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Brussels, 3 August 2017

To: EU Ministries of Employment, Social Affairs and Health

RE: 4th UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing “A Sustainable Society for All Ages: Realizing the potential of living longer”, 21-22 September 2017, Lisbon

Dear Ministers,

As a European network of non-profit organisations ‘of’ and ‘for’ people aged 50+ voicing their interests in the European Union, we take the opportunity of the 4th UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing to call on EU Ministries of Employment, Social Affairs and Health to enhance the protection of older people’s human rights in view of improving their economic and social participation in society.

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) – which is not a human rights instrument – has a great potential of upholding the full spectrum of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights of older persons which has not been used so far. The review of the Plan and its objectives beyond 2017 should focus on mainstreaming these rights into the Regional Implementation Strategy for the UNECE Region. The renewal of governments’ commitments should moreover build on the recent developments in the UN Open Ended Working Group on ageing (OEWG) on how to improve the protection of older people’s rights on the ground. While the OEWG has an exclusive mandate to promote the respect of the rights of older persons, the MIPAA provides a comprehensive policy framework on ageing based on human rights. AGE urges EU Governments to use the complementarity of the two processes to uphold human rights of older people. AGE members also reiterate their support to the recommendation by the UN Independent Expert on the rights of older persons, Rosa Kornfeld-Matte for establishing a binding legal instrument, such as an international convention, to combat the specific barriers faced by older people in respect of their human rights.

We hope that our recommendations (see annex) will help to identify areas where further efforts are needed to bridge the gaps between policy-making on ageing and human rights agenda.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your support and remain

Yours sincerely,

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Annex – AGE Platform Europe’s recommendations

In view of contributing to the third appraisal of the MIPAA Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) for Europe, AGE analysed in 2016 the level of advancements in the implementation of the Plan at subnational and national levels. ¹ Building on this assessment we would like to reiterate some key recommendations on the Plan’s overall policy scope and governance mechanism:

AGE recommendations on MIPAA policy scope:

- Address the particular challenges older people across Europe face with regard to: adequate income to live in dignity; access to employment with support of life-long learning; social networks to fight loneliness and stimulate social participation; accessible, affordable and quality health and long-term care; and access to goods and services regardless of age criterion;
- Monitor how far older people can equally enjoy their human rights and what is the real impact of the existing MIPAA framework on their lives, i.e. how policy measures help fight ageism and ensure that older persons can live in dignity and participate equally in society;
- Apply a rights-based approach in the implementation of all domains covered by the MIPAA in view of promoting and protecting the rights of older persons in all national plans, policies and laws;
- Follow the recommendation of the UN Independent Expert on the rights of older persons calling for a new binding instrument, such as an international convention, to combat the specific barriers that older people face in respect of their human rights;
- Continue discussing how the already existing UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities applies to older people and ensure an equal application of its provisions to everyone, without distinction on the basis of old age;
- Translate into practice the UNECE call for active strategies to meet older migrants’ economic, social and healthcare needs – in order to address the increasing international mobility and migration of people at an older age.

AGE recommendations on MIPAA governance:

- Promote the MIPAA to make it visible, transparent and connected to all relevant governmental actions and initiatives which impact Europe’s ageing population and the lives of older persons. This will increase ownership of the process among the relevant actors and facilitate its implementation at all levels;
- Introduce monitoring and accountability mechanisms in order to evaluate progress achieved across all MIPAA objectives and its Regional Implementation Strategy; Having made progress in some areas, the Plan’s implementation has been so far fragmented and uneven and did not help sufficiently to achieve tangible results across all its objectives;

¹ AGE Platform Europe contribution to the 2017 review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), November 2016

http://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/AGE%20MIPAA%20Review%202016_corrected.pdf

- Develop common indicators in the context of MIPAA objectives – greater emphasis should be given to social and not only to economic indicators and to the positive impact social measures may have on the economy; Qualitative indicators should be promoted and complement quantitative indicators at national and EU level to reflect a comprehensive and exhaustive definition and understanding of the notion of quality of life across the life course;
- Mainstream in the implementation of the MIPAA the quantitative targets and indicators on social protection set by other policy frameworks, e.g. the Europe 2020 Strategy headline targets, the Active Ageing Index developed by the European Commission and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and the future proposals to be tabled in the framework of the EU Pillar of Social Rights;
- Remove barriers to the participation of older people and their organisations in the monitoring and implementation of the Plan (via more transparency and genuine consultation mechanism) in view of using its full potential to build consensus among all stakeholders on how to create an inclusive society for all ages;
- Pay equal attention to all type of older people’s organisations to participate in monitoring the MIPAA’s implementation i.e. regardless of their experience or knowledge about policy work so that every voice in civil society is heard;
- Engage actively as national Governments in the UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing by sending representatives to OEWG sessions and coordinating your contribution to the debate with other EU delegations; This should seize the potential of multiple synergies between the MIPAA and OEWG processes in shaping effective ageing policies in response to demographic change while respecting and promoting older people’s rights.

Moreover, in relation to the following three objectives to be debated at the upcoming 4th UNECE Ministerial Conference, AGE Platform Europe recommends:

Recognizing the potential of older persons

- Combat ageism through awareness-raising campaigns, including – but not limited – to contributing to the WHO campaign against ageism;
- Address age discrimination faced by older people when implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the EU Disability Strategy;
- Extend legislation to cover age discrimination beyond the field of employment, in particular by adopting the draft EU horizontal equal treatment directive;
- Collect data for all age groups, without age limits and with additional age bands: without such data it is difficult to evaluate the impact of policies on older people and to eliminate unlawful age discrimination and promote age equality;
- Launch intergenerational solidarity campaigns at national level to highlight the important societal value of older people and activate their potential in society by challenging pervasive negative stereotypes;

- Promote actions which enable older people to be more involved in a wide range of activities, including intergenerational activities and volunteering; the role of older people in enhancing social cohesion in communities including migrant and refugees should be also considered;
- Provide infrastructure and financial resources to involve older people in policy-making on a permanent basis and at all stages, from the design, through monitoring, evaluation and control to reformulation.

Encouraging longer working life and ability to work

- Challenge stereotypes and age discrimination in the labour market through legislation banning age discrimination and by strengthening the promotion of diversity in the work force; make funding available at national level to promote awareness of the value of older workers among companies and the wider society;
- Create specific employment targets for the labour market participation of older workers and targets for the participation of older workers in life-long learning, supported up by guidelines for job search services that take into account the needs of older workers;
- Recognise the value of informal caregiving provided by older workers through acknowledgement of carers' rights, i.e. adopt EU Directive on Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers in order to take better account of the gender dimension in labour market by providing flexible care leave provisions to accommodate the needs of those workers – in particular older women – who care for relatives including older people in need of care;
- Protect workers of all ages by health and safety rules that include emotional and social risks linked to work, as well as enhance occupational health prevention by adapting workplaces to the needs of ageing workforce – the latter should be accompanied by awareness raising among employers about the relative low costs of the creation of age-friendly working environments versus the benefits of productivity gains and job satisfaction;
- Promote flexible pathways into retirement that allow older workers to reduce their working time without losing out on acquired social protection rights, such as pension or health insurance and create possibilities to combine part-time employment with part-time pensions;
- Allow workers with disabilities to retire with a disability pension or an equivalent rather than forcing them to stay in the labour market and use up unemployment benefits.

Ageing with dignity

- Guarantee the adequacy of pensions on the long-term and recognise individual pension rights for all to ensure a dignified life in old age, including those with justified career breaks – mainly women – who have caring responsibilities for family members all along their working life;
- Enforce gender pay and career equality through employment-related measures such as investment in child and eldercare – in order to ensure an adequate retirement income for women in the future; Introduce transitional measures to address the unacceptable gender pension gap affecting currently older women (EU average: 40%), in particular the very old;

- Guarantee an adequate minimum income in old age to fight poverty and prevent social exclusion – the right to minimum income schemes, including minimum pension, should be recognised as a fundamental right to ensure everyone’s dignity and independence;
- Apply innovative tools to establish and preserve decent standards of living and dignity for the most vulnerable amongst older persons, for instance national reference budgets for an adequate minimum income including pension;
- Promote right to dignity, physical and mental well-being, freedom and security – quality standards for health and long-term care services should be introduced and adhered to by public authorities e.g. European Voluntary Charter of the rights and responsibilities of older people in need of long-term care and assistance;
- Reach out, inform and help those older people in particularly vulnerable situations who are unable to claim their rights – in particular the very old, disabled and/or isolated older people, older migrants and people from ethnic minorities and empower them to participate actively in their communities and in wider society.
