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# Chapter 4:

# The voices of older persons

“You are talking of a Second World Assembly on Ageing. What happened to the first? We were never consulted, yet you tell us a Plan of Action to address our situation emerged. Who made it?” *Older woman, Zimbabwe*<sup>1</sup>

When the International Plan of Action on Ageing was adopted in Madrid in 2002, United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan reminded Member States that this was the first time that “Governments agreed to link questions of ageing to other frameworks for social and economic development and human rights, most notably those agreed at the United Nations conferences and summits of the past decade”.<sup>2</sup> He also noted that “the real test will be implementation”.<sup>3</sup> The question of implementation is at the heart of the Madrid Plan’s accountability process, including its 10-year review and appraisal.

The Madrid Plan explicitly asks that there be consultation with older women and men in assessing implementation and impact. In 2005, Member States endorsed a “bottom-up, participatory approach” for its review and appraisal. This approach highlights the importance of promoting older persons’ participation in reviewing and appraising the Plan.<sup>4</sup>

This chapter gives a flavour of older persons’ views on the Madrid Plan’s impact.<sup>5</sup> It draws on the opinions and experiences of 1,300 older men and women from 36 countries<sup>6</sup> (Table 1). This project is the first comprehensive assessment of older people’s experiences using primarily qualitative but also quantitative methods. Consultations with older people were conducted across all regions using a consistent methodology. The aim was to focus on the perspectives of older persons themselves, enabling them to identify

gaps and to propose ways forward. In addition to the consultations, most of the participants also completed a questionnaire which provides further insights into their experiences of ageing.

## One process

As a contribution to this United Nations-endorsed bottom-up review and appraisal process, UNFPA and HelpAge International collaborated with a number of organizations to conduct consultations with older persons around the world. These consultations took place between mid-2011 and early 2012. The aim was to document participants’ quality of life, explore if and how their lives had changed since the Second World Assembly on Ageing, and whether they had noticed improvements in the key areas outlined in the Plan – in particular: ensuring that older people are included in development initiatives; advancing health and well-being into old age; and creating enabling and supportive environments. The consultations also sought to ascertain the extent of participants’ knowledge of the Madrid Plan and government actions.

The intention was to highlight older persons’ main areas of concern through in-depth analysis and put forward their recommendations. These recommendations inform the overall findings of this report and are offered to policymakers as a contribution to more age-sensitive national policymaking. This approach acknowledges that older people have the capacity and legitimacy to contribute to society and reinforces the need to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes.

## Methodology

The data gathering combined three approaches. The principal method was group discussions (consultations), which were undertaken in both rural and urban areas and focused on the key issues covered in the Madrid Plan. In addition, basic socio-demographic data on the participants and insights into their experiences of ageing were collected through a survey. Individual interviews were conducted and a selection of these testimonies can be found throughout this report. HelpAge International, with the support of UNFPA, developed two manuals to guide these activities and ensure that the same methodology was used in all countries.

The consultations took place at sub-national level with an average of four consultations in each country, in both rural and urban areas. Participants were identified either by local organizations of older people or by those that work with older people. The participants were also asked to consider the experiences of older people who were too frail to attend the discussions.

The main selection criterion for inclusion in the consultations was for the participant to be of pensionable age or aged 60 years or over. Generally, the participants were selected through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method. Each consultation aimed to include similar numbers of men and women. In countries where mixed-sex groups were not seen as culturally appropriate, an equal number of consultations with men and women were carried out. Potential participants were approached through organizations of older people, the majority of which are part of the HelpAge network. Details of the methodology can be found in Appendix 4.

## Global survey on ageing

The global survey included questions on basic socio-demographic data and older people's experiences of ageing, addressing particularly issues highlighted in the Madrid Plan. Out of the total number of 1,300 participants, 1,150 completed the survey.

### Participant profile

The findings from the quantitative data in the survey reveal that:

- Almost half of the respondents are aged between 65 and 74 years (48 per cent). About one quarter are under 65 (26 per cent) and another quarter are over 75 (25 per cent). One per cent either did not reply or responded "don't know".
- Sixty per cent of the respondents are women and 40 per cent are men.
- The majority (53 per cent) are married, 34 per cent widowed, 8 per cent single and 4 per cent fit none of these three categories.
- The majority of the respondents (48 per cent) have between two and four adult children. Another 34 per cent report having five or more adult children, 10 per cent have one child and 7 per cent, no children.
- Twenty-five per cent of the older persons have 10 or more grandchildren or great-grandchildren. Thirty per cent have between five and nine and 33 per cent, between one and four. Eleven per cent do not have any grandchildren or great-grandchildren.
- Seventy-seven per cent of the respondents own their own houses.
- Respondents' educational level varies widely: 17 per cent have less than three years of primary schooling, while 21 per cent attended college or university. About 29 per cent had finished primary school and 27 per cent completed secondary school.
- Two thirds of the respondents are members of associations, clubs or organizations for older persons.

Table 1: Countries in which consultations were undertaken

Africa	Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Uganda
Asia and the Pacific	Bangladesh, Cambodia, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Viet Nam, and Turkey
Latin America and the Caribbean	Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Peru
Eastern and Southern Europe	Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Serbia, and Ukraine
Other developed countries	Austria, Canada, Germany, and Ireland

## Older persons' responses to the Madrid Plan

Older persons' responses to issues highlighted in the Madrid Plan are summarized in Table 2. The findings show that age discrimination is widely recognized and experienced by a considerable proportion of the respondents. A third of the respondents worked in paid employment in the last month. Two thirds wish they had the opportunity to work for money. About half of the older persons worry about their financial situation

and face problems in paying for basic necessities and services. Two thirds of the respondents (66 per cent) rate their current health status either as fair (44 per cent), bad or very bad (22 per cent). One third find it hard or very hard to access health care. In general, half of the participants are satisfied or very satisfied with their lives.

**Table 2: Results of the global survey on older persons' experiences of ageing**

Issue	Percentage of respondents
<b>Rights/Inclusion</b>	
<b>Recognition of age discrimination</b> % of people aged 60+ who believe that age discrimination exists in older people's everyday lives	67
<b>Experience of age discrimination</b> % of people aged 60+ who report having experienced age discrimination in the past year	37
<b>Fear of violence</b> % of people aged 60+ who report being afraid of personal violence	43
<b>Respect</b> % of people aged 60+ who believe they are treated with respect	49
<b>Use of technology</b> % of people aged 60+ using a mobile phone	61
<b>Financial security</b>	
<b>Work</b> % of people aged 60+ in paid employment in the last month	33
<b>Willing to work</b> % of people aged 60+ wanting to work for money if they had the opportunity	66
<b>Income constraints</b> % of people aged 60+ finding it difficult or very difficult to pay for basic services	53
<b>Cash worries</b> % of people aged 60+ finding themselves always or very often worried about problems with money	47
<b>Health and well-being</b>	
<b>Fair health status</b> % of people age 60+ reporting their current health status as fair	44
<b>Bad health status</b> % of people age 60+ reporting their current health status as bad or very bad	22
<b>Health-care accessibility</b> % of people aged 60+ finding it difficult or very difficult to access health care when they need it	34
<b>Loneliness</b> % of people aged 60+ feeling they are always or very often lonely	16
<b>Life satisfaction</b> % of people aged 60+ being satisfied or very satisfied with the way they live	47

## Highlights of the consultations

The consultations give an insight into the extent to which older people are included or otherwise in their society, community and family, their experience of poverty, their desire to participate in policy processes, and the high priority they ascribe to the provision of basic services.

### Participation and contributions

Despite the acknowledgement in the Madrid Plan that it is essential for older persons to be empowered “to participate meaningfully in all stages of policy development, implementation, monitoring, review and appraisal”,<sup>7</sup> there is a resounding lack of knowledge of the Madrid Plan and policies, rights and entitlements that could lead to improvements in the experience of old age in all countries. Such knowledge can provide a way for older persons to be involved in local decision-making. This can bring tangible results, as, for example, in rural Ethiopia, where older people are reported to play leading roles at community level and act as a bridge between the government, NGOs and the community.

The consultations show that older men and women see voting in elections as essential for political participation, and that they are aware of their growing political power as their numbers increase. Participants say that they feel that more attention is now given to ageing issues. However, in developing countries, particularly in rural areas, improvements in living conditions over the past 10 years are most often attributed to improved physical infrastructure – water, roads, the building of health clinics and schools – rather than to the implementation of ageing-specific policies.

Participants place great emphasis on reciprocity within families and communities. Most of those consulted work in some way to support their families and communities as well as themselves. They value both caring and being cared for by others, including neighbours, friends, children and grandchildren. The majority indicated that they feel a lack of support in providing care, however. On this issue, there were no striking differences between rural and urban communities.

Overall, the consultations reveal older people's enthusiasm for working through organizations of older people. They value engaging in such groups because it brings both economic and social benefits, such as increased well-being and a sense of worth, as well as enhanced political recognition and greater community and family respect. In some cases, older persons report that they often felt lonely before joining a group and have been happier since they joined. Some say that the activities of older persons' groups have increased their involvement in local decision-making. In a rural area of Serbia, for example, members of an older persons' group succeeded in obtaining home health care, a general practitioner and a pharmacy for their village.

### Income security

Participants describe the difficulties that older people encounter in finding productive employment, often as a consequence of age discrimination, and also of general high levels of unemployment, health problems, and a lack of qualifications or poor working conditions. When applying for jobs, they are often told that they are too old. In some cases, those working for the government say that they are forced to retire. Some participants also feel that their qualifications are not sufficient or that they should not expect to be employed while the younger generation also faces unemployment. Older people in developing countries also report problems in accessing credit as they grow older. These experiences are common in both rural and urban communities.

The development of social protection – especially regular pension payments and access to health care – is singled out as the key improvement since 2002. Older persons see pensions as very important for reducing older people's vulnerability and that of their families. However, few have access to a pension, except in the more developed countries. Pensions are particularly valued in those developing countries where universal pensions or free access to health care have been introduced. Pension recipients explain how the whole family benefits from these basic social protection mechanisms. For example, in Brazil, an older woman explains that five people depend on her pension. Many participants, however, report difficulties in accessing pensions, even where schemes are in place. These difficulties may derive from having assets, receiving remittances, or being physically unable to collect the pension. Pension recipients are also concerned that the recent rapid inflation in prices of food, consumer goods and services in many countries is eroding the value of pensions.

## Health in older age

Overall, participants note improvements in health promotion initiatives and in the general provision of, and access to, health-care services. However, they continue to face problems relating to the cost of health-care services and medicines, and to the length of waiting lists. In all regions, the rising cost of medicines, medical consultations, home care and transport are highlighted as a source of stress and anxiety. Participants described short-sighted policies – for example, providing free health consultations but requiring payment for expensive basic medicines which are often not stocked in regular pharmacies or at health-care centres.

When discussing barriers to accessing health care, many participants, particularly in developing countries and the countries of Eastern and Southern Europe, refer to a lack of medicines and equipment to treat and diagnose age-related diseases. They also say that they often experience the behaviour of health professionals as a barrier to receiving the health care they need. In many cases, they are told that their health issue is “part of the old-age disease”, which cannot be treated, or that they are seen as a burden.

## Enabling and supportive environments

When discussing the physical environment, participants say that the most pressing issue is the safety and accessibility of public transport, which allows them to visit family and friends and access services. Many participants express dissatisfaction with the state of the roads, bus services and the cost of public transport. However, even when transport is free, which they see as a great improvement, many of those taking part in the consultations speak about bus drivers who lack respect for them, sometimes ignoring them and even leaving them behind when they are standing at the bus stop. The cost and accessibility of local transport also remain major concerns in rural and urban areas alike.

Further exploration of the issue of age discrimination and images of ageing reveals examples of abuse, mainly by family members, ranging from violent disputes over property and assets to neglect when an older person is dependent on the care of others. Many participants also express concern that they do not feel respected by their family or wider society. They would like their contributions to receive more recognition and they value being respected and, for example, being given priority in public places.

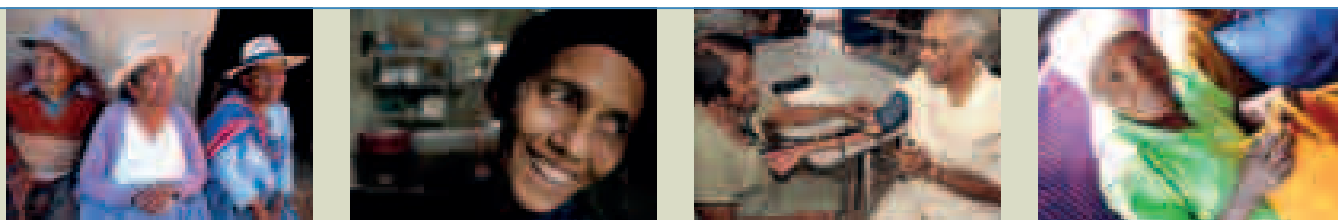
A seamstress from Sri Lanka with a sewing machine bought with a loan from her older people's association. Older people speak of difficulties in accessing credit.



Mayur Paul/HelpAge International

Reports from participants indicate that older women are at particular risk of discrimination, including cases of killings related to allegations of witchcraft. The majority of participants also feel that the media generally does not project an appropriate image of older people and often portrays them in a negative light.





## The findings in detail

### Participation and contributions

#### *Awareness of the Madrid Plan*

The consultations indicate that many participants have little or no knowledge of the Madrid Plan and its provisions.

*"Madrid plus 10? What is that? The only thing we know is that Madrid is the capital of Spain." rural Paraguay*

*"A Plan of Action on Ageing is a new phrase for me. I've never heard about this before." urban Austria*

Most of those who have heard of the Madrid Plan do not know its details. Some are aware that the Plan is some kind of international policy document for older persons, but do not know what its content is or how it is relevant to them.

*"I know about the Madrid Plan from newspapers I read and workshops I have attended but I do not know much about it." rural Nepal*

Leaders of older people's organizations are more likely to have heard of the Madrid Plan. They may also use it when working with members of their association or club to seek action on ageing at local level. Advocacy action associated with the International Day of Older Persons on 1 October has been helpful in spreading knowledge of the Madrid Plan and seeking concrete changes in line with its provisions. An example is the global Age Demands Action (ADA) campaign, now running in nearly sixty countries (see box on page 38).

*"I came to know about the Madrid Plan after participating in celebrations of 1st October." urban Ethiopia*

*"We heard about the Madrid Plan through the recent Age Demands Action activity held in September 2011." Jamaica*

The process of consultation also helps to share information about the Plan. Some participants recommend that civil society and governments empower them to participate further in the Madrid Plan's bottom-up review and appraisal through knowledge-sharing at local level about its policies and programmes. They point out that effective dissemination also depends on translating its provisions and those of national action plans into local languages.

#### *Participating in elections*

Across all regions, many older persons involved in the consultations assert that their participation in elections is crucial to exercising their rights as citizens; it is their opportunity to have a say and influence decision-making.

*"Yes, we all participated in the last election because we want someone who listens to our voice." urban Ethiopia*

*"I think my vote counts a lot; this is because I have my choice." rural Ghana*

*"We all voted because we wanted to choose a good leader." rural Cambodia*

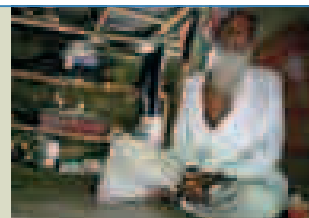
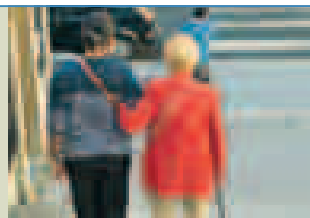
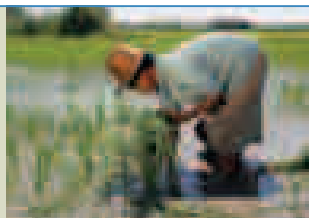
*"If you don't vote you are letting someone else decide for you." Brazil*

*"I feel that during elections it is my opportunity to complain." urban Canada*

Nonetheless, the experience of participants in some countries is that politicians listen to older people before the election but soon forget about their promises.

*"During the elections, older people voted in large numbers, thinking that the new leaders would help us. However, we are still awaiting assistance from them. We only get to see politicians during campaign time." urban Kenya*

*"Only during the election campaigns do politicians pay any attention to the issues of the people living in villages." rural Serbia*



In Kyrgyzstan, older people raised another issue – the incentives offered by political parties before elections.

"We took part in the election and now we are using the electric kettle, have eaten the cakes and have used the 500 soms that they gave to us." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

Although they accept these presents, they do not let these sway their opinions.

"We accept everything that the parties give us and then vote for the candidate that we think is good." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

### **Growing influence of older people**

In countries where older people are a significant and increasing part of the electorate, participants feel that this gives them more leverage.

"Older people should take a stand before the next election.... In each district, we should develop a manifesto which is presented to the candidate." *Belize*

"Now we are more integrated in life, in decisions – in politics." *rural Austria*

"Older people make up around 11 per cent of the population but 18 per cent of the electorate." *urban Ireland*

"As there are so many older people in society the political parties can't vex them." *urban Germany*

Despite this, a participant from Ireland notes that their electoral power is weakened by a lack of unity.

"The only problem with the grey vote is that it is not coordinated strongly enough." *rural Ireland*

### **Attention given to ageing**

Although the majority of those consulted do not know about the Madrid Plan and its provisions, many think that there are improvements in attention to ageing, both in communities and among government officials.

"Older people's concerns have now become an issue to be discussed in the community, and among concerned parties and stakeholders, while in earlier times nobody was raising this as an important subject. So now we see positive signs." *urban Ethiopia*

"The Government has made things easier than 10 years ago. We have a nearby health centre, where we get basic treatment at reasonable cost. We have easy access to our ward commissioner office (local government) and they listen to us – we can sit there." *rural Bangladesh*

"Measures are being taken to remove barriers – disabled people receive subsidies and special pensions, and special day-care centres have been created by the Territorial Centre of Social Services." *Belarus*

In Northern Europe and Western Europe, older participants consider that the increased attention given to older people and ageing is

"because of the increased numbers of older people. They need our votes." *rural Austria*

The evidence of improvement is particularly striking in Latin America and the Caribbean, where older people especially value access to social clubs, alongside free health care and food programmes.

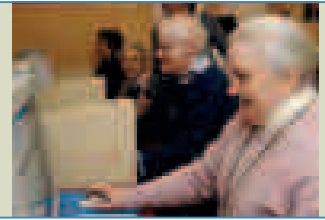
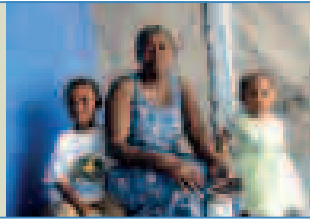
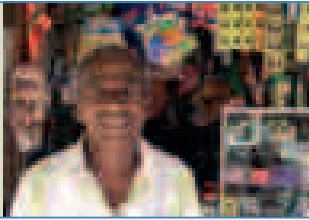
"I feel there is dedication now. There are dances and groups, and people want to take part. These weren't there before. Now there are more opportunities." *Brazil*

In Brazil, the majority of participants further highlight the role of the Law for Older Persons (*Estatuto do Idoso*) which they say has improved the lives of older people in many ways.

"One of the achievements is the Law for Older Persons. This is something that didn't exist before. It is an improvement." *urban Brazil*

In some countries, participants acknowledge that activities which help them to organize, such as the Age Demands Action campaign (ADA), are improving their access to policymakers:

"We are now encouraged to take part in local governance. Through ADA we are able to engage policymakers at local level." *rural Ghana*



In Eastern and Southern Europe as well as in Central Asia, many participants feel that conditions are deteriorating, with reflections that in the past:

*"Everything was better." rural Serbia*

They indicate that the economic reforms have made it more difficult for them to access basic services, which were formerly provided free.

*"Before we used to get sent to resorts. Now the trade unions still collect money but they have forgotten about us." urban Kyrgyzstan*

*"All the changes have worsened our situation. Before we could benefit from more subsidized medicines, now we need to pay for so many things despite the fact that we all have free medical insurance." urban Moldova*

### **Benefits from infrastructural improvement**

Many participants welcome governmental attention to ageing and the fact that their votes are gaining more weight, although the type of changes they mention as most significant are general infrastructural improvements, rather than age-specific policy changes. They identify roads, water and sanitation as especially important to their well-being. This is particularly true for Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. New roads make for easier and quicker access to health-care facilities and markets to sell products. Clean water, improved sanitation and pest control also contribute to better health.

*"We now have a good road network. We can easily be rushed to the hospital for medical attention. Previously we drank from the stream but now we have potable water to drink." rural Ghana*

*"The Government has improved sanitation by encouraging toilet construction. Trapping of tsetse flies is also done by the Government to protect community members from disease." rural Uganda*

*"The road has made a huge difference in our lives. Now that it is here, we can take sick people to the health centre. I think some people's lives have been saved by this road." rural Cambodia*

### **Older people's contributions to families and communities**

#### **Grandparents as caregivers**

In all regions, in developing and developed countries alike, participants view caring for grandchildren as a crucial contribution. This role assumes added significance where both parents are working or studying. In some areas, older persons are looking after adult children with HIV and bringing up orphaned grandchildren.

*"Many of us are looking after our grandchildren while their parents have to study or are in the cities." rural Nigeria*

*"Older people have the burden of taking care of orphans or grandchildren. Due to HIV, there is an increased burden for us." urban Kenya*

*"We, the older women take care of the children as well as doing housework like cooking, cleaning, and washing." urban Bangladesh*

*"I take care of my grandchildren. In my community I try to give them all my support and share my time with them." Chile*

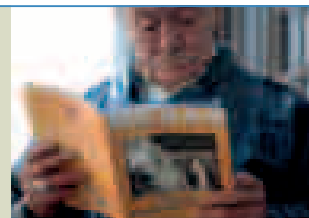
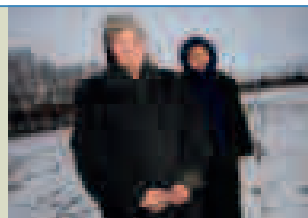
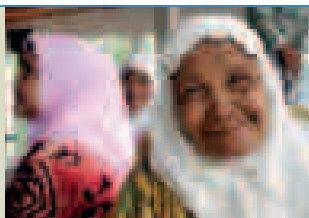
*"We look after our grandchildren so our daughter won't experience this 'new discrimination' of our time – against women with children. My wife lost her job because she was having a child." rural Austria*

In cases where the parental generation has emigrated, participants often care for the children who remain behind.

*"Compared to 10 years ago there is a change, in that the young people migrate to work, leaving the older people behind to take care of their grandchildren. They have to work instead of taking a rest in order to help their children earn money." rural Viet Nam*

*"Children leave and it is the grandparents who have to provide physical care, food and so on for the grandchildren." Belize*





Some also refer to the shifting relations between generations caused by migration.

"Young people leave their families and older people have to raise their grandchildren.... Family ties are broken as younger ones are seeking jobs in other countries." *urban Ukraine*

From Africa and Asia there is evidence that older people continue to play an important role in providing guidance and advice and maintaining harmony in the family.

"We settle family disputes and marital issues and even take care of our grandchildren when their parents are away for work." *urban Ghana*

"Older people are like a watchdog in the family. When there are any problems or a crisis, they guide the whole family in the right direction with their life experiences." *urban Sri Lanka*

"On the one hand, it is hard work to take care of our grandchildren. On the other hand, the parents who went to Argentina or Spain send money. But when they succeed, they come here and take their children, so we are left alone, first without children, and then without grandchildren, which kills us." *Paraguay*

### Lack of support for older caregivers

Little information on the extent of support for caregivers is available from participants in Latin America and the Caribbean, or in Northern and Western Europe and Canada. However, evidence from other regions shows that older men and women rely on informal support from their community when caring for sick children, grandchildren or other older people.

"There is no direct assistance for older people who care for those living with HIV or orphans." *urban Mozambique*

"There are no programmes or support for caregivers in particular, but the older people's association here helps people who have grandchildren at home and gives them loans for medicine and other things." *rural Cambodia*

"Caring for the infirm and infants in the family is mostly based on the experience of the family elders. The practices are more self-taught by experience and age rather than systematic training. The younger generation does not possess these skills, particularly in the area of geriatric care." *rural India*

"I am an older woman caring for two grandchildren and their disabled father. I applied several times for social aid for the father of the children and every time I was refused." *rural Moldova*

### Supporting the community

Those who took part in the consultations consider older persons to be a valuable asset to the community because of their traditional knowledge, which can help to guide younger generations.

"An older person is a community treasure, so you get many community members dropping in to see you about welfare." *rural Nigeria*

"We share our wisdom, knowledge and experience with family members and the general community. My family sits with me to share the pros and cons before making any decision collectively." *rural Fiji*

Older persons' role in providing traditional remedies extends beyond the family.

"We support community members by giving them traditional herbs when they are sick since we know the curative herbs." *rural Uganda*

Evidence from Africa and Asia indicates that participants see conflict resolution as another important contribution made by older people:

"Conflict resolution in the family and community, and even at regional and country level, is mainly taken care of by older people." *rural Ethiopia*

"We have been involved in development activities like drinking water schemes, school buildings, community conflict resolutions, electrification, temple building, road construction and so on." *urban Nepal*

"When young people quarrel, older people solve the problems." *urban Kyrgyzstan*



Older men and women also assist through volunteering, including helping other older people and teaching children and adults.

"We volunteered ourselves to help in the construction of our Senior Citizens Multipurpose Centre until its completion." *urban Philippines*

"We hold after-school classes to assist children and even adults with their studies." *Jamaica*

"Without older people, the villages we live in would not have water, roads and light. We achieved all of this in the last 12 years through our activism, and through being organized in older people's groups and volunteering." *rural Bosnia and Herzegovina*

### Recognizing older people's contributions

Participants have mixed views about how far their contributions are recognized by society and governments. Generally, they feel that recognition is highest at family or community level.

"Our contribution is valued only within the family." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

"Our contributions are recognized at the community level but not at national level. Our deeds are not publicized through the media." *rural Nepal*

Participants mention specific situations in which older people's contributions are well recognized.

"The local authority respects the contributions by older people, especially during funerals, and the solidarity that has been created in the community. Their initiative is also cited as a good practice on many occasions." *urban Mozambique*

Others say that their contributions are not valued, however.

"Older people are not valued and supported." *urban Tanzania*

"The younger generation does not value the contribution of older people. They consider we are trying to advance backward cultures." *urban Ethiopia*

In Latin America and the Caribbean, participants feel that their contributions are recognized to some extent but less than they deserve to be.

"Some officials will say 'thank you', but there are few concrete incentives." *Belize*

### The key role of older persons' organizations

Organizations of older people show tangible results in enhancing the well-being of their members and also in bringing general improvements to their communities. In all countries, especially in Asia, participants say that older people's organizations make a significant difference in their lives.

"I am very happy that there is an older people's organization in my neighbourhood. Now I do not feel lonely anymore." *urban Indonesia*

"We all were born under this system and were managed like animals, and we cannot get rid of this situation. But if we don't organize ourselves, the only right we will have will be the right to go to the cemetery." *rural Paraguay*

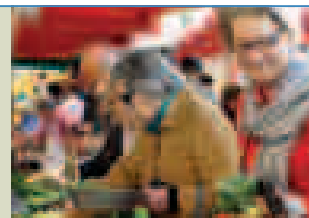
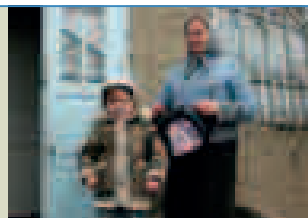
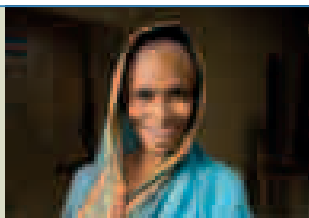
"We managed to obtain home health care, a general practitioner's office and a pharmacy in our village. If you do not protest and you are old, you will not get anything." *rural Serbia*

The participants see working with older people's associations as an opportunity to participate in decision-making about, for example, community services or social activities.

"Socially, older people play leading roles at community level and are a bridge between the government, NGOs and the community in all necessary aspects, political and social, and in realizing development interventions and so on." *rural Ethiopia*

"Older people are indeed now involved in most decisions in the community. We now handle issues that hitherto were going to the chiefs and opinion leaders." *rural Ghana*

"When they are preparing development plans, wards and municipal authorities invite us to give our suggestions." *urban Nepal*



"Older people were also invited to participate in the development of the budget for the Department of Health. They allocated a budget for the anti-flu and pneumonia vaccines for older people and for the training of home caregivers" *urban Philippines*

"We discussed many times during meetings of our older persons' support group ... that the village lacks a family doctor ... we raised this issue with representatives of the Ministry of Health.... After a while a new family doctor was employed." *rural Moldova*

In Latin America, in particular, older persons have more opportunities to participate in social educational activities.

"We, who have reached the age of 60 and over, have the chance to take a number of courses, and participate in workshops. This has changed my life. I used to stay at home on my own, but now I am not lonely anymore." *Brazil*

"There are many courses and possibilities of education for older people, but there are no chances to get a job." *Chile*

From Kyrgyzstan there is evidence that where an officially recognized organization is lacking, older people jointly participate in discussing relevant issues.

"We have our own community but it's not an official association. It is very important for older people. If there are problems – for example, water issues – older people gather and solve them." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

### Exclusion remains an issue

Despite these positive developments, some participants feel ignored and rarely have a chance to participate in any activities for older people.

"This is the first time anyone would ask older people of this community to come together to have their views heard." *urban Nigeria*

"We usually attend meetings but we are not given a chance to contribute as they think we have nothing valuable to contribute." *urban Tanzania*

"Never in our lives have we been consulted by the Government in relation to our needs." *rural Philippines*

Some older women feel that they are excluded from decision-making other than within their families.

"Male participants are involved in traditional matters but in most cases female participants are involved within their families. They are excluded from matters that are beyond the family issues." *rural Tanzania*

"I have never been consulted about any decisions outside my family, because they do not like to ask us as women what we think." *rural Cambodia*

## Financial security

### The challenge of finding paid employment

In all regions, older people find it difficult to gain access to the formal labour market.

"The Government has established a few welfare schemes for older people but no initiatives have been taken to create work opportunities that affect the ability of older people to have decent work." *rural Bangladesh*

"In the past 10 years, there has been no change in the jobs for older people in this community." *rural Viet Nam*

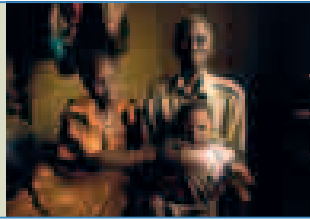
"There are many older people who want to work, but they don't because there are only a few positions." *urban Brazil*

Barriers to employment are often a consequence of age discrimination. The most common reason in all regions is felt to be age discrimination on the part of the employer, which is often supported through national, age-discriminatory legislation.

"It is difficult for older people to get employment. During colonial times, older people could get employed. Nowadays, we are discriminated against. The work goes to younger people." *rural Kenya*

"There is strong age discrimination. Even though we are able to, we are not allowed to work." *rural Philippines*

"We can still contribute and work to earn after the age of 55 years. We want to continue working but due to the compulsory retirement age, we are forced to retire." *urban Fiji*



"I apply here, I apply there and you know what they tell me? 'You are over the employment age'." *Belize*

"Because a person's turned 65, that doesn't mean you are done." *Jamaica*

"Older employees are forced out of their jobs to be replaced by younger workers." *urban Austria*

Women experience further discrimination based on their sex.

"A common perception is that women work less than men, which prohibits women from getting jobs outside their own household." *rural Bangladesh*

Participants acknowledge that there are occasions when people who are over the retirement age are encouraged to continue working, as this older woman from Moldova testifies, or when they have the means to afford courses.

"We have a very good school director and every year she tells me, 'If you can and want to work, then continue your classes'. I am lucky to be employed after I've retired." *urban Moldova*

"After I retired, I decided to use some of my pension to improve my knowledge. I was the oldest person in the course but I didn't feel any discrimination on the grounds of my age. After the course, I got a job at a private clinic and I am very satisfied. Nobody asks me how old I am; everybody appreciates my knowledge and skills." *urban Serbia*

### The impact of the wider economy

External economic factors are recognized as having an impact on older people's ability to find productive employment. In countries where there is high unemployment, especially among young people, participants think that they should not seek employment, but rather leave the jobs for younger people. This is mentioned across all regions, with the exception of African countries.

"There are no jobs even for youth, not to mention older people." *urban Kyrgyzstan*

"You wouldn't be so cheeky as to look for work when there are so many young people looking for work." *rural Ireland*

"How can we work? Our children cannot even find a job." *rural Ukraine*

In rural areas, as, for example, in a village in Moldova, the general lack of business activity is making it impossible for older people to find jobs.

"Employment of older people in our village is basically impossible. There are no businesses here." *rural Moldova*

In Chile, one participant notes that older people's competitiveness in the market is reduced by cheap, imported products.

"The only way to work is to have a personal business.... It is hard to commercialize our products because the market is full of cheaper foreign products." *Chile*

### Health issues and employment

Health problems, a lack of qualifications and poor working conditions further hinder access to productive employment. In Africa, older people mention health problems and loss of strength as obstacles in their efforts to obtain productive employment.

"I was told by the doctor not to work due to health problems. This is the letter from the doctor." *rural Mozambique*

"I was working as a caterer and due to exposure to the heat, I developed a visual problem. I cannot see well, not to speak of working." *urban Ghana*

The consultations show that while older women continue to work in the household, older men seem to face more difficulty in continuing to work in physically demanding jobs because of their declining strength and a lack of alternative employment.

"At our age we can no longer work to earn an income. I personally worked as a mining engineer when I was young and as a result I developed a spinal chord problem." *urban Ghana*

"Older men meet more difficulties than older women. We still have the housework and other small jobs to do. We could do any job and not be afraid of losing face, while older men could not." *urban Viet Nam*



"Older women can do many things. We do a lot of things older man can't do. We can continue most of our activities while men often cannot continue working as builders when they get old." *rural Philippines*

### Skills and access to training

Even older persons who are able and willing to work find that a lack of qualifications presents another barrier to continued employment.

"Older people are not skilled and thus cannot perform modern types of jobs." *rural Nepal*

"First, there is the economic factor that doesn't allow you to get a job; second, there is the age factor [as they want] those who are 20 to 35 years old, because when you turn 36 you are considered an older person. And they also ask for experience. They ask for a CV and I get scared." *Nicaragua*

"I worked all my life in a family home, but I have no qualifications, so I don't have job opportunities." *urban Brazil*

Participants report a lack of training opportunities which could help them to get productive employment.

"If I knew how to operate the garment-making machinery, to prepare leather products, or at least knew how to check the product quality, this would be more beneficial for me." *rural Bangladesh*

"Women involved in groups got training in cottage industries (candle making and making plates out of leaves). Men did not receive any kind of training. They want the Government to provide them with agricultural training at the Institute of Agriculture at Rampur." *rural Nepal*

In some cases, participants also mention that the work which is available is not age-friendly and working conditions are not flexible enough.

"It was very difficult to get work in the area ... and some of the available jobs are not age-friendly." *rural Ethiopia*

"Older people are not looking for formal employment because they are frail and tired already, but they probably would be interested in being employed if employers offered flexible working hours and shorter shifts." *Belarus*

However, a few exceptional circumstances are mentioned which improve older people's chances of getting paid employment.

"There are more jobs here now because all of our young people are in Thailand." *rural Cambodia*

"The availability of work has increased with the growth of the number of businesses." *urban Ukraine*

Not all participants see the availability of jobs due to outward migration of younger generations as a benefit to their well-being, however.

"The youth are all leaving our country. If there was no unemployment, our lives would be better. There are no people who work in the fields – that's why food products are so expensive." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

"It would help to create employment in the region to keep the middle generation here." *rural Moldova*

### Access to credit

Participants report that in many cases they experience problems in accessing credit. Older people feel disadvantaged in comparison to younger people when it comes to obtaining credit.

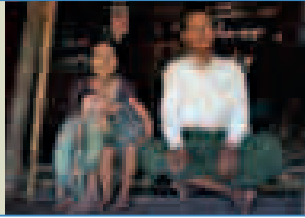
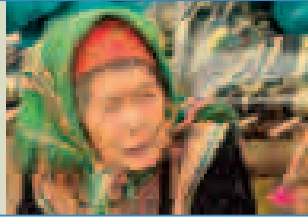
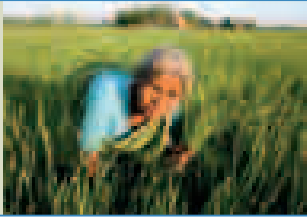
"I think they are not giving loans to older people because they think we can't work and pay back the loans." *urban Tanzania*

"Financial services are available but they are for the young." *rural Indonesia*

"A year ago, I asked the bank for a loan, but when they saw my identity card they said 'no'. I also have an account with another bank but when I turned 75 they did not lend me money anymore." *Chile*

"I said I was a pensioner. I filled in all the forms and then, when you mention that you are over 60, the system rejects them – you can't access credit.... They didn't give me a loan. Retirement is synonymous with 'you will die soon'." *urban Nicaragua*





Older people are also reportedly taken advantage of as guarantors for younger people.

"We cannot get bank loans because we are too old, but we can be loan guarantors. So the banks, knowing the financial situation of younger generations, usually take us as guarantors and do not inform us that those young people are not able to pay off the loans. We become victims and pay off other people's loans for years." *urban Bosnia and Herzegovina*

In Bangladesh, women are often prioritized in accessing credit, although one participant alleged that men benefit from this.

"Women are the vehicle for men to borrow money from NGOs, since NGOs only provide credit to women." *urban Bangladesh<sup>8</sup>*

### Poverty and the value of pensions

Those who took part in the discussions suggest that old age is often experienced as a time of worries about poverty as income declines. Relatively few older people have access to any kind of pension, except in the more developed countries. They are aware of the importance of having their own income in old age, and when this is not available, they express frustration.

"If we could get a pension or cash benefit ... we would be able to fulfil our basic needs ... and this is crucial to enhance our confidence and respect from the community." *rural Ethiopia*

"People who can afford to pay their own expenses are more respected. If I do not have money, can I beg for it? No, I would be ashamed." *urban Paraguay*

"The pension reflects the image of older people. If the pension is low we cannot talk about a good life and well-being of older people." *rural Moldova*

When older people have access to pensions they are generally satisfied with the system of disbursement.

"I started receiving my pension two years ago. I have bought bricks to build my house. I can access basic needs more easily." *rural Uganda*

"Social pensions have brought visible changes in older people's life and dignity." *rural Bangladesh*

"In the past, housewives who did not work did not have a pension. Now they do." *Chile*

"I have a shelter, I can afford food. I have enough money – the Old Age Security is not much but it is enough. My health isn't too bad either, so I have no worries." *urban Canada*

### Access to pensions

Older people often report having difficulties in accessing pensions. The participants in all but the developed countries find the procedures for applying difficult, requiring them to fill in forms and submit documentation. They also say that they encounter discrimination in determining eligibility.

"We are eligible for the LEAP<sup>9</sup> cash transfer yet we do not know the procedure for accessing it. We have brought this to the notice of the Department of Social Welfare so many times but nothing seems to happen." *urban Ghana*

"I want the Government to reduce the legitimate age for the social allowance from 80 to 70, or at least 75, because older people at 70 years and above already need a lot of help and support." *urban Viet Nam*

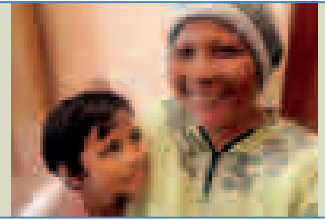
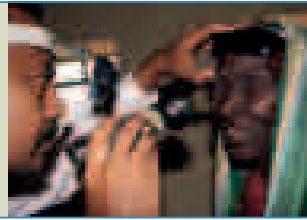
Ownership of basic assets, such as a refrigerator, may render an applicant ineligible for the benefit, irrespective of how low their income is.

"I was deemed ineligible as a result of the means test for a non-contributory pension because I have a stove, a radio, a TV and a refrigerator. But I have no food, I have no money." *Belize*

The physical effort required to claim the pension can also be taxing.

"Queuing for long hours to collect our monthly pension salary with no protection from the sun or a seat, with no priority given to older people, has been a problem for a long time." *rural Ethiopia*

"Sometimes you are required to travel to the capital city for what they claim to be verification that you are not dead. Such trips are always traumatic.... I have friends and relatives who have died while in the endless queue for their pensions." *urban Nigeria*



"Pension fund officers treat older people very rudely. Last month my sister was at the local pension fund office. As she came into the office, nobody offered her a seat. She had to stand during the meeting, while the officer was sitting!" *urban Ukraine*

### Pensions and inflation

Pensions, if available at all, are generally felt to be too low, especially with rising prices for food and other basic needs.

"Income among older people has reduced; it is difficult to find an older person with enough money to meet their needs in this community." *rural Uganda*

"The rising cost of living and lack of options for poor older people to sustain their life are becoming a serious problem.... They are unable to cope with the changes and ... many of them are forced to come out onto the street and beg." *urban Ethiopia*

"Older people in general have skills in agriculture, but there are fewer jobs available for us. So the income of older people is decreasing. Also the value of money is decreasing, so we cannot buy things which we could buy 10 years ago." *rural Nepal*

The diminishing value of the pension due to inflation is a common concern for older people in all regions, in urban as well as in rural areas.

"Many years ago, older people could have bought a car or a house or gone on long holidays with their retirement grants and pensions but now it is completely different. We can just pay for basic goods and services. I am not even talking about going to a concert or the cinema." *urban Turkey*

"When I retired my pension was high enough to meet all my needs; and now I have to think what I can permit myself." *Belarus*

"The pension is getting smaller and the costs are rising." *rural Germany*

### Access to basic services

Participants report that older people are often unable to pay for basic necessities, even if they are in receipt of a small pension, and fear that their situation will deteriorate once they are not able to work anymore.

"We go to supermarkets as if we are going to a museum; there is everything we need but we cannot afford anything." *urban Kyrgyzstan*

"We feed people here at the senior citizens club and ask them to make a contribution of \$2.00 but a lot of people don't have this." *Belize*

"Up to now we have been able to maintain our house, but when we are too old, we will not be able to work. Will our house fall apart? What is going to happen when my husband and I cannot work anymore?" *Paraguay*

"You need medicines and those are so expensive that your pension is far from covering them. After buying medicines almost nothing remains to survive on by noon. How can we speak about living till the next month?" *rural Bosnia and Herzegovina*

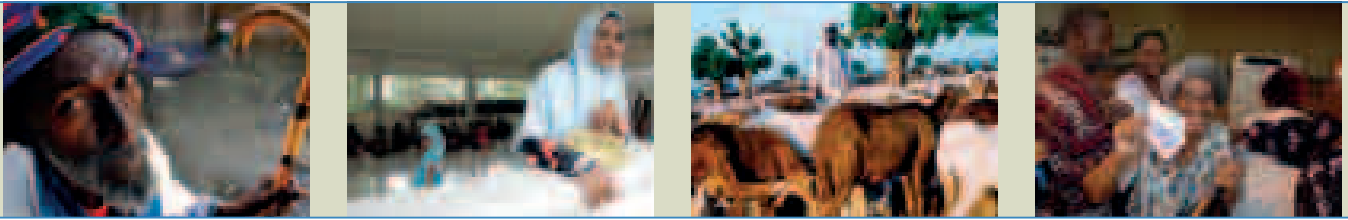
"We are on our way into poverty." *rural Austria*

Many participants say that they are poor because they were not in formal employment throughout their lives. This applies particularly to women. In Northern and Western Europe, and Canada, older women are thought to be at higher risk of poverty because they have never worked in paid employment or have worked in low-paid jobs.

"The fact that poverty in older age has increased is often focused on women. In our generation many women didn't work and they raised their children, so that now they don't get much pension." *rural Germany*

The employment situation of adult children often has a direct impact on older people's financial situation. Participants note that there are older people whose children are unemployed who use their small pensions to support their children and grandchildren or, in extreme cases, even go on the street to beg.

"There are five people at home and they all depend on my pension. None of my children works. There are older people who contribute to their families, and children and grandchildren live with the older person and depend on them." *urban Brazil*



"We really suffer because our children are so desperate. Nowadays it is quite normal to meet older people who beg to help their children and who sink into depression and even think about committing suicide." *urban Bosnia and Herzegovina*

"Our children get low salaries so we have no choice but to give them our pension." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

"Our children cannot help us financially so we have to help them with our small pensions." *rural Ukraine*

Where children have migrated in search of employment, participants mention the benefits of receiving remittances, although often they are too low.

"Besides our own income we also receive financial support from our children who work overseas." *rural Indonesia*

"All of my children live in Argentina and they send me money. I am 79 years old and do not want to work anymore. But the remittances I receive are not enough to improve my income because the Argentinean peso has fallen. So I have to eat tapioca and onions, and do not eat meat at all." *urban Paraguay*

However, having migrant children also has a negative financial impact in the form of difficulties in obtaining social benefits, in addition to the emotional strain.

"The authority says: 'Why do you need social benefits? Your children are working in Russia.'" *rural Kyrgyzstan*

"There will be nobody to bury us; there are no young people in the village." *rural Serbia*

Some participants therefore suggest that the government should ensure that there is employment for younger people so that they do not need to migrate.

"I would ask the Government for employment policies for small producers so that our children can stay in the country." *rural Paraguay*

## Health in old age

### Improving care

In all but the developed regions, where the topic of health promotion was not taken up by the participants, older people recognize governments' efforts to spread knowledge and information to promote healthy lifestyles and improve general health-care provision.

"Health officials teach us about hygiene, use of latrines, and cleanliness inside the house." *urban Mozambique*

"We have trainings from various government ministries, including how to ensure your drinking water is clean and knowing your HIV status." *urban Kenya*

"The Government has campaigned to encourage people in the community, including older people, to remain healthy by providing them with knowledge about food choices." *Thailand*

"Now there is much information on health and health care such as the 'Listen to Your Body' programme on television, and the hotline for health consultations." *urban Viet Nam*

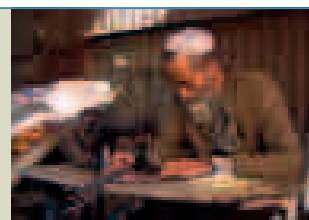
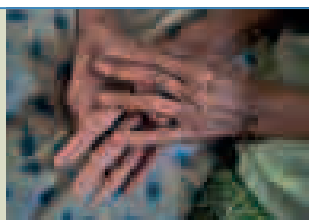
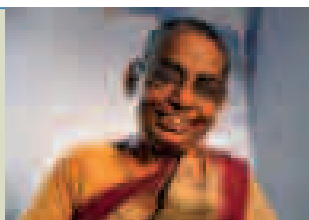
"I think it was somewhat worse in the past, now it is a bit better. You have the family health programme. The programme worker comes often and checks our blood pressure. He also told my neighbour to get a better house, because hers is dangerous." *urban Brazil*

"There are some activities to prevent disease such as organized walks. It is good for our health." *urban Peru*

The evidence from all regions suggests a general satisfaction with health-care services, although there is only very limited evidence to support this statement from Asia and the Pacific. The participants there often feel that much more needs to be done to address their health needs.

"Lots of government and private health institutions were established and constructed, improving the availability of health service in our locality even in the rural areas." *urban Ethiopia*

"Health-care practitioners are paying more attention to older people than before." *rural Ghana*



"In the past there was only one health centre in the whole district but now every community has its own health station. Older people don't have to go far to have their health checked. This is a big change. Health check-ups are provided free to the poor, including poor older people and even older people with a pension." *rural Viet Nam*

"In the area of health, now there is more support, thanks to the Government. Before, there was no attention.... Nowadays they treat us the same as other people. They treat us well. Before, it was not like that." *urban Bolivia*

"Some medical firms care for us well, others poorly; and others offer regular attention. But at least the pensioners receive medical attention. It is not excellent but we receive it." *Nicaragua*

"Health services and in general our health system have improved over the last 10 years. I feel safe and well cared for." *urban Austria*

### **The high costs of care**

Despite these improvements, many older people still report experiencing problems in accessing health care, particularly because of the high cost of services.

"Lack of adequate medicines and health professionals in government health facilities and high cost of services charged by private health institutions made the services unaffordable and inaccessible for the majority of older people." *rural Ethiopia*

"Almost all older people find health-care costs extremely expensive, and, for this reason, many of them do not go to the doctor if they are ill." *rural Moldova*

"It is written in our Constitution that everybody has the right to free medical care but in reality we have to pay if we need to have tests or even just a medical examination. Medicines are very expensive for us." *urban Ukraine*

Access to affordable medicines is the most often reported problem.

"Doctors prescribe medicines for us and we have to go out to the private pharmacies to buy the medicines which are quite expensive." *rural Kenya*

"No matter if a person is 85 years old or disabled, there is no support for them. They have to pay for medicines like any other person." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

"People have stopped going to the health centre because it's useless. The doctor gives me a prescription but I don't have the money to buy the medicine." *urban Philippines*

"OK, you go with your JADEP [Jamaica Drugs for the Elderly Programme] card to some of the pharmacies and they tell you they don't have the drug ... and a person who doesn't have this card goes ... and gets the medication ... because with the JADEP card we pay less for the drug." *Jamaica*

"The medicines are very expensive and you cannot find those which are on the list of free medicines. So you need to pay for them." *rural Serbia*

Long waiting lists are also cited as a common issue, mainly in developing countries.

"Our health situation is very bad because when you go to the hospital you will spend about seven to eight hours before you can see a doctor. This is very bad." *urban Ghana*

"Sometimes we have to wait in long queues to get health care, in the sun or in the rain." *urban Brazil*

"At the regional hospital, if you are on the waiting list, you will have to wait for three months, unless you have an acquaintance working there." *Paraguay*

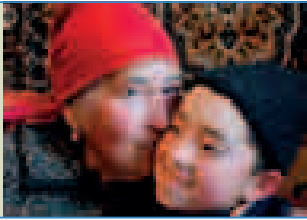
Difficulty in reaching health-care facilities, especially because of transport costs, is another issue that is often mentioned.

"Sometimes you have to make a lot of effort to get to the health centre as your legs hurt due to age. I stop eating to have enough money for the mototaxi. But then nothing remains for the prescription. And then sometimes I am even scared that I will have an accident on the way." *urban Peru*

"Here is how it is. It is 7 kilometres from the village to the nearest doctor, either on foot or by tractor, and then to the nearest pharmacy in town another 6 kilometres. How can an old man of over 70 years do that?" *rural Serbia*

In some countries, there is pessimism about the future availability of health services.

"The prices of health-care services have also been increased in the last 10 years. That is why we are not so optimistic about the health-care system in Turkey." *urban Turkey*



"They have become more economical with the level of care. To begin with, it worked out very well for us but now they are very conscious about their money." *rural Germany*

"The health card was introduced in 2002 and then in 2008 it was withdrawn for all people over a certain income. It used to be for everybody over 70 regardless of income. Now there is also a charge for prescriptions." *urban Ireland*

### **Lack of attention to age-related health issues**

A few participants highlight a lack of medicines to treat age-related diseases and of facilities to diagnose or treat them.

"Medicines are available in the health centre but for older people these are usually painkillers, antibiotics or malaria medicine. You will not find medicine for diabetes, hypertension or other age-related diseases." *urban Uganda*

"The local health centres or hospitals do not have the facilities to measure my blood sugar. They cannot even advise me what to do." *rural Bangladesh*

The attitudes of health professionals are often experienced as a barrier to receiving appropriate health care. Age discrimination, neglect and a lack of training in age-related diseases leading to weak diagnosis are the most frequently identified problems with health professionals, both in hospitals and in health centres. This is not reported in Northern and Western Europe or Canada.

"Hospitals are not very helpful to you when you are old; they treat you as if you are a burden." *rural Nigeria*

"In the government hospital there is a separate counter for older people but it is not functioning and always remains closed. Older people suffer in the long queue to get medicines.... Even though there is a system, the benefit does not accrue to the older people because of neglect." *urban India*

"My wife has many diseases; I often take her to the hospital. She has got tinnitus now. When we came to see the doctor in the hospital this doctor said, 'Your disease is the old-age disease, it is incurable.' This is irresponsible." *urban Viet Nam*

"The serious problem for me is with ambulances. I call them when I feel bad. They first ask me how old I am. If I say I am over 70 they say 'We cannot send an ambulance, you had better treat yourself'." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

"We have no medical experts who specialize in older people. Nowadays one doctor treats everybody in the same way, or does not treat us at all. You go to them already knowing that they will not help you." *urban Bosnia and Herzegovina*

However, some participants gave more positive examples.

"Recently, the doctor explained to me some things about my heart; he explained how to take the drugs. It seems to me that he knows what he is doing." *urban Peru*

Especially in Asia and the Pacific, older people report that they are generally well treated due to the culture of respect for older people.

"The staff members at health centres are very good. They know how to respect us and they do not make us wait for too long when we are sick." *peri-urban Cambodia*

### **Mental health issues**

The consultations indicate that mental health care for older people is not receiving sufficient attention, except in developed countries. Participants report an overall lack of special services for mental illnesses and even a worsening situation of care.

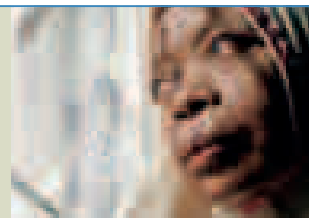
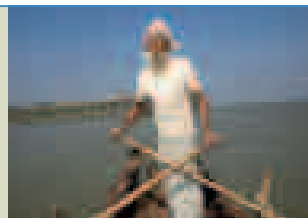
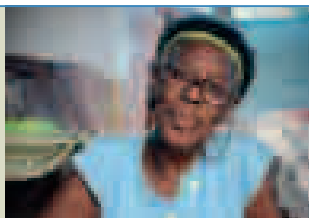
"In the case of a mental health issue we know that a person has to go to the hospital but when we go to the hospital they do not register the cases of older people." *urban Mozambique*

"There is no special treatment or care for older people with mental health issues." *rural Cambodia*

"People who are more dependent or who have more serious physical or mental health issues have more difficulties. For them there has been no improvement, because there is no social care support." *Paraguay*

In some developed countries, participants indicate that there is a change for the better in the treatment of those who have a mental illness.





"People with mental disorders are treated as human beings nowadays." *rural Germany*

"If someone in this care home has a psychological problem, he or she can talk to our psychologist." *urban Austria*

Some also recognize that, with the increasing number of older people, it will be challenging to afford appropriate care for them.

"There are people who are not treated properly and their condition gets worse. The system can't afford this because of population ageing." *urban Canada*

In some countries, older people reportedly think that mental illnesses are caused by evil spirits, so that those affected are shunned.

"We believed our old mother's illness was caused by evil spirits and we consulted local healers and prayers. But she did not recover." *rural Nigeria*

"Mental health problems carry stigma, resulting in exclusion from the community." *Fiji*

"Generally, many believe older people who have mental diseases are insane. We have no idea about the support that the state or local government gives to older people who have mental diseases and to the caregivers who are members of their family." *urban Turkey*

In some cases, health-care professionals are said to understand dementia as an unavoidable consequence of age, which cannot be treated.

"Once I discussed my dementia with the doctor at the community health clinic and she told me: 'It is very natural and normal. This is due to your old age; don't be concerned about it.' She didn't suggest anything for me." *rural Bangladesh*

In contrast, especially in Asia and the Pacific, participants asserted that consideration is shown by the community towards those older people suffering from a mental illness.

"There is no special treatment or care for people with mental health issues, but they are pitied and treated with special consideration by community members." *rural Cambodia*

## Enabling and supportive environments

### Transportation

Many participants still express dissatisfaction with the quality of public transport. Concern is voiced about the safety and accessibility of transport, both physically and financially, as well as the coverage of bus services.

"The only affordable means of transport are the motorcycle taxis, and yet they are so dangerous, with people falling and breaking their bones all the time." *urban Nigeria*

"Public transport, such as buses, does not provide access for disabled older people. The bus services are also not available in the interior parts of the country, but they are the only economical means to travel to hospitals." *rural Fiji*

"Public transport doesn't reach all parts of the community; it's hard for older people to get into the city." *rural Austria*

In those countries where the cost of transport is high, older people are said not to benefit from positive changes:

"There is improvement in the transportation sector but, for older people, the problem remains unsolved due to the type and structure of the transport available and the cost of fares." *urban Tanzania*

Older people often report that they are ignored when standing at bus stops and left behind when the bus leaves. The participants note that this is worse when the older person is frail.

"The drivers see us to be wasting their time in boarding the bus and this situation sometimes compels them to leave us behind." *urban Ghana*

In Ukraine and Brazil, another reported reason that older people are ignored is their exemption from paying for the ticket. Bus companies know they would not lose money by leaving the older people behind.

"The buses go more regularly, but the drivers swear when there are too many pensioners in a bus because they may travel for free." *rural Ukraine*



"There is no respect in public transportation either. When we are alone at the bus stop the buses do not stop, they go to the outer lane. They pretend they don't see us. Particularly if you are holding the free pass." *urban Brazil*

Nonetheless, where public transport is free, as, for example, in Brazil and Mozambique, this is often mentioned as a great improvement.

"I think there has been an improvement, particularly in transport here in São Paulo. I almost never went out of the house before, but now I take five, six or seven buses. This is because we have the free bus pass for older people." *urban Brazil*

However, access to free transport is not always easy. In Mozambique, for example, access to free transport depends on production of an identity card, which is costly to obtain.

"We have identity cards now because an NGO assisted us, but it is difficult to have this card without money." *rural Mozambique*

### **Attitudes of young people**

Many participants wish that they were shown more respect. They acknowledge the importance of having good relations with their children and grandchildren. They express dissatisfaction with the level of respect given to them by the younger generation.<sup>10</sup> According to some participants, older and younger people live in different worlds. Although they feel that respect shown to older people has declined since their young days, it is difficult for them to say if, in the past, the respect was based mainly on fear.

"The respect and care of the young generation towards older people is not at a satisfactory level." *urban Sri Lanka*

"I do not know if people were more respectful in the past, or more fearful. For example, I was afraid of my mother, it was a combination of fear and respect." *Paraguay*

"I feel that my grandchildren value me now as they are young, but when they become grown-ups nobody knows what will happen then. Sometimes my daughter tells me, 'Mama, don't interfere, this is my life, and I can cope with my problems by myself'." *urban Ukraine*

In Eastern and Southern Europe, older people report that usually their contributions are recognized but that the younger generation shows little appreciation or respect.

"Most of the time older people feel recognized for the support we give as volunteers. But it's true that often the younger generation does not respect the work and contribution of older people." *urban Moldova*

In other developed countries, such as Austria, older people experience a lack of interest in their contributions, particularly among young people.

"People of our community, especially the younger ones, are not interested in our possible contributions, such as our knowledge and lifetime experiences." *urban Austria*

However, there is a feeling that the value of their voluntary work is being increasingly recognized.

"Volunteering is receiving more and more recognition in society." *urban Germany*

### **Experiences of social exclusion and discrimination**

In general, participants attach great importance to being respected by society, family and outsiders alike.

"Our right is to be respected by youth and the community in general." *urban Tanzania*

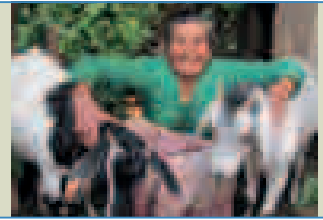
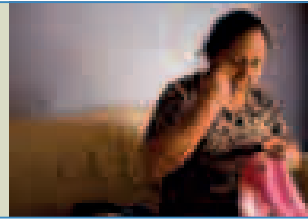
"I take most pleasure from conveying my knowledge to the young ones. They consider me as equal to them in that process. My age is irrelevant to them." *urban Serbia*

For many, the reality is different, however.

"How can we say we are respected when we are called witches?" *rural Mozambique*

"As you grow older, you have to come to terms with your role as a lesser citizen who can be seen, but not heard." *rural Nigeria*

"Older people are treated as if they are derelicts." *Jamaica*



In various aspects of daily life, older men and women report being disrespected, especially by younger people, and treated in unpleasant ways.

"Older people are not valued and supported. For instance, when famine relief maize was brought to our community, older people were listed but were told to wait until the rest got their share and in the end nothing was left for us." *urban Tanzania*

"Not even children respect older parents. They don't give them enough food, even though we help them in the household. The children eat better food outside but don't have enough for their own parents." *rural Philippines*

"Now, as we are old, nobody notices us. We have no privileges; we are not shown any respect. It's the same in shops, at doctors, at the post office. We are worthless to them." *rural Bosnia and Herzegovina*

"I have experienced young teenagers shouting horrible things at me." *rural Austria*

Older people often realize the decline in respect when using public transport, as that is when they are most likely to come into contact with younger people.

"We are pushed and shoved on boarding the bus and the youth do not spare us a seat." *rural Mozambique*

"Before students would be very courteous, now I see more and more older people having to ask for a seat on the bus or the driver would have to ask for them." *urban Canada*

"I cannot remember someone giving up his or her seat in the bus to an older person." *urban Germany*

### **Still some respect**

Exceptions are also reported, however, especially in developed countries.

"I feel respected, yes. Every month when I go to the capital to get my medicine I use public transport and I am always offered a seat. There is no single case when I haven't been offered a seat." *rural Moldova*

"I'm always puzzled when someone helps an older person on public transport. That's really an exception." *urban Germany*

"Younger people treat me with a lot of respect; they open the door for me and offer me a seat on the bus." *rural Austria*

In Asia and the Pacific, and in Latin America and the Caribbean, there are also more reports of older people being generally satisfied with the level of respect shown to them by younger people.

"Respect for older people is still very high in Indonesia." *urban Indonesia*

"People of all ages in society respect and honour older people." *Thailand*

"There is not so much violence in our community. People know how to respect older people, so they would not dare to hit us." *rural Cambodia*

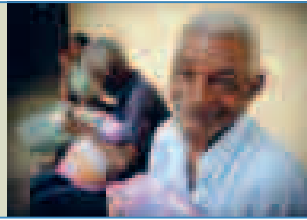
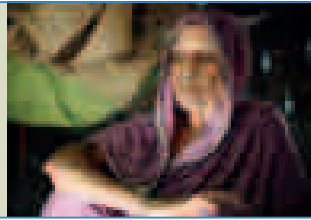
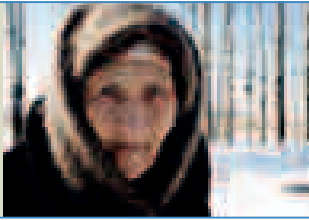
"Over the past 10 years in general there has been a shift in the way people see older people.... Before, they did not exist. Now people are looking at us. There is more room for older people, they have more visibility; they are included." *urban Brazil*

### **Abuse and neglect at home**

Elder abuse is reported fairly widely. It can take the form of verbal abuse, appropriation of property and assets, violence, neglect and demeaning treatment in daily life. Even in Asia and the Pacific, where participants generally felt respected, they are of the opinion that neglect of older people is on the increase.

"Neglecting older people is on the increase now and older people are isolated from their children in old age homes." *urban India*

"I and my husband want to live in the Centre for the Elderly because we cannot stand our son anymore. I have suffered a lot from his psychological violence. We cannot do what he wants. When I could not stand it anymore, I reported this to the police, but they said they would only intervene when my son beats me." *urban Viet Nam*



"Physical abuse by caregivers takes place in older people's homes. There is also emotional abuse." *Jamaica*

"Our family is careless; they don't care for us; they don't see that our documents are updated." *urban Bolivia*

"I think elder abuse occurs usually in the home where the parents disagree with the children and tension builds up. I would never live with my children." *urban Canada*

### Property grabbing

In Africa and some other regions, participants report particular concern about land and property grabbing by younger family members – sometimes even involving killing.

"Abuse of older people by families, mainly adult children, by misappropriating their property, including land, livestock and farm produce, is a serious problem." *rural Ethiopia*

"Older people's land is grabbed and at times they are killed in order to take over their property." *rural Uganda*

"My own children fought with me over the ownership of the land. They told me, 'This is Daddy's land, it was bought with money Daddy had earned'." *rural Philippines*

"Families take advantage of older people when it comes to inheritance. They force them to sign over their property documents to them.... It's so sad." *Belize*

"I know a family where the daughter abuses her old mother, takes her money, and doesn't want to care for her, telling her 'I hope you die soon'." *rural Ukraine*

### Older women's vulnerability

Participants referred to instances of serious maltreatment and crimes against older women, including rape. In some areas, these are often related to witchcraft accusations.

"The youth take drugs and then rob older persons' households and some cases of rape have been reported." *urban Uganda*

"We are called witches due to our old age. We suffer a lot because we do not have anyone to support us, even when we are sick. When we used to work everything was fine but now our children do not give us food and instead call us witches." *rural Mozambique*

"Particularly older mothers and mothers-in-law are in a terrible situation.... They are getting less food compared to other family members, experience physical torture and never get medicines or medical care when they are sick." *rural Bangladesh*

"Our neighbour had bad children who did not take care of her so she died. We had helped her with food, when she was locked up and hungry. My son brought her bread but her children quarrelled with him." *rural Kyrgyzstan*

At the same time, however, some participants note improvements in personal security, especially for older women. The evidence for this is particularly strong from Tanzania, where NGOs have implemented specific programmes in response to issues related to witchcraft beliefs.

"For the last 10 years, the village government, local militia and the community police have been strengthened to make sure that older women live in peace and harmony." *rural Tanzania*

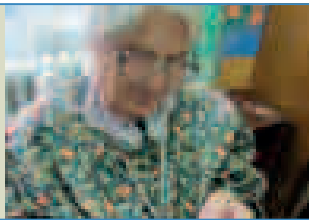
"In our community things have changed. In the past, some older women were abused, for example, they were isolated, sent threatening letters and sometimes even killed. But now, they are protected, respected and able to obtain their rights. This is possible because of a rights awareness programme." *rural Tanzania*

### Barriers to tackling abuse

Feelings of shame are often seen as a barrier to tackling elder abuse. In Asia and the Pacific, some participants say that elder abuse remains largely unreported to safeguard the family's status.

"The issue of abuse does not go outside of the family for the sake of family prestige and out of fear." *rural Nepal*

"Older people suffer abuse in silence." *rural Fiji*



Another barrier to tackling abuse – the fear of being abused repeatedly until justice is done – is also reported. An older woman from Moldova points out:

*"The problem is that if you are abused and you speak out, until the police come, you are in even greater danger.... They also know that justice is so slow that they can be abused many times in the meantime." rural Moldova*

The consultations show that older people are victims of crime and many avoid going out because they are afraid of being attacked. The most common experience is robbery, mainly when walking in the street.

*"There is still a problem of safety because many older people are attacked when leaving the bank. They know the person is old and goes to the bank to get money." urban Brazil*

*"We can't walk freely in the streets because of crimes." Belize*

*"Nearly every day the papers report some theft of objects of value from older people. It is really scandalous that older people become victims of theft or violence only because of their frailty." urban Germany*

*"When I'm walking home from church, I don't feel safe." urban Canada*

Participants also report that older people are discriminated against or taken advantage of as consumers, as two examples from Bosnia and Herzegovina show.

*"After 65 you cannot get travel insurance. If in an exceptional case you get it, you pay double." rural Bosnia and Herzegovina*

*"As consumers we are often abused. As we do not have much money we look for discounts. We often get attracted by big displays of items with discounts, but the details are in such small print that we cannot read them and in the end we pay a lot." urban Bosnia and Herzegovina*

### **Media images of older people**

Many participants feel that the media does not often reflect an appropriate image of older people. Old age and older people are more often than not portrayed in a bad light.

*"What you hear about often in the press are the deaths of older people sleeping rough or queuing for long hours." urban Nigeria*

*"I have never experienced situations of elder abuse or neglect nor heard abuse from people around me. We only see this kind of story in the media, especially through television and newspapers." Thailand*

*"Older people are shown in advertisements but in the media the older individual is still a poor thing, a discriminated poor thing." urban Brazil*

*"Television shows older people only when an older woman is assaulted, when an indigenous older person is sick or when there is some other problem." urban Paraguay*

*"The mass media ignores older people's problems." rural Ukraine*

*"In general, images of ageing are not so good, everyone thinks that older people are stupid or have dementia – but not all of us are suffering from this." urban Austria*

There are, however, some indications that positive images are becoming more common.

*"Today there are also positive images. And I think the positive images are prevailing." urban Brazil*

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## Recommendations and key lessons

The experiences shared by the participants led to a number of recommendations on how to improve older persons' well-being in their communities. The following recommendations are based on the core findings from the consultations.

- Establish and support organizations of older persons, and enable older persons to participate fully in decision-making and claim their entitlements
- Promote a better understanding of older persons' contributions and encourage older persons to participate in cultural, economic, political and social life, including lifelong learning
- Mainstream ageing and older persons into all relevant policy areas, including those related to infrastructural development
- Eliminate age discrimination in access to employment and credit
- Provide training opportunities for people as they age
- Protect older people's right to basic services, including pensions, and ensure that systems to access these are age-friendly
- Ensure that older women's vulnerability to income insecurity is considered within social protection policies
- Recognize the impact of labour migration of adult children on older parents and create economic and social conditions that lessen the need to migrate in search of work
- Provide access to adequate and affordable quality health and social care, including to medication, preventative measures and mental health care
- Promote education and training programmes for health-care professionals, including gerontology and geriatrics
- Train bus drivers to address older persons' specific needs and ensure that an efficient and transparent system for the provision of free transportation is in place
- Encourage a more realistic portrayal of older persons in the media that emphasizes older persons' contributions
- Prohibit age discrimination, neglect and elder abuse through legislation and put in place efficient reporting mechanisms and awareness-raising campaigns
- Address older women's vulnerability to discrimination, neglect and abuse within existing and new legislation for women
- Mainstream gender into legislation for older persons



Recommendations arising from the consultations with older people include promoting a better understanding of older people's contribution.

Wang Jing/HelpAge International

Based on these recommendations, a few key points should be taken into consideration in future decision-making at all levels.

- **Older persons' participation in decision-making:**

The consultations demonstrate the tangible results of older people's involvement in local decision-making through their organizations. Furthermore, the concerns raised by the participants show how their contributions to policy design and implementation could lead to more effective policies. Short-sighted policies could be avoided by involving older persons in decision-making processes. Examples from the consultations include: providing free health consultations but only limited access to the required medication; and the construction of homes for poor older people that are far away from their families and communities.

- **An age-inclusive approach to stakeholders:**

While the primary focus of the consultations was on action at government level, the participants recognize that all stakeholders need to become more active in addressing population ageing and age-related issues. Many of the recommendations can be taken forward and implemented by stakeholders at all administrative levels. The lack of knowledge and awareness of older people's issues among various stakeholders, including the participants' families, was highlighted in relation to issues ranging from basic service provision to the portrayal of older people in the media. For example, many older people report experiencing problems in accessing their entitlements because health-care professionals prioritize younger patients under the misconception that the older people cannot be helped any more.

- **Mainstreaming ageing and older persons:**

The consultations show that older people are aware of the impact of past living conditions, including socioeconomic and health status, on their current well-being. They also acknowledge that they benefit from general development activities, for example, the building of a road, the provision of employment opportunities for younger persons or free education for children. Improved roads provide older people with opportunities to trade their products and easier access to basic services and access to hospitals in emergencies. Free education for their children and grandchildren alleviates older people's worry about being able to afford the costs of education. It also has longer-term benefits when these children and grandchildren are able to get better jobs and cease to be dependent on grandparents' support.

The range of opinions and views of these 1,300 older people provides an overview of their experiences, priorities and what they think works and what does not. This project is the first comprehensive assessment of older people's experiences using qualitative and quantitative methods. Such assessments should be at the heart of the review and appraisal process of the Madrid Plan at every level. Only older people themselves can know what really helps them.