



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs

Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World

World Social
Report 2023



DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

WORLD SOCIAL REPORT 2023:
LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND
IN AN AGEING WORLD



**United
Nations**

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat is a vital interface between global policies in the economic, social and environmental spheres and national action. The Department works in three main interlinked areas: (i) it compiles, generates and analyses a wide range of economic, social and environmental data and information on which States Members of the United Nations draw to review common problems and to take stock of policy options; (ii) it facilitates the negotiations of Member States in many intergovernmental bodies on joint courses of action to address ongoing or emerging global challenges; and (iii) it advises interested Governments on the ways and means of translating policy frameworks developed in United Nations conferences and summits into programmes at the country level and, through technical assistance, helps build national capacities.

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FOREWORD

Our world is changing in fundamental ways. One key trend is the gradual and largely irreversible shift towards an older population, already underway in most countries.

The number of persons aged 65 years or older worldwide is expected to double over the next three decades, reaching 1.6 billion in 2050, when older people will account for more than 16 per cent of the global population.

People are living longer, healthier lives. The rise in human longevity is a success story caused by improved sanitation and medical therapies, greater access to education and family planning, and strides towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

This shift in the population age structure brings into question current arrangements of old-age support in countries both young and old. As the health and wealth of societies continue to improve, traditional notions of dependency at older ages are

becoming less and less valid. Yet, effective systems of old-age support will continue to be needed, as will the intergenerational solidarity required to sustain them.

Not everyone has benefitted to the same extent from the social and economic improvements that drive longevity.

High and rising levels of inequality threaten to become a defining feature of present and future generations. Due to a combination of acute crises and unfavourable long-term trends in employment and wages, successive generations are increasingly unequal and economically insecure in both developed and developing countries despite ongoing improvements in health and education. Without swift and bold policy action to counter this trend, future cohorts of older persons may be even more economically unequal than those alive today. But rising inequality is not inevitable, and policy makers can influence the future direction of inequality as populations continue to live longer.

The *World Social Report 2023* explores the social and economic opportunities and challenges that population ageing presents. As Governments come together to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the *Report* builds on the Plan's framework of support to national policies to create equitable, fair and inclusive societies for people of all ages.

Policies to promote healthy ageing, prevent poverty and foster employment and opportunities for decent work before people reach older ages are vital to enhance economic security and reduce inequality among older persons. Taking advantage of the skills, expertise and knowledge of older persons, women, and other groups that have traditionally been excluded from or disadvantaged in the labour market can go a long way towards promoting equity and ensuring that old-age support systems are fiscally sustainable.

A key message of the *World Social Report 2023* is that population ageing and policies implemented in response to this historic global trend can be harnessed to uphold the pledge contained in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that no one

will be left behind. Together, we can address today's inequalities for the benefit of tomorrow's generations, managing the challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities that population ageing brings.

Questions of intergenerational equity in an ageing world need to take centre stage as the world prepares for the Sustainable Development Goals Summit in 2023 and the Summit of the Future in 2024. Now is the time to plan for the long term, to prepare for the challenges ahead and take advantage of the new opportunities these demographic shifts bring. It is the time to strengthen solidarity between younger and older people today and between present and future generations.



LI Junhua

Under-Secretary-General for Economic
and Social Affairs
United Nations

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The following symbols have been used in tables throughout the report:

A hyphen (-) between years, for example, 1990–1991, signifies the full period involved, including the beginning and end years.

A full stop (.) is used to indicate decimals.

A dollars sign (\$) indicates United States dollars, unless otherwise stated.

Details and percentages in tables do not necessarily add to totals, because of rounding.

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United Nations Official Document System. United Nations documentation obtained from other United Nations and non-United Nations sources are for informational purposes only. The Organization does not make any warranties or representations as to the accuracy or completeness of such materials.

The following abbreviations have been used:

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

International Labour Organization (ILO)

International Organization for Migration (IOM)

International Monetary Fund (IMF)

Luxembourg Income Survey (LIS)

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

Purchasing power parity (PPP)

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

United Nations Children's Fund (UNESCO)

World Health Organization (WHO)

NOTES ON REGIONS, DEVELOPMENT GROUPS, COUNTRIES AND AREAS

The designations employed in this publication and the material presented in it do not imply the expression of any opinions whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries. The term "country" as used in this report also refers, as appropriate, to territories or areas.

In this publication, data for countries and areas are often aggregated in six continental regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern America, and Oceania. Further information on continental regions is available from <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/>. Countries and areas have also been grouped into geographic regions based on the classification being used to track progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations (see <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/regional-groups/>).

The designation of "developing" and "developed", is intended for statistical purposes and does not express a judgment about the stage in the development process reached by a particular country or area. Developed regions comprise all countries and areas of Europe and Northern America, plus Australia, New Zealand and Japan.

Developing regions comprise all countries and areas of Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), Latin America and the Caribbean, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand). Further information is available at <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/about-us>.

The classification of countries and areas by income level is based on gross national income (GNI) per capita as reported by the World Bank. These income groups are not available for all countries and areas. Further information is available at <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/topics/19280-country-classification>.

