

Expert Group Meeting: “Measuring population ageing: Bridging Research and Policy”, Bangkok, Thailand, 25–26 February 2019

Session 1: Different measures of ageing

Chair: *Karoline Schmid, DESA*

1. Presentation: New measures of ageing (25-30 minutes)
Warren Sanderson & Sergei Scherbov, IIASA
2. Presentation: tbd (10-15 minutes)
Zheng Zhang, Fudan University
3. Presentation: Additional measurement concepts of ageing (10-15 minutes)
Ritu Sadana, WHO

Discussion (30 minutes)

Population ageing is a well-established global demographic trend, with major socio-economic consequences. The long-term shift of the share of the population from the younger to the older ages is driven mainly by the declining levels of fertility, and also by the increases of life expectancy that are taking place almost everywhere. There is considerable international diversity in the onset and speed of population ageing, which, according to United Nations data, is most advanced in Japan and countries in Europe, followed by Northern America. Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and Oceania are projected to follow similar trends over the next few decades. Even in most of African countries, whose populations are still relatively young, the absolute number of older persons is growing rapidly, and is leading to long-term shifts in the age-structure.

Traditionally, the United Nations and most researchers have used measures and indicators that are mostly or entirely based on people’s chronological age, which provides a simple, clear and easily replicable way to measure and track various indicators of ageing. At the same time, there has been increasing recognition that the health status, type and level of activity, productivity, and other socio-economic characteristics of older persons have changed significantly over the last century, and even over the last several decades. This has led to the development of alternative concepts and measures of ageing, which provide different outlooks on the levels and trends of ageing, and a more nuanced appreciation of what ageing means in different contexts. At the frontline is the Characteristics Approach to the measurement of population ageing developed at IIASA.

These changes and the various approaches to understanding and measuring ageing, have important implications for the design and implementation of national development policies and programs, and for the follow-up and review of internationally agreed development goals that are related to or are affected by population ageing. Specifically, the different ways of measuring ageing affect the assessments of the evolution of the number of older persons, their living conditions, their contributions to the societies where they live and their needs for social protection. They have significant implications for labour markets, life-

long education and health, and the interactions and mutual support of older persons with the younger generations.

Recognizing the diverse stages and characteristics of ageing in various regions of the world, as well as the recent developments and innovations in measurement, the Population Division the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (IIASA), and Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), are organizing an international expert group meeting on **“Measuring Population Ageing: Bridging Research and Policy”**, to be held in Bangkok, Thailand, from 25 to 26 February 2019.

This expert meeting will seek to take stock of different concepts and methodologies, and their applicability to and usefulness for various policy analyses and purposes. It will bring together experts to discuss key questions related to the measurement of population ageing, including discussion of traditional and new concepts and methods, and to assess their scope and limitations to support national policy design and implementation, as well as the regional and global review of progress in the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, as noted above. Experts from governmental and international organizations, from research institutions as well as civil society organizations will be invited to discuss the applicability of various measures of ageing in different contexts.

This session will discuss different measures of ageing. The most widely used data on population ageing are those produced by the United Nations Population Division (UNPD). The most recent version of those data can be found at *Profiles of Ageing 2017* (<https://population.un.org/ProfilesOfAgeing2017/index.html>) and those data provide the basis of much of what will be discussed in this meeting.

UNPD data are used in the development, analysis, and implementation of policies with respect to ageing as well as in numerous academic studies. Those data provide the lenses through which we interpret the history of population ageing as well as see its likely future.

Our view of the history and likely future of population ageing has now gotten more complicated, because the UNPD has provided everyone with two very different ways to assess them. *Profiles of Ageing 2017* presents a traditional old-age dependency ratio (OADR) and a “prospective old-age dependency ratio” (POADR). The OADR is the ratio of the number of people categorized as being old to the number of adults who are not categorized as old multiplied by 100. There are a number of variants of the OADR, but a common one that we will use here classifies people as being old if the age 65+ years-old and people as adults if they are 20+ years-old. The POADR, developed at the International Institute for Applied Systems Research (IIASA) is a new addition to the roster of UNPD measures of population ageing. It differs from the traditional OADR by classifying people as being old based on their remaining life expectancy. As people grow healthier and become ever more capable, the POADR adjusts the threshold at which people become classified as old.

This session will focus on different definitions of the old-age threshold and discuss the arguments that lead to the need of developing new measures of ageing that take characteristics of people into account. The expected outcome of the first panel is to create a better understanding of age and ageing, for both science and policy.

This session is expected to set the stage and possibly address the following points:

- Who is old? How old do you have to be to be considered old?
- What are conventional measures of ageing missing?
- Does it matter which view of population ageing is adopted for policy purposes?
- Should there be regional differences in measures of ageing?
- Can the new measures be easily implemented in statistical offices?
- What are the policy implications of measures of ageing that take characteristics of people into account?
- Should we abandon conventional measures of ageing or rename , for example, the old-age dependency ratio in a way that old-age and dependency are abandoned?

Please note that all speakers are requested to adhere to the 15-minute time limit to allow for discussion after the session.

Should you have additional questions, please contact either Ms. Stefanie Andruchowitz (andrucho@iiasa.ac.it) or Ms. Karoline Schmid (schmidk@un.org)