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# World Population Ageing 2019

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*Virtually every country is experiencing an increase in both the size and the proportion of persons aged 65 years or over. Population ageing, driven by reductions in fertility and improvements in survival associated with economic and social development, is in many ways a demographic success story. Preparing for the societal shifts related to population ageing is critical to ensure progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).*

*The following key findings are based on the report **World Population Ageing 2019** prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).*

## Ten key messages

### 1. The world's population is growing older

Globally, the number of older persons, which currently stands at 703 million, is expected to more than double in the next 30 years, reaching 1.5 billion persons in 2050. As a share of the world's population, the number of people aged 65 or over is projected to increase from 6 per cent today to 16 per cent by 2050. Regions that are expected to witness the largest relative increase in the number of older people include Northern Africa and Western Asia (+230%), sub-Saharan Africa (+220%), Oceania<sup>1</sup> (+190%), Central and Southern Asia (+180%), Latin America and the Caribbean (+160%), and Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (+120%).

### 2. Most older people reside in Asia, Europe and Northern America

In 2019, Eastern and South-Eastern Asia was home to the largest number of older persons with 261 million people aged 65 years or over, followed by Europe and Northern America (200 million) and Central and Southern Asia (119 million). The number of older persons is also significant in Latin America and the Caribbean (56 million), sub-Saharan Africa (32 million), and Northern Africa and Western Asia (29 million), Australia and New Zealand (4.8 million) and Oceania<sup>1</sup> (0.4 million). Between 2020 and 2050, regions that are projected to gain the largest number of older persons are Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (+573 million), Central and Southern Asia (+328 million), and Europe and Northern America (+296 million).

### 3. Some countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia will experience the fastest population ageing

Between 2020 and 2050, 9 out of the 10 countries with the world's largest percentage increases in the older population will be in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia. The Republic of Korea will witness the largest increase in the population aged 65 or over (23%), followed by Singapore (21%) and Taiwan, Province of China (20%).

### 4. Life expectancy at birth continues to improve with sub-Saharan Africa experiencing the largest gains

Improvements of survival into older ages significantly contribute to population ageing. From 1990-1995 to 2015-2020, global life expectancy at birth has increased by 7.7 years (12%) and is projected to increase by an additional 4.5 years (6%) from 2015-2020 to 2045-2050. Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced the largest gain in life expectancy, from 49.1 years in

<sup>1</sup> Excluding Australia and New Zealand

1990-1995 to 60.5 years in 2015-2020 (11.4 years), while life expectancy in the region is projected to gain another 7.6 years between 2015-2020 and 2045-2050. Women continue to outlive men, leading to a predominantly female older population globally.

### **5. Life expectancy at age 65 is increasing, but large regional differences persist**

Globally, a person aged 65 years in 2015-2020 is expected to live, on average, an additional 17 years. By 2045-2050, that figure will have increased to 19 years. In 2050, life expectancy at age 65 is projected to range from almost 24 years in Australia and New Zealand to around 14 years in Oceania<sup>1</sup> and sub-Saharan Africa. The “female survival advantage” persists into older ages, with women at age 65 in 2015-2020 expected to live another 18 years whereas men at the same age will live another 16 years.

### **6. In many regions, the old-age dependency ratio is projected to rise sharply in the coming decades**

Globally, the ratio of persons aged 65 years or above per 100 persons aged 20 to 64 years is projected to increase from 16 in 2019 to 28 in 2050. By 2050, the old-age dependency ratio is expected to range from 49 in Europe and Northern America to 9 in sub-Saharan Africa. In Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Central and Southern Asia, the old-age dependency ratio is projected to more than double by 2050.

### **7. Prospective ageing measures point towards a slower process of population ageing**

Innovative measures of population ageing based on prospective age, or the number of years of life remaining, point toward a slower process of population ageing than indicated by standard measures. The prospective old-age dependency ratio (POADR), using a threshold of “old age” that rises with increasing life-expectancy, is projected to rise from 11.6 persons above the threshold per 100 adults below it in 2019 to 17.3 by 2050. Eastern and South-Eastern Asia are projected to experience the fastest increase in the POADR, from 12 in 2019 to 25 in 2050. The POADR in sub-Saharan Africa is expected to remain around 10 in both 2019 and 2050 due to the region’s relatively young age structure.

### **8. The impact of population ageing depends on the age pattern of production and consumption**

The economic old-age dependency ratio integrates patterns of consumption and production and changes in the population age structure by comparing the number of effective consumers aged 65 or over with the number of effective workers of all ages. Globally, it is estimated that the economic old-age dependency ratio will increase from 20 in 2019 to 33 in 2050. Currently, the economic old-age dependency ratio is the highest in Europe and Northern America (43) and Australia and New Zealand (36), reflecting relatively high levels of consumption at older ages and a sizeable share of older persons. Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean are projected to reach similar levels of the economic old-age dependency ratio by 2040 and by 2050, respectively.

### **9. Rising dependency ratios will result in increasing pressures on old-age support systems**

In regions where public transfers are high, such as in Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean, population ageing will increase the fiscal pressure on these systems. By contrast, in countries where privately held assets are the primary source of financing consumption at older age, such as those located in Southern Asia and South-Eastern Asia as well as in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, individuals and families face greater pressure to finance their consumption during old age.

### **10. Population ageing does not inevitably lead to macroeconomic decline**

To maximize the benefits and manage the risks associated with population ageing, governments should support continuing and lifelong education and health care for all; encourage savings behaviour and healthy lifestyles throughout the life course; promote employment among women, older persons and others traditionally excluded from the labour force, including through a gradual increase in the official retirement age; and support family-friendly policies to facilitate work-life balance and increased gender equality in both public and private life.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These messages are based on the report *World Population Ageing 2019*, which provides an overview of global trends and dynamics of population ageing and discusses conventional, prospective and economic measures of population ageing. More work of the Population Division is available at [www.unpopulation.org](http://www.unpopulation.org).