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**Social development: social development, including questions relating to the world social situation and to youth, ageing, persons with disabilities and the family**

## **Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing**

### **Report of the Secretary-General**

#### *Summary*

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/177](#) on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing. It provides an overview of the application of the concept of intergenerational solidarity across public policy domains, highlighting opportunities and challenges for current and future generations of older persons. The report covers selected work carried out by members of the Inter-Agency Group on Ageing. Key recommendations for consideration by Member States are set out in the concluding section.

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\* [A/79/150](#).



## I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [78/177](#) on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing. The General Assembly, in its resolution [78/177](#), recognized the importance of strengthening intergenerational partnerships and solidarity. It also recommended that Member States increase efforts to raise awareness of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 and identify key priority areas for its implementation, bearing in mind the crucial importance of intergenerational family interdependence, solidarity and reciprocity for social development.
2. Section II of the present report serves to address the application of the concept of intergenerational solidarity across select public policy domains, highlighting opportunities and challenges for current and future generations of older persons.
3. Section III features selected work conducted by members of the Inter-Agency Group on Ageing, and key recommendations for consideration by Member States are set out in section IV.

## II. Older persons and intergenerational solidarity<sup>1,2</sup>

4. The demographic landscape of the world has undergone and will continue to experience significant transformations, according to projections prepared as part of the *World Population Prospects 2024*, which indicate that a significant increase is expected in the global population aged 60 years and over from 1.2 billion in 2024 to 2.1 billion between 2024 and 2050.<sup>3</sup> This increase is accompanied by a progressive

<sup>1</sup> Some content in section II draws from background papers and presentations prepared for the expert group meeting on older persons and intergenerational solidarity, jointly organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, on 10 and 11 October 2023 in Bangkok. Contributions were provided by experts including Tengku Aizan Hamid, Gerontologist, Malaysia; Simon Brimblecombe, Chief Technical Adviser, International Labour Organization (ILO) country office for Thailand; Bethany Brown, Human Rights Expert, United States of America; Andrew Byrnes, Emeritus Professor of International Law and Human Rights, University of South Wales, Australia; Ryosuke Fukuda, Director, Planning and Coordination Office for Training of Physicians, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan; Karen Gomez Dumpit, Chair, Working Group for an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Human Rights Mechanism, Philippines; Wassana Im-Em, Regional Technical Specialist on Population and Development, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, Thailand; Aminath Jameel, Chief Executive Officer, Aged Care Maldives; Aidai Kadyrova, Director, Babushka Adoption Foundation, Kyrgyzstan; Shen Ke, Professor of Demography, Fudan University, China; Eduardo Klien, Regional Representative, HelpAge International, Thailand; Makiko Matsumoto, Employment Specialist ILO East and South-East Asia and the Pacific Office, Bangkok; Rintaro Mori, Regional Adviser, UNFPA Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, Thailand; Chan Narith, Secretary-General, National Social Protection Council, Cambodia; Paul Ong, Chief Strategy Officer, Tsao Foundation, Singapore; Aminta Permpoonwiwat, undergraduate student, Vanderbilt University, United States; Thaworn Sakunphanit, Vice-Chair, Foundation for Research Institute on Social Protection and Health, Thailand; Waqar Shahid Puri, Senior Programme Manager, Transforming Communities for Inclusion, Pakistan; Siu Ling Maureen Tam, Professor and Head, Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China; Bussarawan Teerawichitchainan, Associate Professor, National University of Singapore; Tran Bich Thuy, Country Director, HelpAge International, Viet Nam; Prakash Tyagi, Executive Director, Gramin Vikas Vigyan Samiti (GRAVIS), India; Mo Wang, Programme Specialist, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Institute for Lifelong Learning. More information is available at <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/ageing/events/egm-olderpersons-intergenerational-solidarity>.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis in this section partly draws on evidence presented in *World Social Report 2023: Leaving No One Behind in an Ageing World* (United Nations publication, 2023).

<sup>3</sup> *World Population Prospects 2024* (United Nations publication, 2024).

rise in life expectancy at birth across nearly all countries, and the trend is projected to continue. Notably, the number of persons aged 80 years or over is growing at an even faster rate than the number of persons aged 65 or over. While globally, Europe and North America currently have the highest combined share of persons aged 65 or over, regions such as North Africa, Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa will experience the most rapid growth in the number of older persons in the coming decades. Despite being in the early stages of the demographic transition, all the least developed countries are projected to experience an increase in both the number and proportion of older persons between 2023 and 2050. This demographic shift will lead to a rise in the number of least developed countries with a demographic group of over 1 million older persons. While the population of only 10 of the least developed countries included over 1 million older persons in 2023, 27 of them will have more than 1 million older persons in their respective population by 2050, with 2 of those countries expected to have more than 10 million older persons.<sup>4</sup> Unlike more developed countries, some emerging economies are experiencing rapid demographic changes before becoming high-income countries.

5. Current trends point to an increase in economic inequality among future cohorts of older persons compared with the current cohort. The effect of inequalities accumulated throughout the life course must be highlighted in narratives and policies that address the complex and evolving challenges and opportunities of population ageing. The accumulation of human capital is a key factor in addressing such inequalities. The development of human capital refers to a dynamic interplay of individual experiences, socioeconomic and environmental factors, human rights protections, educational opportunities, and access to health care and to resources across all stages of the life course.<sup>5</sup> Intergenerational connections play a crucial role in this process, as the experiences, knowledge and resources transmitted from one generation to another can significantly influence an individual's life course.

6. The connection between the life course approach and intergenerational partnerships underscores the importance of applying a holistic, people-centred, long-term, multisectoral policy approach, which is well aligned with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002.<sup>6</sup> Addressing the distinct needs and contributions of various age groups through a policy framework that integrates an intergenerational perspective into policy development can foster inclusive and sustainable societies that enhance the well-being of individuals of all ages.

## **A. Promoting intergenerational solidarity through labour markets and pension reform**

7. In economic terms, intergenerational solidarity refers to the financial transfers and reallocations that occur between generations, in both the private and public spheres. Within the public domain, a prevailing social understanding guides such intergenerational transfers, whereby working-age adults ensure the economic security and well-being of those considered “dependent” by funding essential public services, including education and social protection programmes such as old-age pensions, through their labour. Under this framework, while children are considered to be dependent, older persons are also considered as such due to the perceived inability to

<sup>4</sup> *World Population Ageing 2023: Challenges and Opportunities of Population Ageing in the Least Developed Countries* (United Nations publication, 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Robert Black and others, “Health and development from preconception to 20 years of age and human capital”, *The Lancet*, vol. 399, No. 10336, (April 2022).

<sup>6</sup> *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4).

meet their material needs through the production of goods and services. In the private domain, the current intergenerational model of transfers relies predominantly on the expectation that the family will serve as an informal system of support.

8. As a result of these trends, dominant narratives portray population ageing and the increase in longevity as trends that will unavoidably hinder national economies by escalating fiscal pressures. Such narratives are centred on the premise that as populations age, a shrinking working-age population and smaller family sizes will make it more difficult to support older persons within current support systems, making those systems unsustainable. However, while the demographic shifts that are reshaping the global landscape call for a reimagining of intergenerational economic solidarity, whether population ageing unfolds as an opportunity or a challenge for individuals, families and societies depends on the policy choices made today.

9. The economic impact of population ageing differs greatly across countries, evolving over time and in response to changes in various aspects of public policy. Recent analysis, utilizing data from National Transfer Accounts,<sup>7</sup> highlights how population dynamics will affect the global economy and confirms that in countries with ageing populations, per capita consumption among older persons and children is higher than that of the working-age population. At the same time, the stage of demographic transition in each country plays a crucial role. For instance, in countries such as the United States of America, where demographic shifts are still unfolding, consumption by children is within the medium global value, while consumption by older persons remains notably high. In countries such as China and India, old-age dependency rates remain low, while consumption levels by children are very high.<sup>8</sup> By understanding the specific dynamics of population ageing, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to promote economic growth and social inclusion and to strengthen solidarity between younger and older persons, and between present and future generations.

10. From the perspective of generational economies, older persons contribute to the economy through both formal and informal work, engage in consumption, share their financial wealth and assets by way of intergenerational transfers, save and contribute to public budgets by paying taxes. Population ageing also drives diversification and the creation of new markets.<sup>9</sup> In addition to their economic contributions, recognizing the vital role that older persons also play in caring for younger generations, including in providing unpaid care for other relatives, is essential for fostering intergenerational solidarity.<sup>10</sup> For example, policies and programmes that support grandparents in their caregiving roles can help to strengthen family bonds and promote the well-being of both older persons and the children for whom they provide care.<sup>11</sup> However, this contribution is often insufficiently understood due to the lack of research on

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<sup>7</sup> National Transfer Accounts constitute a complete, systematic and coherent accounting of economic flows from one age group or generation to another. For more information please see *National Transfer Accounts Manual: Measuring and Analysing the Generational Economy* (United Nations publication, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Mason and others, “Six ways population change will affect the global economy”, *Population and Development Review*, vol. 48, No. 1 (March 2022).

<sup>9</sup> *Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: Inclusion and Rights of Older Persons – Report of Latin America and the Caribbean for the Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (United Nations publication, 2022).

<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme, *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (New York, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Chamie, “Increasingly indispensable grandparents” YaleGlobal Online, 4 September 2018.

caregiving patterns, including horizontal, downward and upward care, throughout the adult life course and by gender.<sup>12</sup>

11. Strengthening intergenerational economic solidarity in a context of population ageing requires policy actions in multiple areas. One such area concerns policies to increase labour participation, in particular that of women, young persons, older persons, persons with disabilities and other groups that are traditionally excluded from the formal labour market. Enabling and supporting workers to adapt to changing digital technologies in the labour market as they age is also crucial to promoting labour participation.

12. Gender disparities in access to labour markets persist worldwide, especially in less developed regions. When disaggregated by gender, the jobs gap indicator<sup>13</sup> shows that the jobs gap between genders is smaller in high-income countries, with a rate of 7.4 per cent for men and 9.6 per cent for women. The jobs gap between genders is more striking in lower-middle-income countries, where the rate for men is 11 per cent and that for women is 17.4 per cent, and even more pronounced in low-income countries, with rates of 16.6 per cent and 24.9 per cent for men and women, respectively.<sup>14</sup> In the European Union, employment rates among women aged 20 to 64 remains 11.7 percentage points lower than those of men.<sup>15</sup> To counter such deficits, it is paramount to combat gender-based discrimination at all levels. Furthermore, policies need to address the ways in which the intersection of gender and age results in exacerbated discrimination against older women, with regard to employment.

13. Age-based discrimination affects both younger and older persons' access to labour markets. Worldwide, the youth unemployment rate was 13.3 per cent in 2023 and that of adults was 3.9 per cent.<sup>16</sup> In Africa, more than 1 in 4 young people are not in employment, education or training, accounting for approximately 72 million people, most of whom are women.<sup>17</sup> The labour force participation rate of older workers also remains lower than the average rate. For instance, only 59.1 per cent of persons aged 55 to 64 in the European Union were employed in 2019 in comparison with 73.1 per cent of the entire working-age population (aged 20 to 64).<sup>18</sup> Given the multiple barriers to the full participation of older workers in labour markets, including entrenched attitudes, legislative gaps and the structure of workplace institutions,<sup>19</sup> the imperative for the implementation of targeted policies to promote longer working lives becomes increasingly evident.

14. Enabling older persons to remain engaged in labour markets after reaching the statutory retirement age, should they wish to, is a multifaceted endeavour. While some older persons choose to continue employment after retirement because of the intrinsic value they place on work and its role in fostering social inclusion, others do so out of the necessity to support themselves and/or their families. Policies that promote the labour participation of older persons must be responsive to these complexities. It is crucial that policies account for the fact that low-income earners tend to have shorter

<sup>12</sup> Sarah E. Patterson and Rachel Margolis, "The demography of multigenerational caregiving: a critical aspect of the gendered life course", *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World*, vol. 5, (January–December 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Indicator developed by ILO to capture all people who would like to work but do not have a job.

<sup>14</sup> ILO, "New data shine light on gender gaps in the labour market", Spotlight on Work Statistics No. 12, ILO Brief, March 2023.

<sup>15</sup> European Commission, Green paper on ageing: fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations, document COM/2021/50 final.

<sup>16</sup> ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024* (Geneva, 2024).

<sup>17</sup> Vipasana Karkee and Niall O'Higgins, "African youth face pressing challenges in the transition from school to work", ILOSTAT, 10 August 2023.

<sup>18</sup> European Commission, Green paper on ageing.

<sup>19</sup> [A/75/218](#).

life expectancies compared with their high-income counterparts. Indexing the retirement age to the average life expectancy may result in a regressive effect that exacerbates disparities and disproportionately affects workers with lower life expectancies by diminishing a larger share of their projected lifetime income from pensions.

15. Implementing policies and practices that facilitate knowledge transfers between generations and leverage the unique strengths of each age group can also encourage longer working lives. Research findings link intergenerational workplace relationships to increased success and satisfaction and to a greater sense of belonging for younger workers, while also fostering a sustained purpose for and contribution by older workers. Initiatives such as phased retirements and so-called “returnships” help to retain valuable institutional knowledge while enabling the seamless transfer of expertise, ensuring that younger workforces benefit from the lived employment experiences of older generations. This age diversity is aligned with broader trends of increasing life expectancies, highlighting the necessity for inclusive lifelong learning to develop human potential across the life course.<sup>20</sup>

16. Harnessing the potential of older workers and promoting intergenerational knowledge transfers are crucial, but they must be accompanied by comprehensive policies that address the broader challenges of a changing workforce. To offset the decline of the working-age productive population, there is a need to foster growth in labour productivity, address informality and promote decent work. Decent work deficits persist worldwide, although considerable differences exist across regions and socioeconomic groups. While labour informality has declined over the past two decades, in 2023, the number of informal workers worldwide stood at 2 billion people, representing over half of the working-age population. Despite progress in reducing informality, more than 80 per cent of workers in Africa, almost 66 per cent of workers in Asia and the Pacific and more than 50 per cent of workers in Latin America and the Caribbean were engaged in informal employment in 2023.<sup>21</sup> Education and training systems must evolve to meet the lifelong learning needs of the workforce, supporting job transitions and the proficient use of emerging technologies that drive economic transformation and sustainable development.

17. Informal work affects job quality and access to social protection programmes, thereby affecting the ability of individuals to accumulate wealth and ensure their economic security as they age. Informal work also erodes the tax base needed to finance social protection systems for younger and older generations, including pensions. Decent work, especially for women, young people, older workers and other groups facing vulnerabilities in the labour market, increases the well-being of persons of all generations and also ensures the sustainability of support systems.

18. Policies to increase labour force participation, address informality, promote decent work and increase productivity must go hand in hand with robust, comprehensive and adequate social protection systems. Pensions are key to ensure that present and future generations age with dignity and economic security. Gender disparities persist, with women earning less than men, experiencing shorter and less linear career trajectories, being more likely than men to work part-time and assuming a greater share of unpaid care responsibilities. As a result, women are more likely to experience poverty in old age. In the European Union, for example, women’s pensions are on average 29.3 per cent lower than men’s. In China, recent research indicates that gender differentials in public pension transfers remain pronounced after the age of 65 and tend to widen among the oldest old. Persisting gender pension gaps accentuate the need to apply a gender analysis and perspective to pension reforms.

<sup>20</sup> Stanford Center on Longevity, *The New Map of Life*, April 2022.

<sup>21</sup> ILO, *World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024* (Geneva, 2024)

Adopting an intergenerational approach highlights the importance of addressing gender-based discrimination throughout the life course in order to overcome such inequalities in later life.

19. In many countries, intergenerational support for children, older persons and dependants is primarily provided by family members, often disproportionately by women, including older women, especially in the absence of adequate social protection systems. Changes in family size and dynamics, population ageing and other social and economic trends can undermine these traditional support systems. In response, many countries are strengthening their pension systems, not only to safeguard the rights and dignity of older persons, but also to reinforce the vital role of families and foster broader social cohesion. For instance, in Cambodia, where 73 per cent of older persons rely primarily on their families for support, the Government has recognized the pressing need to develop a comprehensive pension system to safeguard the economic security of older persons and their families. In other countries in the Asia-Pacific region, efforts have been made to ensure that adult children support their parents in old age by enacting filial piety laws that promote responsibility based on the reciprocity of relations.

20. In designing and implementing these policies, it is imperative to update the commonly used indicators and the often outdated assumptions that underpin them. Traditional measurements of labour force participation, for example, do not sufficiently capture the economic activity of persons of all ages, in particular of women, and do not account for informal work. Yet, it is estimated that 3 out of 4 older persons worldwide are employed in the informal sector and, consequently, their economic contribution through labour is unrecorded. Similarly, unpaid care work, largely performed by women, many of whom are older, is not factored into gross domestic product calculations and is therefore omitted from economic productivity measurements. Indicators such as the dependency ratio, which is frequently used in analysing the economic relationship between generations, inaccurately assume, on the one hand, that all individuals aged 65 years or over are homogenous in terms of economic activity, functional capacity and dependency, and that all working-age adults are actively participating in the labour market, on the other.<sup>22</sup>

21. Furthermore, many current analyses of the economic impact of population ageing use chronological age to define older age. This approach fails to consider increased longevity and the significant diversity within the 60-plus age group and is thus prone to bias. Utilizing the prospective old-age dependency ratio indicator<sup>23</sup> suggests that the adverse economic implications of population ageing may be less severe than suggested by the traditional old-age dependency ratio, especially in populations with high levels of life expectancy. However, the lack of high-quality age-disaggregated data within the currently defined old age group further impedes policymakers' understanding and ability to address population ageing issues.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The dependency ratio relates the number of children (0–14 years old) and older persons (65 years or over) to the working-age population (15–64 years old). See [https://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology\\_sheets/demographics/dependency\\_ratio.pdf](https://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology_sheets/demographics/dependency_ratio.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> The prospective old-age dependency ration is calculated as the number of persons above the age closest to a remaining life expectancy of 15 years relative to the number of persons between age 20 and that age. See *World Population Ageing 2019* (United Nations publication, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> [E/CN.5/2023/6](https://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology_sheets/demographics/dependency_ratio.pdf).

## B. Advancing economic solidarity through lifelong learning

22. In today's rapidly changing global landscape, marked by increased longevity, lifelong learning is vital for continual personal and professional development.<sup>25</sup> It encompasses formal, non-formal and informal education, reshaping the traditional view that learning is primarily reserved for young people. Contrary to beliefs that learning capacity diminishes with age, research reveals that experiential influences play a more significant role, indicating a much greater flexibility and adaptability to learning across the life course.<sup>26</sup> The broadening of learning opportunities, recognized as essential for sustainable economic growth in the framework of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), demands improvements in access to lifelong learning as a social determinant of healthy ageing. However, individuals aged 60 years or over often confront barriers to learning, such as ageism, cost and time constraints, which can deter engagement in learning regardless of income level.<sup>27</sup> The social acceptance of lifelong learning, facilitated by supportive policies, plays a pivotal role in fostering adaptation and growth throughout life, enabling a shift from the conventional three-chapter life course of education, work and retirement. It promotes a more flexible approach where learning, working, caregiving and engaging in cultural activities are interwoven throughout life.<sup>28</sup>

23. Comprehensive strategies that extend beyond economic reforms are also essential for addressing pension gaps and adapting to demographic changes. The need for lifelong learning is of particular importance when addressing cumulative disparities across the life course, especially for women. The Madrid Plan of Action laid the groundwork, including through its calls for equal opportunities in continuous education, training and retraining across all ages, while emphasizing the expertise of persons of all ages and recognizing the benefits of increased experience with age.<sup>29</sup> This approach, underscored by the Transforming Education Summit,<sup>30</sup> is pivotal in navigating the multifaceted challenges of our societies.

24. Investing in lifelong learning benefits various policy domains, such as labour market productivity, health, well-being, social cohesion and intergenerational solidarity. However, a survey conducted in 2021 in 159 countries revealed disparities in global engagement in lifelong learning. Despite an increase in participation since 2018, driven primarily by the emergence of online distance learning opportunities, the landscape remains uneven. While 56 per cent of countries reported higher involvement among women, only 23 per cent noted a similar increase among older persons. This disparity becomes more pronounced in the light of the fact that 24 per cent of countries observed a decline in the participation of older persons in lifelong learning, compared with 10 per cent reporting such declines in 2018. Spain reported a slight uptick in older persons' participation in lifelong learning, from 1.6 to 1.8 per cent between 2018 and 2019, while other countries such as Cabo Verde, Colombia, Estonia and Yemen, reported declines in such participation. These trends emphasize the critical need for an all-encompassing, age-inclusive educational framework. Furthermore, increased public investment is needed to address the shortfall in funding

<sup>25</sup> Alicia M. Goodwill and Shen-Hsing A. Chen, "Embracing a culture of lifelong learning: the science of lifelong learning", programme and meeting document, UIL/2021/PI/H/3, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Brittne Kakulla, "Lifelong learning attracts older adults for personal growth and cognitive health", AARP Research, March 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Stanford Center on Longevity, *The New Map of Life*.

<sup>29</sup> E/CN.5/2023/6.

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.un.org/en/transforming-education-summit>.



allocations for lifelong learning programmes designed for older persons.<sup>31</sup> By promoting inclusive policies, these efforts aim to mitigate the educational inequalities observed across various age demographics.

### C. Intergenerational living<sup>32</sup>

25. Living arrangements influence the economic situation, health status and well-being of older persons and their family members. Household configuration has been found to affect mortality rates, with research confirming higher mortality among older persons living alone or in institutional settings than among those living with a spouse or other family members.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is imperative for policymakers to gain a deeper understanding of the implications of living arrangements for ageing populations. Systems rooted in mutual support among family members of different generations have traditionally existed within intergenerational households. Demographic shifts, cultural norms, individual preferences and constraints and the availability, accessibility and adequacy of social protection systems all shape choices relating to living arrangements.

26. Although living arrangements still vary greatly across countries and regions, global trends show that living in extended family households is becoming less prevalent on average and that the proportion of older persons living alone or with a spouse only is increasing. Living with extended family members or at least one adult child is the most frequent living arrangement among older persons in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. In Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, the most common living arrangement for older persons is living with their spouse, followed by living alone. Analysis in the Latin America and Caribbean region shows that the co-residence of older persons with adult children is more likely to occur in countries at the earliest stages of demographic transition, especially in rural areas.<sup>34</sup> Africa and Asia have the lowest proportion of older persons living alone, yet family and household configurations are changing there as well. In Malaysia, for example, rapid demographic shifts have increased the proportion of nuclear family units.

27. Older women are more likely than older men to live alone, and when they do, they often experience poverty to a greater extent than their male counterparts in similar living arrangements. A larger proportion of older persons living in skipped-generational or extended family households are women. Data from the Arab region shows that, due to the higher likelihood of older men being married, compared with older women, a greater proportion of older women live alone, placing them at an increased risk of social isolation.<sup>35</sup>

28. Access to pensions, health care, affordable housing and other relevant services enables older persons who wish to live alone to do so, in contrast to settings where old age is associated with more economic insecurity. Migration, whether international or between rural and urban areas, also affects traditional living arrangements.

<sup>31</sup> UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning *Fifth Global Report on Adult Learning and Education: Citizenship Education – Empowering Adults for Change*, (Hamburg, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> The analysis in this section is partly based on the evidence presented in *World Population Ageing 2020: Highlights – Living Arrangements of Older Persons* (United Nations publication, 2020).

<sup>33</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, “United Nations database on older persons living in collective living arrangements”, Technical Paper No. 2023/8 (2023).

<sup>34</sup> *Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean* (United Nations publication, 2022).

<sup>35</sup> *Ageing in Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) member States: Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* (United Nations publication, 2022).

Furthermore, migration can disrupt conventional perceptions of family structures, gender roles and intergenerational relations, thus involving adjustments and negotiations of roles and responsibilities among family members. In countries with high rates of emigration, skipped-generational households, in which migrant parents entrust the care of their children to grandparents, are increasingly prevalent.<sup>36</sup>

29. While changes in living arrangements can transform intergenerational relations and traditional support systems, they do not necessarily imply a decline in support among family members. Evidence from several Asia-Pacific contexts illustrates that families can adapt to evolving social and economic dynamics while maintaining strong intergenerational support between older parents and their adult children. Available research in several countries within the region suggests that the expansion of social protection systems for older persons has not crowded out intergenerational support provided by adult children. For example, data from Thailand shows that while the old age allowance scheme has become a primary income source for many older persons, it has not led to a decrease in intergenerational cohabitation or non-monetary social support.

30. In response to population ageing, countries are implementing diverse initiatives to adapt to changing living arrangements. Promoting ageing in place requires not only targeted support to individuals and their households, but also the redefinition of the roles that communities and families can play in supporting social inclusion and the adaptation of social and safety networks to new demographic, social and economic realities. Several countries in the Asia-Pacific region, such as Cambodia and Malaysia, prioritize ageing in place, emphasizing the importance of age-friendly public infrastructure.<sup>37</sup> In Singapore, the proximity housing grant programme encourages family units to reside closer to one another, thus promoting intergenerational support. Furthermore, the country's "3-Generation" flats accommodate family members from different generations living together.<sup>38</sup> In the European region, several alternative arrangements that promote the social inclusion of older persons have gained recognition. In Austria, for example, there are intergenerational housing schemes that bring together older and younger generations.<sup>39</sup> In Algeria, there are opportunities for older persons with no available family support to live with volunteer host families.<sup>40</sup>

#### **D. Intergenerational solidarity and caregiving**

31. Given the global demographic shift towards older populations, the caregiving landscape is undergoing significant transformation, encompassing a wide range of needs for both paid and unpaid support, delivered in both formal and informal settings. Intergenerational solidarity is key to building a strong care system that engages people of all ages in providing and receiving care. Older persons constitute a heterogeneous group with diverse health needs; some require different levels of care and support, reflecting the cumulative impact of social determinants throughout the life course, including socioeconomic status, education, employment, housing, food security and access to health care. To ensure that comprehensive care strategies are effective, it is important to recognize and value the diverse contributions made by caregivers. These contributions range from family members offering unpaid care to professionals

<sup>36</sup> [A/78/61-E/2023/7](#).

<sup>37</sup> [ESCAP/MIPAA/IGM.3/2022/INF/1](#).

<sup>38</sup> [A/78/61-E/2023/7](#).

<sup>39</sup> *Ageing Policy in Europe, North America and Central Asia in 2017–2022: Synthesis Report on the Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region between 2017 and 2022* (United Nations publication, 2022).

<sup>40</sup> *Ageing in ESCWA member States* (United Nations publication, 2022).

delivering various targeted services, including palliative, rehabilitative and long-term care.

32. Progress with respect to care work and support services for older persons varies across countries and regions. Changes in family structures, labour market dynamics, cultural norms and youth migration trends to urban areas or abroad, in pursuit of education and employment opportunities, have led to a widening gap between the supply and demand for care and support for older persons. In many countries, this trend has contributed to a decrease in intergenerational care and support within families, with younger generations increasingly compelled to turn to Governments to provide care and support services. Such changes notwithstanding, older persons deserve to receive care and support that is respectful of their human rights and dignity, regardless of their individual physical and mental capacities. Implementing policies to support caregivers, such as cash benefits or training programmes,<sup>41</sup> highlights the need to adopt a comprehensive approach to long-term care systems. These systems must address the needs and preferences of older persons, while supporting the well-being of caregivers, who may themselves be older persons, and also promoting intergenerational solidarity.

33. The lack of data, in particular age-disaggregated statistics incorporating factors such as sex, disability and socioeconomic status, obscures the true scale of caregiving within an ageing society. In turn, the data gap makes it difficult to form an accurate understanding of the challenges experienced throughout the life course and to design proactive measures that would enable unpaid caregivers to fully participate in the labour force.<sup>42,43</sup> In Europe, informal caregivers provide approximately 80 per cent of all long-term care, with estimates suggesting that they represent between 10 and 25 per cent of the total population.

34. The increase in the number of caregivers is not keeping pace with the rising demand for long-term care. In 2015, one study found that there was a global shortage of about 13.6 million formal care workers,<sup>44</sup> with the largest deficit observed in Asia and the Pacific (8.2 million), followed by Africa and the Americas, with shortages amounting to 1.5 million and 1.6 million workers, respectively. In Europe, the shortage amounted to 2.3 million workers. Such deficits mean that, globally, half of the older population does not have access to quality formal long-term care. Foreign-born migrants have often filled gaps in the supply of care workers. In Italy, for example, an estimated 73 per cent of the paid care workforce in 2017 was foreign-born. Migrant care workers are often in an irregular situation and therefore can only work in the informal economy, with limited protection and low wages. Recognizing and protecting the rights of all care workers, including migrant care workers, is in line with Sustainable Development Goal target 8.8 on protecting labour rights.<sup>45</sup>

35. Women are responsible for roughly 70 per cent of informal care hours globally, with the highest proportion in low- and middle-income countries, where care policies, programmes and services remain insufficient.<sup>46</sup> Family caregivers in these countries often have multiple responsibilities, including caring for dependent children, managing household chores and finances and engaging in income-generating

<sup>41</sup> [E/CN.5/2023/6](#).

<sup>42</sup> Analysis in this section is based on the evidence presented in policy brief No. 143 on caregiving in an ageing world.

<sup>43</sup> World Health Organization (WHO) *Progress Report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021–2023* (Geneva, 2023).

<sup>44</sup> Xenia Scheil-Adlung, *Long-term Care Protection for Older Persons: A Review of Coverage Deficits in 46 Countries*, Extension of Social Security Working Paper, No. 50 (Geneva, ILO, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> [A/73/213](#).

<sup>46</sup> WHO, *Global Status Report on the Public Health Response to Dementia* (Geneva, 2021).

activities, leaving them overworked and at risk of providing poor-quality care. The reliance on informal caregiving may also discourage caregivers from seeking support, and the physical and mental health struggles they may experience can also inadvertently compromise the quality of care they are able to provide.

36. Different countries exhibit diverse long-term care ecosystems. While some rely heavily on familial support and informal caregiving networks, where the provision of organized long-term care is inadequate and dominated by charitable or private for-profit services,<sup>47</sup> others have developed comprehensive policies and institutions to address long-term care needs. In the latter contexts, government regulations and funding significantly shape systems, with greater emphasis being placed on professionalized care, rather than relying solely on familial support. Nevertheless, common threads exist, including a recognition of the variety of services, providers and funding sources, as well as of the central role of the family in legislation and policies; a commitment to ageing in place; and an acknowledgment of the accelerating need for long-term care policies. A survey conducted in 110 countries in 2020 and 2022 revealed that the percentage of countries with a national policy to support long-term care for older persons had increased from 67 per cent in 2020 to 78 per cent in 2022, highlighting the growing recognition of the importance of long-term care policies.<sup>48</sup>

## E. Fostering intergenerational solidarity for climate action

37. Climate change poses grave risks to individuals of all ages, affecting both current and future generations. Climate- and weather-related disasters have increased fivefold over the past 50 years, undermining progress in development, global health and poverty reduction.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, this crisis threatens to exacerbate health disparities within and between different populations.<sup>50</sup> Addressing these challenges requires the transcending of ageist perceptions and attitudes that often segregate older and younger populations. Fostering a culture of intergenerational cooperation and solidarity is critical for a unified and effective response to the climate crisis.

38. In 2023, global average temperatures reached their highest levels in over 100,000 years, in the wake of broken heat records across all continents in 2022. Those who are most vulnerable to extreme heat include older persons and infants, who now experience twice as many heatwave days as they would have in the period from 1986 to 2005. Furthermore, heat-related deaths among people over 65 years of age increased by 85 per cent compared with the period from 1990 to 2000, a significantly higher rate than the expected 38 per cent increase if temperatures had remained stable.<sup>51</sup> A highly conservative estimate indicates that heat exposure due to climate change is expected to cause an additional 38,000 annual deaths among older persons between 2030 and 2050.<sup>52</sup> Mortality estimates show that in Africa, the share of individuals over 65 years of age who died of extreme heat (measured as a fraction of deaths per 100,000 individuals) over the period 2017–2022 was 11 per cent higher

<sup>47</sup> WHO, *Towards long-term care systems in sub-Saharan Africa*, Series on long-term care, (Geneva, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> WHO, *Progress Report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing*.

<sup>49</sup> World Meteorological Organization, *Atlas of Mortality and Economic Losses from Weather, Climate and Water Extremes (1970–2019)* (Geneva, 2021).

<sup>50</sup> WHO, fact sheet, “*Climate change*”, 12 October 2023.

<sup>51</sup> Marina Romanella and others, “The 2023 report of the *Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change: the imperative for a health-centred response in a world facing irreversible harms”, *The Lancet*, vol. 402, No. 10419 (November 2023).

<sup>52</sup> WHO, *Quantitative Risk Assessment of the Effects of Climate Change on Selected Causes of Death, 2030s and 2050s* (Geneva, 2014).

than that registered during the baseline period of 2000–2005. For that same period, the corresponding increases in Europe and Central and South America stood at 8.8 and 7 per cent, respectively.<sup>53</sup>

39. Annually, from 2018 to 2022, individuals in small island developing States, Africa, Asia and Central and South America endured the highest frequency of days with temperatures posing health risks due to climate change.<sup>54</sup> This escalation in extreme weather events, spanning from heatwaves to storms and floods, has become a critical public health issue, causing widespread mortality, health complications and substantial disruption to food systems. Prolonged drought and heat devastate crop yields and hinder outdoor labour. Older workers who depend on physical jobs face higher vulnerability due to limited alternative employment options. The resulting loss of income limits their access to nutritious food and secure housing, thereby initiating a vicious cycle that increases susceptibility to illness and diminishes work capacity. Moreover, climate change erodes key social determinants of health, including livelihood stability, the accessibility of health care and the social safety nets that are intended to enable resilience, all of which contribute to downward social mobility.<sup>55,56</sup> Consequently, older populations, especially in lower-middle-income countries, where two thirds of the planet’s older persons reside, are among the most affected by the intersecting impacts of climate change on health and on economic instability.<sup>57</sup>

40. A recent analysis provides concrete evidence from 24 countries regarding the magnitude of the challenge posed by the climate crisis for rural populations that are in socially and economically vulnerable positions due to their economic status, gender and age. The findings reveal that rural households headed by older persons are disproportionately affected by the climate crisis, losing 3 per cent of their income due to floods and 6 per cent due to heat stress every year, in relation to households headed by younger people. This disparity is largely due to younger households being better able to access off-farm employment opportunities in the face of extreme weather events, making their incomes less vulnerable to such events. While it is recognized that climate change affects those in vulnerable situations, the study highlights that older rural households are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events, but are barely visible in national climate policies. In the nationally determined contributions and national adaptation plans of the 24 countries analysed, less than 1 per cent of the 4,164 climate actions proposed mention older persons.<sup>58</sup> Addressing these disparities requires adequate financial support, concerted policy attention and programmatic actions tailored to the needs of diverse and vulnerable rural populations.

41. Analytical studies highlight substantial gaps in the collection of age-disaggregated data, in particular regarding health monitoring and health-care access, including for older persons with disabilities, which contribute in all likelihood to their marginalization in climate legislation and policymaking.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, older women, older members of ethnic minorities and older Indigenous Peoples face specific challenges in realizing their rights in relation to the impacts of climate change.

<sup>53</sup> Marina Romanella and others, “The 2023 report of the *Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change”.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> WHO, fact sheet, *Climate Change*.

<sup>56</sup> Carissa Wong, “Climate change is also a health crisis: these three graphics explain why”, *Nature*, vol. 624, 7 December 2023.

<sup>57</sup> HelpAge International, briefing “A rising force for change: older people and climate action”, October 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization, *The Unjust Climate: Measuring the Impact of Climate Change on Rural Poor, Women and Youth* (Rome, 2023).

<sup>59</sup> [A/HRC/49/61](#).

42. Many health risks associated with climate change can be prevented or delayed by engaging in healthy behaviours shaped by the transmission of values, habits and knowledge across generations.<sup>60</sup> Strategies to address non-communicable diseases and disabilities in older ages and to increase healthy life expectancy should start early in life, with an emphasis on the importance of nurturing positive intergenerational relationships. Addressing the health impact of climate change requires a collaborative intergenerational approach that recognizes the valuable contributions of older persons in developing sustainable solutions.

43. Despite evidence of older persons' vulnerabilities to climate change, their needs are often neglected in policymaking efforts. This oversight can be attributed to ageism and to the limited visibility of older persons in public discourse and media coverage. However, many older persons remain committed to environmental health and well-being for future generations, owing to their extensive knowledge and lived experiences. Many of them play a pivotal role in fostering multigenerational collaboration, contributing not only through protests and advocacy, but also by offering diverse perspectives and innovative approaches to problem-solving. In addition, their considerable influence in political and economic realms presents an opportunity to shape climate policy.

44. The collection of data and research on the economic contributions and consumption patterns of older persons in relation to green investments and environmentally sustainable options are limited.<sup>61</sup> However, as a growing segment of the population, older persons hold a considerable proportion of disposable income in all countries, in addition to their providence funds and pension systems. Their economic influence remains largely untapped, despite its potential to have a significant impact on the market for all age groups.<sup>62</sup> The ability of older generations to reorient their financial investments towards climate-friendly initiatives is a powerful tool for promoting sustainability. Furthermore, older persons can support a shift in consumption patterns towards more environmentally friendly options.

45. Inclusive, equitable and comprehensive climate action policies are crucial to address the specific needs of all age groups. Policymakers must integrate an intergenerational approach that acknowledges the complex factors influencing the experiences and actions of individuals and communities, paying particular attention to socioeconomic contexts throughout the life course. Such a nuanced understanding is vital, not only for combating ageist stereotypes and generalizations, but also for recognizing the profound ways in which climate change affects older persons. By considering these diverse intersectional factors, Governments could create policies that effectively enhance the resilience of current and future generations.<sup>63</sup>

46. Through the lens of incorporating a life course approach, research indicates that educational attainment is a primary factor influencing climate change action, with education levels significantly helping to predict attitudes towards climate change, worldwide. With the benefit of recent scientific progress, young people currently have increased access to climate education and awareness from an early age, in stark contrast to older generations who, in their youth, did not have similar knowledge available to them. The correlation between educational attainment and environmental advocacy remains consistent across diverse socioeconomic contexts, suggesting that

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<sup>60</sup> WHO, *World Report on Ageing and Health* (Geneva, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Vania Eugênia da Silva and Karla Maria Damiano Teixeira "Consumer pattern and elderly consumer behavior: a meta-analysis", *World Journal of Research and Review*, vol. 12, No. 4 (April 2021).

<sup>62</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change secretariat, briefing "Older people and climate action", February 2021.

<sup>63</sup> [A/HRC/49/61](#).

knowledge and awareness are pivotal in uniting individuals of all ages in the fight against climate change. That correlation serves as a crucial predictor of proactive engagement in climate action, transcending generational divides.

### **III. United Nations system: updates and initiatives to advance intergenerational solidarity**

47. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) organized an expert group meeting on older persons and intergenerational solidarity in Bangkok, on 10 and 11 October 2023. The meeting called for the mainstreaming of population ageing and the safeguarding of the rights of older persons, and for the United Nations to adopt a life course and intergenerational approach to its work. The Commission and the Department are also enhancing government capacities to analyse economic resource-sharing between population groups through a Development Account project on national inclusion accounts. This analysis is crucial for the long-term forecasting of costs and funding for social protection, education and health care in target countries such as the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives and Viet Nam.

48. In the ninth edition of its *Population and Development Report*, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) focused on intergenerational solidarity and the care ecosystem for older persons. ESCWA supported several member States, namely Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, Somalia, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic, in developing national policies and action plans for older persons that include pillars on intergenerational solidarity. ESCWA also facilitated peer learning on intergenerational solidarity through various regional events, including at the stakeholders' dialogue held in the context of the sixth regional review of the International Conference on Population and Development.

49. The International Telecommunication Union organized an intergenerational discussion at the World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2023, which was focused on young people's perceptions of ageing and the importance of reshaping those views, and underscored the need for a life course approach to health that incorporates technology and financial wellness. The discussion highlighted the critical role of digital technologies in fostering intergenerational collaboration within work environments, housing and the design of public spaces.

50. The Universal Postal Union has traditionally supported intergenerational solidarity. Through its member countries and their postal operators, it is entrusted with providing essential services to billions of people, including those living in the most remote communities. Postal services operate a physical network of hundreds of thousands of post offices and vehicles, as well as an expanding digital, financial and social service infrastructure served by more than 5 million employees. Postal services are well used by different generations, typically within families, to combat social isolation, stay in contact and support each other through the exchange of letters, postcards and packages.

51. The World Health Organization (WHO), in implementing the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), has promoted and supported intergenerational solidarity in collaboration with diverse stakeholders. WHO published a practical guide entitled *Connecting Generations: Planning and Implementing Interventions for Intergenerational Contact*. Its establishment of a three-year Commission on Social Connection for the period 2024–2026 is an opportunity for WHO to examine the role of intergenerational solidarity in creating a more socially connected world.

## IV. Recommendations

52. Policy choices that support solidarity between generations in a context of population ageing and extended longevity are multifold and entail innovative and far-reaching transformations and structural reforms. Labour markets, family policies, policies to strengthen human capital and the labour force, and social protection systems all need to better reflect and adapt to the new demographic configuration of the world, which will require reimagining and updating the basic notions that underpin the tools used to examine the impact of population ageing and increased longevity. It involves questioning the assumptions upon which current economic indicators and measurements are based, applying a life course approach and focusing attention on the ramifications of economic and social inequality for population ageing. It is also crucial to better quantify and reflect the contributions of older persons to their societies and to economies.

53. Integrating a life course approach to working lives involves challenging the traditional model of the three linear and distinct stages of education, work and retirement. Novel policy ideas are required to replace this one-way linear career path and offer options to exit and re-enter the labour force, as able or needed throughout the life course. Such options would enable more flexible life transitions that allow for a redistribution of time dedicated to paid work, lifelong learning and intergenerational support, when needs arise.

54. The future is full of uncertainties. The impact of groundbreaking innovations, such as artificial intelligence, and the medium- and long-term consequences of climate change in all areas of human lives make it difficult to foresee and attempt to plan for the future. However, population ageing and the extension of the lifespan are not unknowns, nor are their purported negative impacts in the public domain inevitable. It is a fact that populations are ageing and living longer, and whether countries have already advanced or have only started along that path, projections show that this global trend will characterize the demographic makeup of future societies. In a future where, for the first time, up to six generations will coexist, there is a need for adequate policy choices that apply an intergenerational approach to harness all the potential and opportunities that population ageing and longevity offer to individuals, families and societies.

55. **Member States are encouraged to consider the following recommendations:**

(a) **Recognize the role of intergenerational relations in promoting social cohesion and influencing an individual's life course through the transfer of experiences, knowledge, resources and support;**

(b) **Work towards updating current economic indicators that mask the heterogeneity of older persons' resources and capabilities, overlook the potential of extended longevity and fail to reflect the economic contributions of older persons, including in the informal labour market and in unpaid care work;**

(c) **Recognize the crucial and evolving role played by families in contributing to the well-being of their members and of communities at large, and implement policies that support them, including relevant social protection programmes;**

(d) **Promote intergenerational knowledge transfer in the workplace to harness the potential of different generations and better adapt to changes in labour markets;**



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(e) Invest in digital skills training and foster the adoption of productivity-enhancing technologies, such as automation, artificial intelligence and digital platforms, among other measures, to meet the lifelong learning needs of workers;

(f) Acknowledge that the foundation for healthy ageing is laid before birth and shaped by the cumulative effect of the social determinants of health and other inequalities and discriminations experienced throughout the life course;

(g) Encourage the adoption of a life course approach in health policies to promote healthy behaviours from early life to old age, so as to reduce non-communicable diseases and extend healthy life expectancy;

(h) Support individuals, families and communities through policies that enable older persons and their family members to live in their preferred and chosen living arrangement, for as long as they wish;

(i) Recognize the needs and contributions of older persons in climate action and relevant intergovernmental agreements, and include older persons and their representatives in climate decision-making processes at all levels;

56. The General Assembly is encouraged to consider reiterating the call for Member States to consider including older persons' representatives in their delegations to the General Assembly and other processes held under the auspices of the United Nations, thus enhancing intergenerational discussions, and requesting the Secretary-General to convey this invitation to Member States.