**GLOBAL ANALYSIS**

**Inequality between countries is increasing:** The gap in life expectancy between countries at the top and bottom of the Index has widened by 1.6 years between 1990 and 2012.  This inequality will grow without more focus on this age group and better targeted policies.   Austerity measures in Europe are affecting the wellbeing of older women and men now.

The rise in inequality is reflected in the comparison of the average life expectancy in the 10 countries ranked at the top with the 10 countries ranked at the bottom between 1990 and 2012. It shows that on average in 1990, older people in the bottom 10 countries lived 5.7 years less than older people in the top 10 countries. By 2012, the gap increased to 7.3 years.[[1]](#endnote-1) Average life expectancy at 60 across all Index countries is 21 years. People aged 60 in Japan have the highest life expectancy and live on average an additional 26 years, while people aged 60 in Afghanistan, live on average an additional 16 years.[[2]](#endnote-2)

Inequality in the educational attainment of older people increased by 50 per cent between 1990 and 2010 between the top 10 and bottom 10 countries.[[3]](#endnote-3) Although all regions have made progress on socio-economic indicators, low and lower-income countries are falling behind. The inequality between them and the top 10 countries grew during the economic growth of the 90s and as well as during the market crash of 2008.

Poverty rates among older people also vary dramatically. The Republic of Korea currently has the highest poverty rate among older people at 48.5 per cent, followed by Venezuela, at 38 per cent, Australia, at 33.4 per cent, Bolivia, at 30.3 per cent and Honduras, at 28.9 per cent, despite significant variations in Gross National Income per capita. At the other end of the spectrum countries with low old age poverty rates are equally varied. The poverty rate among older people in South Africa is 12.17 per cent, Mauritius, 6.4 per cent, India, 5.1 per cent, Lao PDR, 4.5 per cent, Czech Republic, 1.7 per cent and the lowest, Iceland at 1.6 per cent.

**Women more at risk of poverty in old age:** The combination of a lifetime of gender discrimination, combined with inequality in old age can have a devastating effect on older women. Globally, 46.8 per cent of women aged 55 to 64 are economically active, compared with 73.5 per cent of men[[4]](#endnote-4). However, women usually earn less than men, so opportunities to save for later life are limited, increasing their risk of poverty in old age.

Discriminatory laws and social norms towards widows can also seriously disadvantage women’s access to resources, especially in low-income countries.

“My dream is to study social work,” says Justina Vanguera, 68, from Buonaventura, Colombia[[5]](#endnote-5). “I left school after my fifth year at primary school but I’ve done all sorts of courses since, dance, sewing first aid. I love to learn! Once my children grew up, I studied for my baccalaureate and graduated when I was 58. I don’t feel age is a problem. It’s the situation in the country. There’s no support for older people. I don’t have a pension. I earn a living by making and mending clothes. I have to keep working. I do not think that age is an impediment. What holds me back is lack of money.”

**Austerity measures hitting older people:** The 2008 financial crisis led to cuts in pensions, health and home care as well as high unemployment rates among the 50 to 65 age group. In 2009, Poland (32) reduced the number of people eligible for early retirement from 1.53 million to 860,000 but pension levels are set to decline from 51 per cent of average wages to 26 per cent[[6]](#endnote-6).

In 2012, Portugal (38) reduced the subsidy to senior citizens for public transport; within six months 41,000 older people in the greater Lisbon area had stopped buying the monthly travel pass.[[7]](#endnote-7)

In 2015, Ireland (15) protected the state pension. However, rising costs coupled with reductions in secondary income supports such as telephone and fuel allowances and the introduction of a number of ‘stealth’ charges for property, tax and water, have hit older people hard. Cuts to health budgets have disproportionately affected older people.[[8]](#endnote-8)

In the USA (11), the old age poverty rate, which varies significantly between racial and ethnic groups[[9]](#endnote-9), has risen substantially, probably reflecting the persistently high unemployment rates following the recession. While annual unemployment rates among workers aged 55 to 64 decreased to 4.3 per cent in 2014, long-term unemployment remains a concern among older job seekers.

**Data on millions of older people still missing:** Data on millions of older people is missing. Comparative international data on basic indicators is only available for 96 countries.  The Sustainable Development Goals offer a unique opportunity to build a better future for people of all ages, but unless data is disaggregated by age and sex and monitored for all countries older people will be marginalised.

With only 96 countries included in the Index, because of a lack of internationally comparable data, the implications of ageing are difficult to predict at national, regional or international levels, resulting in weak policy and poor implementation.

Violence against older women remains largely invisible. In many countries, data systems recording sexual and physical violence against women stop at 49, perpetuating the long discredited notion that only women of reproductive age experience sexual violence.

Women over the age of 50 account for 23.6 per cent of the world’s female population; currently they are largely missing from the evidence required for effective policy making.

One of the Post-2015 Sustainable Development health targets aims to reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable diseases through prevention and treatment, and promote mental health and wellbeing by 2030. However, this will focus only on people between the ages of 30 and 70 years old, leaving those older out in the cold and missing from the data.

Analysing local data collected by older people’s organisations across the world can enrich the picture and be used for service improvement and policy change, but should also be available for global data sets. Tanzania (91) provides a positive example. Health data collected by older people’s organisations was shared with health providers, influencing local planning and budgeting (2012-2014) and resulted in better-tailored services for older people. As a result of surveys into older people’s needs, budgets went up, services designed for older people were implemented, and access to anti-retroviral drugs increased.[[10]](#endnote-10)

**Investing in people reaps results in old age:** Evidence from the Global AgeWatch Index shows that governments that have invested in population ageing and are planning for the future are at the top of the Index.  These countries score highly on all four domains, they are thinking about ageing, carrying out research, resourcing and implementing policies which support wellbeing i.e. social pensions, accessible health care, flexible working and life-long learning and creating  an enabling environment for all ages.

This approach, more common in high income countries is also apparent in some middle-ranking countries such as Chile (21), Argentina (31) and Mauritius (42). In the Czech Republic, Latvia and Estonia, governments have invested in skills, training and education for older people in order to encourage greater workforce participation[[11]](#endnote-11).

“I wasn’t allowed to go to school but now I can read and write,” says Mama u Mtalane[[12]](#endnote-12), 93, from Umgababa, Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa. “My life before democracy was harsh. It was a life with no rights but now I can go to the doctor, I have a roof over my head, clean water, electricity, an income and a voice. One of my most joyous moments is when I receive my pension. To the young women of today, I say, ‘You must be independent and work hard for your families, lead a healthy life so that you live longer like me.’”

**What does the future look like?** By the time the Sustainable Development Goals reach their fruition in 2030, the proportion of people aged 60 and over, globally, is predicted to rise to 16.5 per cent.

Today there are 901 million women and men aged 60 and over worldwide. This figure will reach 1.4 billion by 2030, or 16.5 per cent of the global population - up to three-quarters of whom will live in developing countries. Over 23 per cent of the world’s women are already over 50 years old.

1. Calculated average based on WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository, Life expectancy at age 60 both sexes, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/view.main.700?lang=en> (10 June 2015); data for West Bank and Gaza is taken from Profiles of Ageing 2013, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/popdev/AgingProfiles2013/default.aspx> (23 July 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. WHO Global Health Observatory Data Repository, Global Burden of Disease, Life expectancy at age 60, <http://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.688?lang=en> (23 July 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Bottom 10 countries exclude West Bank and Gaza. Calculation based on Barro and Lee Educational attainment (total secondary and tertiary) of people age 60 and over both sexes, version 2.0, http://www.barrolee.com/ (21 May 2015). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Calculated average based on ILO Key Indicators of the Labour Market, Labour force participation rate, 2013, http://www.ilo.org (8 June 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. HelpAge International interview 2015. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. World Bank Group, *What’s next in aging Europe: Aging: Aging with growth in central Europe and the Baltics*, Conference Edition 3, 2015, pp27-29 <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Publications/ECA/aging%20europe.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <http://economico.sapo.pt/noticias/mais-de-41-mil-idosos-deixaram-de-comprar-passe-da-carris_149755.html> (27 July 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Fahey T et al, A social profile of older people in Ireland, Dublin, Office for Social Inclusion, 2007, <http://www.socialinclusion.ie/documents/Older_lowres2.pdf> (27 July 2015); Age Action welcomes funding to help older patients trapped in hospitals, 3 April 2015, <http://www.ageaction.ie/age-action-welcomes-funding-help-older-patients-trapped-hospitals> (27 July 2015) [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Wu K, *Income and Poverty of Older Americans,* 2011, AARP Factsheet, AARP Public Policy Institute, Washington, September 2013. <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/research/public_policy_institute/econ_sec/2013/income-and-poverty-of-older-americans-AARP-ppi-econ-sec.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. *Using data to improve lives of older people: Data collected by older citizen monitoring groups in Tanzania*, HelpAge paper, 2014, unpublished [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. World Bank Group, *What’s next in aging Europe: Aging, Aging with growth in central Europe and the Baltics*. World Bank Group. Conference Edition 3, p.vii, <http://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/Publications/ECA/aging%20europe.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. HelpAge International interview 2015.

    **REGIONAL ANALYSIS**

    **Africa**

    Despite experiencing a period of rapid economic growth, Africa is the poorest region in the Index with above average levels of old age poverty ranging from 6.40 per cent in Mauritius to 22.9 per cent in Ghana.

    We could only include 11 countries from the region due to a lack of available international data sets, making it difficult to paint a picture of the wellbeing of older people. Not enough is known about older people in the continent and as a result, it’s possible they are being excluded from social and economic policies.

    Of the 11 African countries in the Index, all but Mauritius (42) are in the lowest quarter.

    * Mauritius is the only country in the region with an ageing population - 14.7 per cent of people are aged 60-plus, expected to rise to 23.3 per cent by 2030.
    * It leads the way with a social pension and social insurance scheme established in the 1950s, putting it in the top ten in income security.

    South Africa has a human rights protocol for older people; national ageing policy and a social grant planned to turn into a universal pension by 2016, but suffers from chronic poverty and a high prevalence of HIV, increasing the burden on older people to care for orphans.

    * Its pension coverage (92.6 per cent) is more than three times the regional average and higher than the US and Luxembourg.

    Malawi (95) is the lowest ranked country in the region and has few dedicated programmes for older people, with many social policies not having been put in place despite the government committing to it in 2011. It ranks last in income security and has over 95 per cent of older people working.

    Negative attitudes towards older people are still prevalent in many countries.

    Women face particular discrimination that prevents them from being as independent and economically active as they might otherwise be. Very few have pensions and older women are often particularly poor because of discriminatory laws against them.. In Mozambique for example, women do not feel safe due to witchcraft accusations, financial pressure, and physical and sexual abuse.

    **Asia-Pacific and West Bank and Gaza**

    The Asia Pacific region is the largest by far, making up 52 per cent of the world’s older population. China and India alone make up nearly 36 per cent.

    We can look at Japan as something of an anomaly, the only country in the region that’s in the Index’s top 20.

    * It’s is the only hyper ageing country in the world –33.1 per cent of people are aged 60-plus, 42.5 per cent by 2050.

    It is wealthier than its neighbours and its high Index ranking, as well as being number 1 in health status, reflects its progressive social policies. It cares well for its people throughout old age, despite having a life expectancy at age 60 of 26 more years, the highest in the world, by prioritising health and education a long time ago:

    * It introduced universal health insurance and social pensions in 1961 to stimulate economic growth and redistribute wealth and has one of the highest percentages of older people working in the OECD.

    China has a 15.2 per cent share of older people, predicted to increase to 25.3 per cent by 2030. It’s responding proactively to the challenge and has introduced a range of policies focused on its ageing population.

    * It introduced a rural social pension scheme in 2009 that enabled 89 million people to receive pensions for the first time.
    * As a result, 125 million people now receive a monthly pension.
    * In 2013 a national law was amended to protect the rights of older people, requiring local governments to provide social security, medical and long-term care to their older citizens.
    * It established a National Committee on Ageing to facilitate a growing policy focus on the rights of older people. Pension coverage has gone up to 75 per cent and health insurance coverage to nearly 90 per cent..

    India (71) has 116.6 million people age 60-plus, but effective services are scarce in rural areas where 70 per cent of people live.

    * Many older Indians need greater income security. Currently, just 28.9 per cent of older people have a pension. About two thirds of pensioners receive the general social pension for those who are over 60 and living below the poverty line, with higher benefits for those over 80.
    * The 2007 State of Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act offers up to 10,000 rupees ($160) a month to older people.
    * However, a survey by HelpAge India showed that everyone asked was unaware of the 2007 Act, a potentially effective tool against vulnerability and destitution while only 58 per cent of respondents were aware of pension eligibility .
    * Nepal’s universal social pension is a model for low-income countries and has been used to reduce poverty. Its Senior Citizen’s Act of 2006 was updated in 2013 and it has adopted treatment guidelines for delivering healthcare to older people.
    * Nepal (70) with a lower GNI per capita than Lao PDR (83), ranks higher due to government investment despite both being poor countries with rapidly ageing, largely rural populations.
    * The three countries from the region in the bottom 10, Afghanistan (96), West Bank and Gaza (93) and Pakistan (92) are in states of conflict, affecting nearly every indicator measured by the Index.

    **Latin America and the Caribbean**

    It’s one of the fastest ageing regions in the world and on the frontline of ageing policies. Last year we reported on the increasing numbers of older people receiving a pension in the region. This year the Organization of American States adopted its first convention on the rights of older people.

    The 18 Latin American and Caribbean countries in the Index represent 7.3 per cent of the world’s older population.

    * Uruguay has the oldest population, 19.1 per cent of people aged 60-plus.
    * By 2030, 13 of the 18 countries in the region will have an ageing population.

    There are above average levels of old age poverty throughout the region. 20.1 per cent of older people are living in poverty compared to a 13.2 per cent average worldwide. In Venezuela, that number reaches 38 per cent, the second highest in the Index.

    Panama (20) is the highest ranked country, largely due the effectiveness of government policies on ageing.

    * It has an employment rate of 98.3 per cent for people aged 55 to 64, good healthcare, moderate pension coverage and an old age poverty rate of 17.7 per cent, low for the region. Legislation to protect older peoples’ rights is currently awaiting approval in congress.
    * Honduras (82) is bottom of the region, with age-related discounts and social pensions only available for those receiving contributory pensions. This highlights the importance of social pensions that enable older people to enjoy dignity and independence in later life.

    Brazil (56) has two non-contributory pension schemes: the Previdência Rural providing a basic universal rural pension to all older people who have worked in the agricultural sector and the Benefício de Prestação Continuada, a means-tested scheme operating in urban areas.

    * It has 86 per cent pension coverage, one of the highest in the region.

    Argentina (31) has health policies and programmes in place to support its 15.1 per cent share of older people, including access to free medicine for chronic diseases, coverage in nursing homes and preventative social programmes.

    * It scores very highly in the income security (20), ahead of wealthier countries such as Switzerland (27), Japan (33) and the United States (29).

    Bolivia has a universal non-contributory pension, the *Renta Dignidad*, giving it the highest pension coverage rate in the region at 95 per cent, but an old-age poverty rate of 30.3 per cent suggests that salaries and pensions are failing to meet basic needs.

    **Western Europe, North America and Australasia**

    This is the wealthiest and best performing region in the Index. Of the 24 Index countries in the region, 20 are in the top 25.

    Switzerland tops the Index, with Norway second and Sweden third. At the bottom, Greece (79) has dropped eight places possibly due to austerity measures.

    Italy (37) and Germany (4) are ageing the most rapidly, rising from around 28 per cent in 2015 to around 36 per cent in 2030.

    Despite the significant wealth of the region there are surprising cases of high old age poverty rates.

    * 3 highest: Australia (17) at 33.4 per cent, Israel (18) is at 20.6 per cent and the USA (9) is at 18.8 per cent
    * These countries have average pension coverage despite their relative wealth.

    There is a notable disparity between northern and southern Europe. Nordic countries have had social pensions for some time; in the case of Iceland and Denmark they were introduced more than 100 years ago, as well as offering flexible employment opportunities, lifelong learning and effective health care.

    Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy were hit hard by austerity measures affecting pensions, widespread cuts to health and home care and high unemployment rates among the 50-65 age group.

    * Portugal, ranking third lowest in for enabling environment, reduced the subsidy to senior citizens for public transport in 2012; within six months 41,000 older people in the greater Lisbon area had stopped buying the monthly travel pass.
    * In response to the financial crisis France, Italy, Sweden and other countries undertook a pension reform to address benefits adequacy, financial and fiscal sustainability, retirement age and administrative efficiency.

    It’s not only poorer countries that have been hit hard by austerity.

    * In the USA, the old age poverty rate, varying significantly between racial and ethnic groups, has risen substantially, probably reflecting the persistently high unemployment following the recession. While annual unemployment rates among workers ages 55 to 64 decreased to 4.3 per cent in 2014, long-term unemployment remains a concern among older job seekers.

    **Eastern Europe**

    By 2030, all 20 Index countries in the region are predicted to have more than 20 per cent of their population aged 60 plus. By 2050, 17 countries will be hyper-aging countries, with more than 30 per cent of the population aged 60 plus.

    * Bulgaria has the highest share of older people in the region at 26.9 per cent. Armenia has the smallest, with 16.3 per cent.

    Out of the 20 countries, almost half rank in the bottom third of the Index, reflecting the lack of social and economic policies addressing the needs of older people.

    Moldova (77) is ranked lowest in the region due partly to its poor healthcare (90). It ranks behind some poorer, lower ranked African countries, such as Rwanda and Tanzania in healthcare.

    * Approximately 71 per cent of older people in Moldova suffer from chronic diseases.
    * More than a quarter of old people in the country don’t receive a pension.

    The region has been hit hard austerity. In 2009, Poland reduced the number of people eligible for early retirement from 1.53 million to 860,000, but pension levels are set to be cut by almost a half.

    In the Czech Republic, Latvia and Estonia, governments have responded to their ageing populations by investing in skills, training and education for older people in order to encourage greater workforce participation.

    * Results are evident in their performance in the capability domain focusing on work and education: Czech Republic (17), Latvia (15) and Estonia (6), scoring higher than many Western European countries.
    * These 3 countries have old age employment rates above 50 per cent.

    Russia (65) and Poland (32) have similar per capita GNIs but Poland ranks significantly higher in the health and enabling environment domains due to greater investment in healthcare and pensions.

    * The average value of a contributory pension (known as a “labour” pension) is 36 per cent of the average wage but the cost of living is very high particularly for food, fees for medicine or hospital care.

    **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

    *Ageing population – 14-30 per cent of the population are aged 60 and above.*

    *Hyper-ageing population – 30 per cent plus of the population are aged 60 and over.*

    *Educational attainment – the percentage of adults aged 60 and over who have some degree of secondary or higher education.*

    *GNI – Gross National Income – the income accrued to residents of a country, taking into account money sent from abroad such as remittances and aid and excluding money generated in the country but sent abroad.*

    *Social pension – pensions financed through taxes rather than individual contributions.*

    *Economically active – people seeking work and people working.*  [↑](#endnote-ref-12)