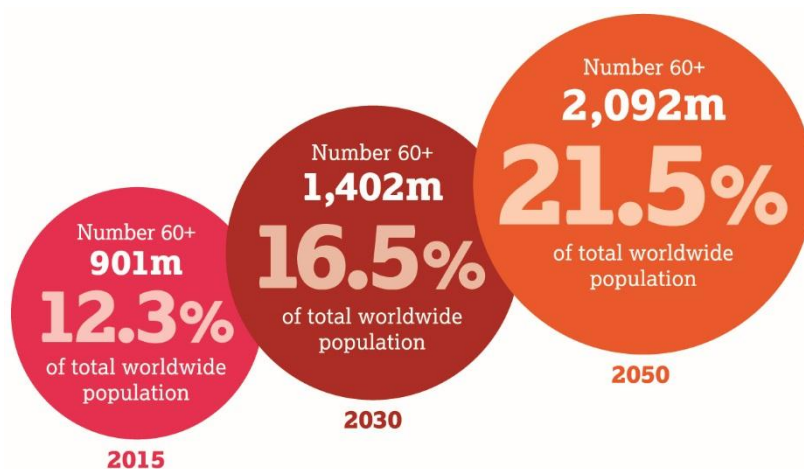


# Ageing and Development

Asghar Zaidi  
November 2015

The world's population is ageing across all regions of the world. Extraordinary developments in technology, medicine and public hygiene over the last 100 years have resulted in increasing numbers of people living longer than ever before, with better health and the prospect of a more active life long into old age. This trend coupled with a decline in fertility is resulting in a fast growing population of people 60 years and over in many countries around the world. At present, people over 60 years old outnumber children under five years of age. By 2050, this number of people over 60 years old will have grown to also outnumber those under 15 years of age.

Figure 1: Number and proportion of older people globally in 2015, 2030, 2050



Data source: UNDESA Population Division. (2015). *World population prospects: the 2015 revision*; chart taken from HelpAge International (2015).

Further, the proportion of those aged 80 years and over is increasing at a faster rate than the 60+ population as a whole. Projections suggest that the number of centenarians in the world will rise from 449,000 in 2015 to 3.4 million in 2050.



*Asghar Zaidi is Professor in International Social Policy at the University of Southampton. He is also Visiting Professor at London School of Economics. Since 2012 he has led on research for the Active Ageing Index, funded by the European Commission and the UNECE. He has worked with HelpAge International to develop the methodology for the Global AgeWatch Index, the first ever index to measure the well-being of older people on a worldwide scale. Previously, he was Senior Economist at OECD Paris and Economic Advisor at the UK Government's Department for Work and Pensions. He has published many books, research articles, and blogs on population ageing and its challenges.*

*Reading packs are commissioned by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) for independent study and professional development use. They are intended to be thought-provoking introductions to emerging issues and debates within the subject areas they cover. The views expressed are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of GSDRC, its partner agencies or DFID. © DFID Crown Copyright 2015. Licensed under the Open Government Licence: [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence)*

*Suggested citation: Zaidi, A. (2015). Ageing and Development. GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack no. 25. Birmingham, UK: University of Birmingham.*

There are marked differences in the rate of population change between different regions. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the 'youngest' region – only 4.8% of its population is over 60, compared with 23.9% in Europe (the world's oldest region). Yet by 2050 there will be 215 million people aged over 60 years in the region, triple the number there is today. Japan is currently the only country in the world with 30% of its population aged 60 or over. By 2050, 58 countries will have nearly one in three people aged 60+.

Alarmingly, these demographic changes are most rapid in the developing world which, by 2050, will be home to eight out of 10 of the world's over 60s. Between 2011 and 2032 Brazil will double its older population at approximately 5 and a half times the rate of France (between 1865 and 1980). The speed of population ageing, especially in low- and middle-income countries, has led many commentators to say that the developing world is "growing old before it grows rich". There is a gap between longer life and the lag in the evolution of policies that protect and empower older people. As a result, population ageing will be a challenge for governments around the world yet to put in place responsive policy frameworks. In particular, many of the sub-Saharan, Middle Eastern and Asian countries fall short in identifying the challenges for health and inclusion of older people and also in their awareness of the potential of older people in being net contributors in the development process (Lloyd-Sherlock 2010; Aboderin & Ferreira 2009).

Ageing and development intersects with other social development concerns, too (Age International 2015). With urban populations steadily increasing around the globe, and concentrated in the developing world, ageing and health in urban settings are increasingly becoming major priority issues.

Further, policies to support a dignified and secure old age should be of serious concern to today's younger people. In part, this is because many countries are currently facing a 'youth bulge' - a result of successes in reducing infant mortality. This 'youth bulge' of today will be the 'age bulge' of tomorrow. Early interventions in education, health and training will result in more resilient, secure and healthier adults (Zaidi 2014).

A higher share of older population suggests greater voting power. Many countries now have political parties formed by representative groups of older people (for example in Central Europe and Italy). However, there is no evidence to suggest that this has shifted resources away from younger groups in the population. A well-planned strategy of intergenerational solidarity between the young and old, facilitated by a supportive environment towards active ageing will ensure sustained knowledge-sharing and learning throughout the process of development.

Old age is often considered from a purely economic perspective, with assumptions of what the ageing population will cost and an understanding of the capacities and vulnerabilities of older people tied to pre-industrial principles about ageing and its challenges. Older people remain vulnerable in many ways, but they also have the potential to be active and productive long after the traditional age of retirement. Population ageing can support development, and acknowledging and responding to the opportunities this presents should be higher on the agenda.

Appropriate social policy priorities and responses, including social protection and universal social services, are needed to support the growing number of older citizens and mitigate the negative implications of population ageing. For example, as early as the 1960s, Japan – a country with a third of the population over 60 – invested in a comprehensive welfare policy, introduced universal healthcare and social pension, and a plan for income redistribution, low unemployment rates and progressive taxation. This investment has paid off: Japan is currently one of the healthiest and wealthiest countries in the world.

The Sustainable Development Goals recognise the importance of considering ageing and development. Older people and ageing are mentioned in 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with Goal 3 'Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at *all ages*' (emphasis added) reflecting the pledge to "leave no one behind" and the call for data disaggregated by age.

People's experiences of older age vary enormously depending on where they live. Countries that support human development throughout life are more likely to attain higher levels of quality of life for older people, and also have higher rates of their participation in volunteering, working and engaging in their communities (UNECE/European Commission 2015). But there are still contexts in which older people are still considered a burden on their families and communities in which they live. Launched in 2013, the Global AgeWatch Index provides comparative information on the wellbeing of older people across the world (HelpAge International 2015). This data helps to identify contexts in which older people fare better, and point to policy interventions that are effective in reducing vulnerabilities. The countries scoring well usually have social and economic policies that support older people's capabilities for employment, wellbeing and autonomy. Often they have long-standing social welfare policies delivering universal pensions and better access to healthcare, as well as action plans on ageing. This approach is apparent not just in some Western European, Nordic and North American countries, but also in some medium income countries like Chile, Argentina and Mauritius.

## Key readings

**Reading 1:** HelpAge International. (2015). *Global AgeWatch Index 2015: Insight report*. London: HelpAge International.  
<http://reports.helpage.org/global-agewatch-index-2015-insight-report.pdf>

**Reading 2:** Lloyd-Sherlock, P. (2010). International Development and Population Ageing. In: *Population ageing and International Development: From Generalisation to Evidence*. Bristol: Policy Press.  
<http://www.policypress.co.uk/display.asp?K=9781847421920>

Open access book review available here:

<http://journals.cambridge.org/action/displayFulltext?type=1&fid=7909188&jid=ASO&volumeId=30&issueId=08&aid=7909186>

**Reading 3:** Aboderin, I. & Ferreira, M. (2009). Linking Ageing to Development Agendas in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and Approaches. *Journal of Population Ageing* 1:51-73  
DOI 10.1007/s12062-009-9002-8  
<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs12062-009-9002-8>

**Reading 4:** Age International. (2014). *Facing the facts: The truth about ageing and development*. London: Age International.  
<http://www.ageinternational.org.uk/Documents/Age%20International%20Facing%20the%20facts%20report.pdf>

**Reading 5:** Zaidi, A. (2014, July). *Changing the way we age: Reducing vulnerability and promoting resilience in old age*. UNDP, New York.  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/content/changing-way-we-age-reducing-vulnerability-and-promoting-resilience-old-age>

**Reading 6:** Bloom, D.E.; Chatterji, S.; Kowal, P.; Lloyd-Sherlock, P.; McKee, M.; Rechel, B., Rosenberg; L., Smith, J.P. (2015). Macroeconomic implications of population ageing and selected policy responses. *The Lancet* 385(9968), 649-657.

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(14\)61464-1/ppt](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(14)61464-1/ppt)

**Reading 7:** UNECE/ European Commission. (2015). *Active Ageing Index 2014: Analytical Report*. Report prepared by Asghar Zaidi of Centre for Research on Ageing, University of Southampton & David Stanton, under contract with United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (Geneva), co-funded by European Commission's DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (Brussels).

[http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/groupsite/Administration/SitePublisher-document-store/Documents/aai\\_report.pdf](http://www.southampton.ac.uk/assets/sharepoint/groupsite/Administration/SitePublisher-document-store/Documents/aai_report.pdf)

### Questions to guide reading

1. What are the common features of population ageing and how do they differ across various parts of the world?
2. Are older people an untapped resource or a hindrance in development processes?
3. What are some common economic and social challenges associated with ageing in the development process?
4. What opportunities can population ageing offer the development process? What strategies can promote these opportunities?
5. What other societal developments/challenges accompany and reinforce the demographic change?
6. Based on the key readings (particularly 1 and 5), what are some policy focus areas that will support better quality of life of older people, and promote active and healthy ageing?