



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

Chapter 1. An ageing world

- The number of people aged 65 years or older worldwide is projected to more than double, rising from 761 million in 2021 to 1.6 billion in 2050. The number of people aged 80 years or older is growing even faster.
- Population ageing is an irreversible global trend. It is the inevitable result of the demographic transition – the trend towards longer lives and smaller families – that is taking place even in countries with relatively youthful populations. In 2021, 1 in 10 people worldwide were aged 65 or above. In 2050, this age group is projected to account for 1 in 6 people globally.
- As fertility levels fall, the share of younger people declines, while the shares of working-age adults and, eventually, older people go up. Further population ageing is driven by more people living longer, healthier lives.
- Among regions, Northern Africa and Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are expected to experience the fastest growth in the number of older people over the next three decades. Today, Europe and Northern America combined have the highest share of older persons.
- Women tend to live longer than men and thus comprise the majority of older persons, especially at advanced ages. Since the average survival of males is projected to gradually move closer to that of females, small but noticeable reductions in the sex gap in life expectancy and in the female share of the population at older ages are likely in coming decades.
- Conventional measures of population ageing, such as the old-age dependency ratio, are often used as proxy indicators of economic dependency. Other measures can provide a more nuanced picture by taking account of increased life expectancy or the economic production and consumption of various age groups.



Chapter 2. Towards living longer, healthier lives

- There is no doubt that increasing human life expectancy is a long-term trend. Survival to older ages has become more common worldwide. Health among older people varies considerably, however, both among and within countries.
- Increased global life expectancy reflects better health overall. The number of years lived in good health, or at least without severe disability, has risen in many places.
- Men live, on average, fewer years than women. Yet older women experience a greater prevalence of morbidity and disability. Given the dominance of cardiovascular disease and cancer as causes of death, different personal behaviours and diverse exposures to environmental risks both contribute to group variations in morbidity and mortality, including by sex.
- Inequalities in income, education and living arrangements, including those due to race or ethnicity, help explain observed differences in the health of individuals and their risks of dying over the life course. Uneven access to affordable, quality health care can lead to unequal use of services and disparities in life expectancy.
- Rapid growth in the number of people reaching older ages highlights the importance of promoting health and preventing and treating illness throughout the life course, as conditions experienced earlier in life can have a substantial impact on a person's health and well-being at older ages. The concept of "healthy ageing" highlights the importance of maintaining functional ability as people grow older to enable their continued participation in society.
- Societies with ageing populations need to adapt to having increasing numbers of older persons with a wide range of functional abilities. The ability to perform critical functions and to participate in everyday activities depends not only on the intrinsic capacity of individuals but also on the social and physical environments in which they live. Supportive environments can help older persons to remain active and independent as they age.

Chapter 3. What population ageing means for economies and intergenerational equity

- Changes in population age structure unfold at different times and speeds. The impact of ageing on the economy depends on where countries are in their demographic transition as well as their economic structure and level of social development, including education and human capital formation.



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- The young and the old consume, on average, more than they produce through formal labour. Families, markets and governments mediate the reallocation of economic resources from one age group to another to smooth consumption over the life course. An ageing population calls for the continuous adaptation of channels for redistribution.
- Ageing societies may face fiscal challenges due to rising health-care, long-term care, retirement and other old-age support costs, combined with a potential reduction in government revenue from fewer working-age taxpayers. Addressing these issues starts with making ageing integral to economic development and ensuring that older people can use their expertise and skills in ways that benefit them and the broader economy.
- Women's labour force participation rate remains below that of men in every age group, reflecting gender gaps in education and the predominant share of women in unpaid work, among other concerns. Such patterns mean that women generally receive lower pension benefits in most countries. Pension systems need to be transformed to help reduce gender gaps and protect women's income security in old age.
- In all societies, policymakers must support the reconciliation of conflicting work and family demands through effective and equitable social and economic policies.

Chapter 4. Ageing, poverty and inequality, now and in the future

- Old-age pensions and access to health care are critical in reducing poverty and inequality among older persons. But they are not sufficient on their own. Ensuring economic security and health for all in old age calls for promoting equal opportunity from birth, including through universal access to health care and education as well as opportunities for decent work.
- Investments in decent work are paramount. Decades of wage stagnation are jeopardizing people's ability to save enough to support themselves in older ages. Informal employment and various non-standard forms of employment limit workers' social protection coverage and their contributions to public revenues.
- Without swift policy action to prevent it, future cohorts of older persons are likely to be economically more unequal than those today. With growing numbers of older persons in all regions, inequality and economic insecurity at older ages should be rising causes of concern.



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- While worries over fiscal sustainability have dominated pension reforms, pension benefits are still too low in many countries and beyond the reach of some groups. Inadequate investment in economic security at older ages risks jeopardizing progress in reducing poverty among older persons. It may diminish the well-being of future cohorts of older persons and further undermine already shaky trust in Governments.

Chapter 5. A crisis of care

- Demand for long-term care is rising due to population ageing and changes in the living arrangements of older persons. The COVID-19 crisis exposed weaknesses in long-term care, yet care and support systems continue to receive insufficient policy attention.
- The absence of accessible and equitable long-term care services takes a heavy toll on older persons, their families and whole societies. Women bear the brunt of deficiencies as they comprise the majority of both care recipients and paid and unpaid caregivers.
- Rethinking how to provide long-term care will benefit today's older persons and those who care for them as well as future cohorts of older persons. Countries should pursue a more equitable, person-centred approach involving governments, businesses, civil society, communities and households, and addressing needs in paid, formal forms of care as well as unpaid, informal ones.