Commentary on Sri Lanka's domain ranks in the 2015 Global AgeWatch Index

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Global AgeWatch Index rank

46
out of 96

Sri Lanka ranks moderately on the Index at 46 overall. It performs best in the enabling environment domain (25) due to above regional averages for social connectedness (79%), safety (71%) and civic freedom (81%).

It ranks moderately in the capability domain (36), with employment rate (50.3%) lower than the regional average (55.1%). It ranks moderately in the health domain (54), with life expectancy at 60 (20) and healthy life expectancy at 60 (16.2) above the regional averages, 19.3 and 14.8 respectively.

It ranks lowest in the income security domain (78), with low pension income coverage (17.1%), a low poverty rate (11.3%) and low GNI per capita compared to regional averages.

This year Age Demands Action campaigners in Sri Lanka will rally to call for separate hospital wards for older people.

Income security

78
36.2/100

According to international data, pension income coverage in Sri Lanka is lower than 20%. A few state banks have started their own pension schemes depending on the deposits that a person maintains with the bank. The average income per household is 46,207 Rupees (US$ 355) per month in 2012. In 2009/10, it was 36,451 (US$ 280) showing an increase of 26.8%. However, the real increase after making adjustments for inflation is only 5.5%.

HelpAge Sri Lanka and older campaigners have been continuously advocating for increasing older people's income by providing them a monthly allowance at least for people aged 70 or older. This has been successful, as there are now around 254,000 older people over 70 who receive a monthly allowance of 1000 Rupees (US$ 7.68).

Health status

54
50.0/100

According to international data, both life expectancy at 60 and healthy life expectancy at 60 is above the regional averages. According to national data women can expect to live a few years longer than men.

The public health system is free of charge for everybody in Sri Lanka. Government hospitals and dispensaries are established in every district and all main towns. People living in rural areas still face difficulties in accessing these services due to lack of and cost of transport. There are numerous private medical institutions in all main towns, but people living in poverty cannot access these because of the high prices.

Health systems for older people are improving as the Ministry of Health has realised that proper measures must be taken to provide for the increasing population of older people. The ministry has issued instructions for all registered medical institutions (public and private) to have disability and age friendly environments. These medical institutions have the capacity for treating most communicable and non-communicable diseases. Medicine is provided free of charge.

Challenges exist for vulnerable older people who have no one to assist them to access these services, especially in rural areas. Despite positive developments in the health sector, health facilities have not been sufficiently set up in the rural areas of the country.

Capability

36
40.1/100

Most older people work in the informal sector. Most commonly they work in the fields of agriculture, fishing, trading, and sewing. In the informal sector, older people tend to work as long as they can to secure their livelihoods.

In the formal sector, compulsory retirement age is 60 years. Some of the formal sector employees, after retiring, join the informal sector to generate additional income.

Enabling environment

25
72.9/100

In Sri Lanka, particularly in rural areas, people are closely connected and support each other. For instance, during a period of grievance, relatives, friends and neighbours volunteer to help the victims.

With the end of ethnic conflict in 2009, large numbers of police and armed forces were removed from war affected areas to other areas of Sri Lanka. These security officers are now being utilised by the government to ensure public safety, for instance on roads.

Freedom of choice is a problem as people get older in Sri Lanka; they often have to abide by decisions made by their children, as older people often become dependent and are living with their children.

Local public transportation systems are improving for instance with increased number of public buses, but these are still not age-friendly. The condition of most of the roads (even in rural areas) have been improving over the last few years.

The Global AgeWatch Index ranks countries by how well their older populations are faring.

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