under 50.

In order to cover those gaps which were impossible to cover with the quantitative survey focus groups and interviews had been conducted with different related groups and people, desk analyses were done.

The qualitative survey had the following structure: they were 19 focus groups interviews with the pensioners not residing in older persons' houses, with the pensioners residing in older persons' houses, non-pensioners, pensioner experts, who were former officials making decisions on older persons' issues at governmental or non-governmental organizations. Also expert interviews were carried out with representatives of the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, the RA Ministry of Health, the RA Ministry of Education and Science. Deep interviews were carried out with representatives of the Employers' Union, community bodies, non-governmental organizations, family doctors and mass media. Public discussions on pivotal issues of ageing are held regularly with representatives of non-governmental organizations and institutions rendering care and other services to older persons.

3. National Capacities for Follow-up to MIPAA/RIS

RIS Commitment 1: Mainstreaming ageing

In 2009 Armenia was selected by UNECE as the first country to develop a Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing. The central tenet of the Road Map is mainstreaming ageing – that is ensuring that matters related to population ageing and to the interests of older persons are considered in all policy areas. The aim of the Road Map is to provide assistance in translating the recommendations of the MIPAA/RIS into concrete actions relevant to the economic, social, cultural and political specificities of the country, so that it can better implement these internationally agreed commitments within the framework of national circumstances.

The Road Map provides recommendations in relation to several different substantive policy areas, including integration and participation of older persons, social protection, health, institutions, housing and independent living, education, the labour market, gender, monitoring and evaluation. These areas were chosen as the most relevant in reflecting the essence of the MIPAA/RIS and the concept of mainstreaming ageing.

Recommendations were developed based on a field study, desk analysis and fact-finding missions of UNECE experts during which interviews were carried out. The process pursued

a participatory approach, that is representatives of all stakeholder groups, including government, civil society, trade unions and the private sector were consulted and involved, particularly officials from the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues, experts from the National Institute of Labour and Social Researches, representatives of the main acting non-governmental organization in the ageing sphere <<Mission Armenia>>.

Following the mission of UNECE experts and discussions in the working group, the document was submitted to different stakeholders, such as line Ministries, local governments, NGOs, social partners, international organizations and older persons for their suggestions and comments. After receiving comments round table discussion was conducted in order to finalize the document and submit to the RA Government's approval. The Road Map was published and distributed in 2011 by the UNECE.

The development of the Road Map coincided with a national process of developing Strategy on Ageing Issues and Social Protection of Older Persons and a corresponding Action Plan. The recommendations developed for the Road Map were channelled directly into the drafts of these documents, which are now in the process of finalization and will be submitted to the RA Government for approval in December 2011.

The structure and content of the Strategy is in line with the Commitments of the MIPAA. The main aim of the Strategy is to create decent life conditions for older persons in the result of consolidated and coordinated policy elaboration based on studies, facts, as well as national and international documents. The strategy is a long-term program through which society and economy and first of all healthcare, social protection, labour market and education will be brought into conformity with demographic changes with the purpose to establish society with equal opportunities for persons of all ages, where especially negative consequences of ageing will be overcome, needs of older persons will be satisfied and their unused potential will be identified and decent life conditions will be provided.

The first activity of the Action Plan includes the following provision: <<Take into consideration ageing issues and include principles of individual responsibility and exclusion of age discrimination in all strategies and legislative acts to be elaborated>>. Implementation of this provision will contribute to reflection of ageing issues in all policy spheres, as well as will serve as legal precedent for decrease of age discrimination cases.

Participation of older persons in policy development in Armenia is done in an indirect way, in the process of drafting legal acts non-governmental organizations dealing with older persons' issues are consulted, and their suggestions are always taken into consideration. Part of the organization members are older persons. Any program or activity addressing older persons' issues is implemented in cooperation with relevant non-governmental organizations. Also seminars and round tables are regularly organized on these issues. Cooperation with non-governmental organizations in the sphere of elderly issues is non limited to the aforementioned. Starting from 2007 the RA Government delegates rendering of social services to non-governmental organizations, by partial reimbursement of their expenses. Particularly, financial support from the state budget is provided to the non-governmental organization <<Mission Armenia>>, which renders social care and social

maintenance services to lonely older persons and persons with disabilities both at home and at day care centers or older persons' houses in the city of Yerevan and regions of Armenia. The process of delegating services is continuing and is to be enlarged involving other non-governmental organizations.

RIS Commitment 2: Integration and participation of older persons

It should be mentioned that there are no specific measures addressing involvement of older persons in public and political life in Armenia, or they are occasional and are implemented through small projects. There is no national consultative body on older persons' issues in the country. Ageing and social protection issues of older persons are dealt within the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues through its functional and branch subdivisions in the framework of their competences, as well as within territorial bodies and institutions functioning under them through activities of coordination and rendering of services.

Branch subdivision of the RA Ministry of Labour and Social issues dealing with older persons' issues is the Department of Disabled and Older Persons' Issues. Functional subdivisions related to older persons' issues are: Social Assistance Department, Pension Security Department, Strategic Programs and Monitoring Department.

The Centre for home attendance of lonely older persons and persons with disabilities is functioning under the RA Ministry of Labour and Social Issues.

Scientific and research activities are coordinated by relevant subdivision of the National Institute of Labour and Social Researches functioning under the Ministry.

Coordinating activities in this sphere are also implemented by Social Security and Healthcare Departments of the RA Regional Administrations and Yerevan Municipality.

RIS Commitment 3: Promotion of equitable and sustainable economic growth in response to population ageing

In the direction of implementing this commitment no relevant measures have been taken by now. Recalling draft Strategy on Ageing Issues and Social Protection of Older Persons and an Action Plan on its implementation, it should be mentioned that they envisage specific activities for 2012-2016, which will contribute to provision of economic growth, as well as equal and fair distribution of resources, which in its turn will promote income growth of older persons. It is also envisaged to improve housing conditions of older persons and provide comfortable dwelling to homeless older persons.

RIS Commitment 4: Adjustment of social protection systems in response to demographic changes and their social and economic consequences

Legal basis for social protection of population in Armenia is the legislation, which is constantly reviewed and improved.

The key means for life support of older persons is pension, the average size of which as of January 1, 2011 amounted to 26900 AMD. The basic size of pension in the Republic of Armenia is 10500 AMD. All 65 year old citizens receive pension – insurance or social. Old age social pension receive more than 6000 pensioners or 1.5% of the total number of old age pensioners. Size of the social pension equals to the basic pension.

The RA Government expresses strong commitment to reducing poverty among pensioners, focusing on bringing contributory and social pensions to a level that ensures a minimum living standard. Accordingly, in 2008 the RA Government adopted the Pension Reform Program, which foresees the introduction of a multi-pillar pension system.

Another important means for life support is Family Benefit Program, which is the largest program of social protection being implemented in the country. The relations on development, supervision, monitoring and assessment of the program are regulated by the RA laws <<About Social Assistance>> and <<About State Benefits>>. The basic size of the family benefit as of January 1, 2011 is 13500 AMD, and for every under age child in the family supplementary payments are provided, the size of which differs depending on the place of residence and number of children in the family.

During recent years sizes of pensions regularly increase and as recording of pension size is among specific data on income types, even its small increase becomes relevant for benefit entitlement of pensioners or families with pensioners. A number of activities have been implemented which created more favourable conditions for pensioners in obtaining benefit right. The implemented activities provided an opportunity to avoid social tension, especially among pensioners.

Except family benefit territorial bodies rendering social services provide emergency assistance in the size of the basic family benefit to poor families, whose vulnerability score is not high enough to be entitled for family benefit. Emergency assistance is provided for at least 3 months. Large part of the families included in emergency assistance lists are families with older members.

According to demographic forecasts simultaneously with increase of life expectancy the ageing process will develop, in the result of which the number of 80 years old persons and above will increase. People deprived from family assistance in case of physical sickness, deceases and disability will apply to social and healthcare services.

Draft Strategy on Ageing Issues and Social Protection of Older Persons and an Action Plan on its implementation envisage specific activities for 2012-2016, with the purpose of eliminating unfavourable social consequences of the transition period, which mostly affect older persons requiring care.

RIS Commitment 5: Enabling labour markets to respond to the economic and social consequences of population ageing

The number of older persons enjoying income from work has a decreasing nature. This is mainly explained by high level of unemployment, vulnerability and low competitiveness of older persons at the labour market.

There is no provision in the current RA legislation on work of older persons. In this respect it is a priority issue to raise public awareness on advantages and benefits of participation of older persons in employment environment, including appreciation of experience and skills of older persons. Special attention should be paid to elimination of obstacles and prevention of discrimination during recruitment of older persons, especially women. Together with increase of employment rate, the labour market should be able to quickly and flexibly respond to social challenges of ageing.

The draft Strategy on Ageing Issues and Social Protection of Older Persons stipulates the following provision: <<Encourage provision of employment of pensioners willing and able to work>>. For the implementation of the mentioned provision the following activities are envisaged: <<1. Review age and sex discrimination displayed by employers, which will lead to decrease of unemployment rate, especially among 50 and above years old persons by making corresponding changes in current legislation. 2. Improve labour legislation and provide more favourable and flexible conditions for older workers, e.g. taking another position in the same enterprise, having flexible schedule or part time job>>.

RIS Commitment 6: Promotion of life-long learning and adaptation of the educational system in order to meet the changing economic, social and demographic conditions

Although the idea of life-long learning has a wide perception, the practical results do not witness to significant progress in application of the idea. In respect to economic benefits of education the emphasis is placed on middle age participants and educational programs for some professions. In the sphere of life-long learning the RA Ministry of Education and Science has developed a number of legal acts, particularly the Procedure on Organization of Training for Increase of Qualification, Requalification and Additional Training. Its application will provide an opportunity both for employers and older persons to increase their vocational qualification, to be trained on a new profession or to acquire necessary skills (foreign language, computer, etc.).

The works and activities on education of older persons being implemented in Armenia can be divided into two groups:

- a) programs, being implemented in community level at institutions for education of older persons, at healthcare or social organizations,
- b) programs, being implemented by non-governmental and international organizations.

Steps are taken to encourage life-long learning and acquisition of knowledge, which will create enlarged opportunities for employment of older persons.

Another action to be implemented is adoption of the RA law <<About Education of Older Persons>>. It is envisaged to prepare special trainers for work with older persons.

RIS Commitment 7: Striving to ensure quality of life at all ages and maintain independent living including health and well-being

Studies show that only 20% of older persons are practically healthy. Existence of several deceases with chronic nature is peculiar to older persons. And this condition makes the issue of increasing legal and social guarantees for medical treatment of older persons more urgent. The state guarantees the right of population to obtain free of charge medical assistance and treatment in the framework of state targeted healthcare programs.

In Armenia more than 10000 older persons and persons with disabilities enjoy various social services through governmental and non-governmental organizations. Various services, such as psychological consultation, rehabilitation, healthcare, legal consultation, everyday maintenance, provision of permanent and temporary dwelling, in-kind and cash support are being rendered to lonely older persons and persons with disabilities requiring care.

Both at 24-hour care institutions (older persons' house s), day centres and at home older persons lead relatively active life. They regularly participate in cultural events, organize different clubs, self-assistant groups. At older persons' houses there are councils of seniors, who submit suggestions on issues related to them, make decisions, discuss problems with the directorate and offer solutions.

As a measure contributing to independent living of older persons provision of dwelling should be mentioned. With the purpose of partially solving this issue the RA Government with its protocol decree N 25, dated July 1, 2010 approved the Concept Paper on Creating a Complex of Social Dwellings for Homeless Lonely Older Persons and Persons Belonging to Other Social Groups who Require Dwelling.

Projects on creation of social dwellings in Armenia have been implemented since 2008. Such a project was Social Dwelling on Supportive Terms, implemented in the cities of Goris and Yerevan with financial support of Swedish Development and Cooperation Agency.

By the end of 2011 two social dwellings built in the city of Maralik will be populated and will serve as basis for further creation of a social dwelling fund.

RIS Commitment 8: Mainstreaming a gender approach in an ageing society to support families that provide care for older persons and promote intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity among their members

In February 11, 2010 the RA Government approved the Concept Paper on Gender Policy and in May 20, 2011 Strategic Plan on Gender Policy for 2011-2015 was approved. These documents envisage to enlarge components of forming and developing life skills, teaching personal rights and gender issues in the programs implemented for women. Teaching of healthy lifestyle and preparation for the future family life is also highlighted. The mentioned documents address gender mainstreaming of policy being developed in all spheres of social, economic and cultural life, creation of national mechanism to ensure gender equality and special measures for overcoming gender inequalities in all spheres of public life.

According to the Strategy on Demographic Policy, adopted by the RA Government in 2009 family policy will soon be developed, which will have gender perspective.

The current RA legislation has no provisions stipulating gender discrimination.

RIS Commitment 9: Support for families that provide care for older persons and promote intergenerational and intra-generational solidarity among their members

Large part of about 350 thousand older persons of Armenia live in families and care for senior generation is considered an important value, hence social assistance services guaranteed by the state are mainly rendered to lonely older persons (both having children but living alone and having no children).

It should be mentioned that specialists working with older persons have annual short vocational training, which makes their further work more efficient, which in its turn contributes to solution of older persons' issues.

The intergenerational ties are quite strong in the Armenian families and the care of older family members by young generation is traditional and common for our society.

RIS Commitment 10: Promotion of the implementation and the follow-up of the Regional Implementation Strategy through regional cooperation

1. As an example of regional cooperation practice of <<Mission Armenia>> can be mentioned, which is the largest non-governmental charity organization dealing with older persons' issues in Armenia. It was established in 1993 in Yerevan, has a solid management system, about 600 qualified and experienced personnel, more than 100 facilities for maintenance of about 8000 older persons in different regions of Armenia, enjoys close cooperation relations with local authorities. The organization is a member of regional and

international networks, actively participates in international conferences and has its significant contribution to elaboration and adoption of documents on older persons' issues. By now it has implemented dozens of different projects with financial support of international organizations and foreign countries.

The organization established the following strategic priorities:

Develop and complete the package of social and healthcare services being rendered to beneficiaries, taking into consideration current needs of beneficiaries and best international practice,

Elaborate and implement coordinated process on raising public awareness, defending interests and advocating,

Take steps to ensure sustainability and continuity of activities implemented by the organization,

Elaborate and implement measures for capacity building of the organization.

In the Caucasian region the organization has introduced a principally new model, which differs from the former institutional model due to community based approach, which allows older persons to lead an independent and participatory life and receive necessary social and healthcare services at home or community. At the request of Caucasian organizations <<Mission Armenia>> introduced its model in the countries of the Caucasian region, implementing joint programs with the local non-governmental organizations, organizing special training courses, as well as participating in piloting of the model.

In Armenia the organization implements its activities through the following facilities located in 8 regions:

8 Community Centres – rendering various social, healthcare and maintenance services at the centres or at home,

32 Charity Canteens – ensuring food supply services with variety of dishes,

4 Rehabilitation Centres – rendering temporary medical treatment,

5 Resource Centres – organizing different trainings, interest support groups,

20 Aid Stations – providing first medical aid and consultation,

4 Mental Health Day Centres – rendering special services to beneficiaries having mental health problems,

1 Older Persons Garden – serving as a daily club for older persons,

1 Older Persons' House – although community based approach is being applied in all social support activities of the organization, for a number of older persons, who not only require 24-hour care and supervision but also a place to live it is of extremely necessity.

2. One of the best practices of regional cooperation was the Ageing survey.

As the first step the following actions were done:

- Studying the best international practices (Israel, Russia, European countries)
- Using methodology of the Study on Global Ageing and Adult Health (SAGE)

- Using methodology and questionnaire of the Survey on Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE)
- Involvement of the best international experts into the local working group.

After, the following activities were conducted:

- Methodology and survey tools have been developed and adapted
- Ageing Survey was conducted and the Report was widely disseminated
- Regional training on Ageing Policy Formulation was conducted (over 80 Government representatives, gerontologists, parliamentarians, NGO representatives and experts on Ageing issues from different UN agencies and former CIS countries participated).

Later the methodology and questionnaires have been widely used within the several countries of the region (Tajikistan, Moldova). The local experts have been involved in similar works conducted in the several countries of the region to provide assistance and share their experience.

4. Review and Appraisal

Armenia has made important progress in the area of ageing, however to achieve practical implementation of internationally agreed principles, older persons must be enabled to be independent financially and in all other aspects.

Armenia faces a constellation of challenges: the demographic changes associated with longer lives and smaller families; the large-scale emigration of working-age people out of the country and the continued process of transition to a market economy, especially keenly felt in the context of the economic crisis.

Against this background, the Road Map for Mainstreaming Ageing provides recommendations relating to a variety of policy areas, including integration and participation of older persons, social protection, health, housing, life-long learning and the labour market. The elaboration of the Road Map was based on the principle of participatory approach of policy development, involving interviews with a broad range of stakeholders, detailed reviews of existing policies and programs and close consultation with the RA Government.

The development of the Road Map took place alongside the country's development of a National Strategy on Ageing. The Road Map therefore fed into this strategy, helping to ensure that it was in compliance with MIPAA/RIS.

In spite of challenges that Armenia is currently facing, the RA Government has upheld its commitments to the area of ageing. Given the difficulties with which other age groups –

youth and the working-age population are confronted, it remains a challenge to design policies that generate equal opportunities for all age groups.

For further efficient implementation of MIPAA in Armenia the following steps should be taken:

- Policy recommendations should be made for different spheres on the basis of existing situation, surveys results, as well as in the context of current policy implementation,
- Steps should be taken to ensure the efficient and targeted implementation of newly developed Ageing strategy and its action plan,
- Well coordination of human, institutional, financial resources should be ensured to enable the developed policy to become a reality,
- Continuous capacity building measures should be implemented,
- Monitoring and evaluation system should be enhanced,
- Mechanism for regular update of situation should be designed,
- Ensuring the participation of civil society and older persons.

These are the main actions which will enable to have efficient ageing policy implemented in the country, to ensure that ageing issues are addressed in all policies which will finally lead to full implementation of the MIPAA in the country. In this context, it's very important to have continuous cooperation with international organizations and countries of the region.