

## **ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC (ESCAP)**

### **Regional Consultation on Strengthening Income Support for Vulnerable Groups in Asia and the Pacific**

26-27 March 2014

Incheon, Republic of Korea

## **CONCEPT NOTE**

### **Venue and date of the Regional Consultation**

The Regional Consultation on Strengthening Income Support for Vulnerable Groups in Asia and the Pacific will be held on **26 and 27 March 2014** in Incheon, Republic of Korea, at the ESCAP Subregional Office for East and North-East Asia.

The address for the office is 6<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup> Floor, G-Tower, 24-4 Songdo-dong, Yeonsu-gu, Incheon 406-840, Republic of Korea.

### **Participation**

The Regional Consultation will be attended by government officials in expert capacity from selected countries in the ESCAP region, drawn from the Ministries of Social Affairs, Health and Welfare, Labour and other related sectors. Representatives from regional development banks, including the Asian Development Bank, development partners, academia and other research institutions, as well as independent experts, will also be invited to attend. Part II of the Consultation, which will focus on old-age pensions in the Republic of Korea, will also be attended by policymakers, academics, independent experts and Civil Society Organizations from the Republic of Korea including Senior Officials of the Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA) and the National Pension Research Institute.

### **Objectives of the Consultation**

The Consultation will be held in two parts: Part I will focus on income support schemes, particularly for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region, while Part II will focus on old-age pensions in the Republic of Korea.

The objectives of the consultation are as follows:

- (a) To disseminate the results of research on existing income support schemes in Asia and the Pacific;
- (b) To identify trends and gaps in pension schemes including social pensions in the region; and
- (c) To agree on a way forward on a research agenda on evaluating options for implementing sustainable pension schemes for older persons in the Asian and Pacific region.

## **Expected outcomes of the Consultation**

The expected outcomes of the Consultation are: (i) participants will have an enhanced understanding of existing income support policies and programmes in Asia and the Pacific, (ii) participants will have identified challenges and gaps in the implementation of these policies and programmes in the ESCAP region, and (iii) participants will have exchanged information and experiences on income support schemes for older persons, including social pensions, and identified areas requiring further research and evaluation.

## **Background**

During the recent multiple crises, social protection has emerged as a key instrument for building the resilience of vulnerable populations against shocks, as well as for reducing poverty. Among the various social protection schemes, income support schemes have received particular attention in many ESCAP member countries as a means of providing direct economic support and protection to vulnerable groups, such as the poor, older persons and persons with disabilities. A number of academic studies have also identified income support as a key instrument for social protection.

The Social Development Division of ESCAP undertook a project, funded by the Republic of Korea, to study and evaluate existing income support schemes in the Asia-Pacific region. The key findings of the project will be presented at the Regional Consultation. Findings of the studies indicate that older persons tend to be among the groups that are often inadequately covered by income support schemes.

Rapidly ageing countries around the world are confronted with economic and social challenges, such as declining working-age populations relative to the population group at retirement age and increased strain on health systems. Population ageing is an increasing phenomenon around the world, but is especially relevant in the Asia-Pacific region, where populations are ageing at unprecedented speed, *inter alia*, due to fertility declines. One of the main challenges associated with ageing is poverty of older persons. While in other regions, such as Europe, societies started to age in a time when comprehensive social security systems were already in place, social protection systems are still relatively limited in most countries in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in least developed countries. Ensuring income security for older persons will be an important challenge for policymakers to ensure well-being for older as well as younger generations.

In this context, ESCAP has launched a new project, focusing on income support schemes for older persons. The Regional Consultation will contribute to generating information on existing pension schemes and their coverage by identifying research needs on income support schemes for older persons, in particular pension schemes for older persons in Asia and the Pacific.