

MEDIA ADVISORY

Measuring population ageing: bridging research and policy

Expert Group Meeting, Bangkok, Thailand, 25–26 February 2019

WHAT: International expert meeting with a focus on measuring population ageing, to contribute to an enhanced understanding of ageing and its implications for development policy at the national, regional and global levels

WHERE: MANDARIN HOTEL, 662 Rama IV Rd., Bangkok 10500

WHEN: 25 & 26 February 2019; 8.15 – 18.00

WHO: Organized by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), the International Institute for Applied System Analysis (IIASA), and Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Media access: This event is open to media. Media representatives need to present media credentials at the entrance.

Background:

More people are living longer now, a trend that has major implications for governments and societies. An international gathering in Bangkok on 25-26 February will look at how to best measure population ageing, with the aim of improving the understanding of ageing and its implications for development policy at the national, regional and global levels.

According to UN DESA's World Population Prospects (2017), new 60-year-olds in high-income countries can expect to live at least another 25 years. As recently as in the 1950s, this was true of 50-year-olds.

The international expert group meeting on "Measuring population ageing: bridging research and policy" is expected to attract government officials, academics, civil society and media representatives from all over the world to Thailand – a country that itself is projected to become an older society within the next decade.

"We are living in exciting demographic times, witnessing a once-in-history transformation of societies from youthful to older age structures," according to Tim Miller, United Nations Interregional Advisor on Population and Development. "Since these societies are such a new phenomenon, we don't have much hard evidence about how such societies will function economically, socially, politically. But we are certain that these societies – that we know so little about -- will come to dominate the world, so that's the motivation behind conferences like the one in Bangkok."

The same remarkable shift in prospective age is seen throughout the world, across all regions and income levels—reflecting sustained progress in reducing mortality at older ages. In a diverse collection of countries, 60 is the new 50. In Ethiopia, a new 60-year-old can expect to live at least another 18 years. This was also true of 50-year-old Ethiopians in 1950. In Ireland, a new 60-year-old can expect to live at least another 24 years. This was also true of 50-year-olds in Ireland in the 1950s. Progress has been fastest in Asia – where 60 is the new 48. Latin America shows about average progress – where 60 is the new 50. And Africa and Europe have had slower progress – where 60 is the new 54.

All societies in the world are in the midst of this longevity revolution – some are at its earlier stages and some are more advanced. But all will pass through this extraordinary transition, in which survival to age 60 changes from a flip-of-the-coin, 50-50 chance – as was the case in Sweden in the 1880s – to a near certainty at present. What is more, the proportion of adult life spent beyond age 60 increases from less than a quarter to a third or more in most developed countries.

These changes for individuals are mirrored in societal changes. Older persons become the largest demographic group in society – accounting for more than a quarter of the population. We call these populations: older societies. Today, there are 15 older societies: Japan and 14 European countries, a mere 5 per cent of the world’s population live in older societies. But by 2030, nearly one-third of the world’s population will live in older societies as 29 other countries pass this milestone. Countries like China and the United States will become older societies with important implications for the world economy. And according to data from UN DESA’s Population Division, that number will grow to 144 countries by the end of the century, covering most of the world’s population. What is currently a novel lifestyle – living in an older society – will become commonplace.

The international expert group meeting aims to take stock of these new concepts and methodological approaches to measuring ageing and to assess their applicability and possible implications for policy analysis and policy development at the national and international level. Organized by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), IIASA, and Chulalongkorn University, in collaboration with the UN Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), the meeting will also include a moderated discussion of journalists on the role of the media as they inform but also reflect public attitudes and opinions on population ageing.

Media contacts:

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Conference websites:

www.iiasa.ac.at/pop/ageing

www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/expert-group/29