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# Chapter 5:

# The way forward

“Older persons must be full participants in the development process and also share in its benefits.” *Madrid Plan, para. 16*

## Summary and conclusions

Population ageing is a megatrend that is transforming economies and societies around the world. It is a cause for celebration and a major opportunity for all. Older people’s activism shines throughout this report, and their increasing economic weight is a growing political reality. The report shows the wealth of productivity, contributions and leadership of those aged 60 and over. It demonstrates that, with the right measures in place to secure health care, regular income, social networks and legal protection as we age, there is a “longevity dividend” to be reaped by current and future generations.

Older persons are the world’s fastest growing population group, amid rapidly changing family structures and the possibility of declining family support systems. During 2010-2015, the annual growth rate for the population aged 60 years or over (3.2 per cent) was almost three times that recorded for the total population (1.1 per cent). In the coming decades, the gap between these two growth rates is expected to widen. Already there are 33 countries with an average life expectancy at birth of 80 years or more, and 316,600 centenarians. The lived experience of older women and men varies according to age group, life experience, living conditions and gender, but there is also diversity in the situation of older people within and between countries, depending on the stage of each country’s demographic transition and societal development.

Population ageing is not just a developed world concern. It is happening fastest in developing countries, including in those that also have a large youth population. Investing in young people’s education

and employment will improve well-being and quality of life as they age. Our shared future is one where there will be more older persons than children. Worldwide, it is predicted that, by 2050, there will be more people aged 60 and over than children under 15. In China, this will happen in less than 10 years, by 2020.

The issue of the growing numbers of older women in relation to men, particularly in the “oldest old” age group, is raised in this report. Gender relations structure the entire lifecourse, influencing access to resources and opportunities, with an impact that is both ongoing and cumulative.

There is a thread of concern running through the report about the multiple discrimination experienced by older persons, particularly older women, including access to jobs and health care, subjection to abuse, denial of the right to own and inherit property and lack of basic minimum income and social security. These concerns are compounded by the on-going problem of lack of data.

Political will is necessary to ensure that ageing is a time of opportunity for all. Social and intergenerational equity should be the guiding principles of national policies. It is unacceptable that millions of older people continue to live in poverty, lacking income security, health care, access to basic services, support in emergencies and the full enjoyment of their human rights. The expected growth of the population of older persons should not be an excuse not to act but rather seen as a call to action. A well supported old age is in the interest of all generations. Taking a lifecourse approach across all public policy domains – that is, explicit recognition by policymakers that the vast majority of citizens will live to old age – will bring concrete benefits to all ages and the economies in which they live.

The 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing gives clear recommendations to ensure that older people's issues are integrated into the development process. It urges Member States and United Nations agencies to mainstream ageing throughout their policies and programmes and to allocate budgets for this. The last 10 years have seen important progress by many countries in adopting new policies, strategies, plans and laws on ageing, but much more needs to be done to implement the Madrid Plan and fulfil the potential of our ageing world.

This report presents many inspiring examples of innovative programmes in many areas that support older persons. These programmes have worked and they can be replicated and adapted elsewhere to bring older people to where they want to be – in the mainstream of society.

As life expectancy increases, the roles of older people are changing. Development must take account of the process of ageing and reinforce the opportunities it brings.

## The need to challenge age discrimination

Contributors to this report – both technical experts and older people themselves – agree that living longer requires affirmative measures to ensure that older age is experienced as a time of opportunity rather than a time of life to be feared. Older persons, as contributors and participants, must be included in the policy process. All people, now and in the future, in all countries, must be able to age with dignity and security, enjoying the full realization of all human rights and fundamental freedoms to lead fulfilled and active lives.

The opinions and lived experience of older women and men provide a clear guide to what must be done. Older persons who took part in consultations for this report emphasized the importance of care-receiving and caregiving and their engagement with the communities in which they live. They stressed the importance of having a regular and secure income to support themselves and their families, including, for many, access to lifelong education, employment, credit and business opportunities. They called for more responsive health services and better trained health providers. They talked of the value they placed on participation and self-organization and of their ideas and hopes for the future.

But this report also shows that ageing can be a source of stigma, which contributes to age discrimination. Many people fear the ageing process and old age itself. Sixty-seven per cent of those surveyed for this report said they believed that age discrimination exists in

older people's everyday lives. Fifty-three per cent said that it was very difficult to pay for essential services. Old age may be experienced as a time of opportunity and positive contributions, but it can also be experienced, often by the same person, as a time of increasing vulnerability and lack of protection. Frailty and loss of physical and mental faculties can place older persons in situations of insecurity and exclusion. This makes them vulnerable to attitudes and behaviour that can lead to the toleration of human rights abuse in old age.

The challenge of protecting the human rights of older people requires a change in attitudes to ageing, political action and specific instruments to help end discrimination and human rights abuse. Progress towards the development of global, regional and national instruments to guarantee the human rights of older persons is increasingly considered a priority in many countries. At global level, the possibility of a Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons is gaining increased visibility among the international community working on ageing issues.

## The need to ensure income security for all

Among the most urgent concerns of older persons worldwide is income security. This, together with health, is most frequently mentioned by older persons themselves and these issues are also among the greatest challenges for governments faced with ageing populations. The global economic crisis has exacerbated the financial pressure to ensure both economic security and access to health care in old age.

Poverty and inequality are two major concerns in relation to ensuring income security in older ages for all. The current pattern of high, and in many countries, increasing inequalities,<sup>1</sup> especially inequalities in access to decent employment, a steady income and adequate health care among people of productive age, can potentially have a major impact on inequality in later life. Without addressing the root causes of societal inequalities and ensuring equal access of all segments of the population to education, employment, health care and basic social services that will enable people to live decently in the present and save for the future, any progress already made towards improving the lives of older persons will be derailed. Without investment in human capital by improving the education and employment prospects of the current generation of young people, investment in policies, programmes and institutional arrangements that cater for older persons may be in jeopardy.

Investments in social security systems are seen as one of the most important ways to ensure economic security. Sustainability of social security systems is of particular

concern in developed countries, while social protection and old-age pension coverage remain a challenge for developing countries, where a large proportion of the labour force is found in the informal sector. While private transfers from family members were typically expected to provide a significant source of income for older persons, changing family structures may result in lower levels of support in the future.

According to some researchers, there is no evidence that population ageing has undermined economic development and that countries do not have sufficient resources to ensure pensions and health care for an older population. Nevertheless, globally, only one third of countries have comprehensive social protection schemes, most of which only cover those in formal employment, or less than half of the economically active population worldwide. While social pensions are an important end in themselves since they make a big difference in the well-being of older persons, they have also been shown to benefit entire families.

The report points to the need for policy change to build stable protection schemes for an increasing number of older persons. Questions of solidarity, accessibility, affordability and sustainability will need to be addressed when considering the options available to ensure a minimum level of protection for all people after a certain age.

## The need to ensure access to quality health care

In order to realize their right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, older persons must have access to affordable health care and services that meet their needs. This includes preventive and curative care and rehabilitation. A lifecourse perspective should include health promotion and disease prevention activities that focus on maintaining independence, preventing and delaying disease and disability, and providing treatment. Policies are needed to promote lifelong health, assistive technology, rehabilitative care, promotion of healthy lifestyles, and supportive environments. Training of caregivers and health professionals is essential to ensure that those who work with older persons have access to information and basic training in the care of older people.

The report points out that good health must lie at the core of society's response to population ageing. Ensuring that people live healthier as well as longer lives will result in greater opportunities and lower costs to older persons, their families and society. The report describes a four-point strategy to foster healthy and active ageing throughout the lifecourse that focuses on promoting healthy behaviours at all ages, early detection

Campaigning for a pension in Paraguay.



Dirección General de Adultos Mayores

and quality care to minimize the consequences of chronic disease, creating physical and social environments that foster the health and participation of older persons, and changing social attitudes to encourage their participation.

## The need for budget allocation to develop, implement and evaluate evidence-based policies

While there has been substantial progress in adopting new policies and legislation on ageing and mainstreaming ageing into existing legal and policy frameworks, the evidence suggests that implementation and budget allocation is still incomplete. Accountable budgets are necessary to support policies. There is also a need for capacity development in government, academic and voluntary-sector institutions to enable the formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and interventions. Concrete, accountable, gender-sensitive and funded actions to ensure key commitments of the Madrid Plan are still needed across all its key policy domains. Ageing must be mainstreamed across all policy sectors and action on ageing can no longer be subordinate to other issues.

Contributors to this report agree that there must be improvements in data collection and analysis as well as more research to ensure effective monitoring of the Madrid Plan. The evidence shows that the absence of national and sub-national data on poverty, health, inclusion and contributions of older people may be systematically excluding them from development plans and public policy provision.

Surveys, indicators and monitoring mechanisms that have a cut-off at around age 49, such as those reporting on HIV and violence, are outdated and discriminatory. The small number of older persons covered in household surveys does not permit meaningful analysis of the older population. Adjustments are needed to ensure that ageing is no longer the “missing dimension” or “blind spot” in data collection and that action on ageing forms part of the future development agenda.

Although there are new programmes that include both cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys on ageing, the lack of adequate data on the situation of women and men in later life is common in most of the developing world. This results in unacceptable levels of exclusion from basic services and exposure to violence and abuse. Indeed, the data gap on age is singled out as an issue that urgently needs to be rectified to improve understanding and to deliver more inclusive policies and programmes.

In other areas, the development of a global response to information needs (demographic and health surveys, for example) has been seen. It becomes clear from this report that a similar effort needs to be developed in the area of ageing. A global survey on older persons that provide comparative information should be developed.

### The need for explicit development goals on ageing in the post-2015 agenda

Programmes to achieve the MDGs are not explicitly including older people. Poverty data are still not disaggregated by age and mainstream poverty processes do not overtly include older persons, despite the provisions of the Madrid Plan and the inclusive approaches to development called for by the Millennium Declaration.

As the international community prepares to chart a course for post-2015, it is essential to ensure that population ageing and the concerns of older persons are part of the process. In a rapidly ageing world, explicit development goals related to the older population, notably absent in the MDG framework, should be considered. These can be elaborated on the basis of the three priority directions of the Madrid Plan: 1) ensure that older persons are integrated into the development process and are poised to be an asset rather than a burden to society, 2) support healthy ageing and economic well-being in old age, and 3) promote enabling and supportive environments for older persons. It is imperative that ageing issues are included in national development frameworks and poverty-reduction strategies in order to ensure a “society for all ages”.

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A grandmother in Myanmar prepares food for the family.



Joanne Hill/HelpAge International

## Capacity development for an ageing world

Capacity development is essential to prepare for the challenges and opportunities of an ageing world. The United Nations Population Fund is working on a capacity development strategy to respond to the training needs at global, regional and national levels. This includes an assessment of the training needs in each region, the extent to which the needs are currently being met by existing institutions, and recommendations for building capacity in each region to facilitate formulation, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes to address the challenges of population ageing.

### National level

At national level, policymakers and planners are among the first cadres that need to be trained to ensure the formulation and implementation of sound policies and programmes that effectively meet the needs of older persons. Government ministries that address ageing issues should be strengthened and sufficient resources should be budgeted for the training of staff and the implementation of programmes. Training centres should be established or existing institutions should be utilized to offer training programmes and to provide a venue for the exchange of experiences.

Policymakers should be trained not only in the demographics of population ageing, but also in such areas as the social and financial implications of ageing and health and well-being in old age. They should also receive training in age-, gender- and culture-sensitive programme planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Medical and nursing schools should offer specializations in gerontology and geriatrics and universities should be encouraged to offer undergraduate and graduate programmes and degrees in these fields. Service providers, including

health-care professionals and social workers, should receive training in medical and social care for older persons. This should be done at the primary health-care level as well as at the secondary and tertiary levels. Informal caregivers, family members and volunteers who care for older persons should be able to access training in the care of the aged. Those who work with older persons should be trained in detecting and reporting elder abuse and discrimination.

### Regional and global levels

Global and regional institutions and research centres should coordinate and cooperate to promote the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and provide guidance in policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Madrid Plan.

Training centres should be established in each region within easy reach of major cities to provide policymakers, government officials, researchers, academics, health-care professionals and social work personnel who work with older persons with a venue for the exchange of experiences, good practices and lessons learned. Such centres should organize training programmes, conferences, and expert meetings that address the particular needs of the region. They should support collection of quantitative and qualitative data on the status of older persons and research in the social and financial implications of population ageing.

Training of trainers' programmes should be developed for implementation at national training and research institutes. Training modules should be developed to address specific priority areas of ageing. Global and regional institutions should encourage comparative research and networks of good practices. They should also consider developing virtual training sites for participants who may find it difficult to travel abroad for training. International organizations that address ageing issues also have a role to play in capacity development.

Members of an older people's association in Kenya take a vote.

Kate Holt/HelpAge International



## Recommendations

### Ten priority actions to maximize the opportunity of ageing populations

1. Recognize the inevitability of population ageing and the need to adequately prepare all stakeholders (governments, civil society, private sector, communities, and families) for the growing numbers of older persons. This should be done by enhancing understanding, strengthening national and local capacities, and developing the political, economic and social reforms needed to adapt societies to an ageing world.
2. Ensure that all older persons can live with dignity and security, enjoying access to essential health and social services and a minimum income through the implementation of national social protection floors and other social investments that extend the autonomy and independence of older people, prevent impoverishment in old age and contribute to a more healthy ageing. These actions should be based on a long-term vision, and supported by a strong political commitment and a secured budget that prevents negative impacts in time of crisis or governmental changes.
3. Support communities and families to develop support systems which ensure that frail older persons receive the long-term care they need and promote active and healthy ageing at the local level to facilitate ageing in place.
4. Invest in young people today by promoting healthy habits, and ensuring education and employment opportunities, access to health services, and social security coverage for all workers as the best investment to improve the lives of future generations of older persons. Flexible employment, lifelong learning and retraining opportunities should be promoted to facilitate the integration in the labour market of current generations of older persons.
5. Support international and national efforts to develop comparative research on ageing, and ensure that gender- and culture-sensitive data and evidence from this research are available to inform policymaking.
6. Mainstream ageing into all gender policies and gender into ageing policies, taking into account the specific requirements of older women and men.
7. Ensure inclusion of ageing and the needs of older persons in all national development policies and programmes.
8. Ensure inclusion of ageing and the needs of older persons in national humanitarian response, climate change mitigation and adaptation plans, and disaster management and preparedness programmes.
9. Ensure that ageing issues are adequately reflected in the post-2015 development agenda, including through the development of specific goals and indicators.
10. Develop a new rights-based culture of ageing and a change of mindset and societal attitudes towards ageing and older persons, from welfare recipients to active, contributing members of society. This requires, among others, working towards the development of international human rights instruments and their translation into national laws and regulations and affirmative measures that challenge age discrimination and recognize older people as autonomous subjects.

## Specific actions according to the Priority Directions of the Madrid Plan

### Older persons and development

- Support older people's engagement in national policymaking and local decision-making
- Invest in older people's associations
- Promote opportunities for life-long learning
- Include older persons in poverty-reduction strategies to reduce by half the proportion of older people living on less than \$1.25 a day and reduce by half the proportion of older persons who suffer from hunger and malnutrition
- Eliminate mandatory retirement and encourage older persons who can and want to work to go on doing so
- Promote older persons' right to decent work through policies that support a healthy and productive working life, including training and more flexible working patterns
- Ensure that the needs and capacities of older persons are systematically included in humanitarian and emergency response situations
- Facilitate the integration of older migrants, refugees and displaced persons within their new communities and assist older persons who stay behind when family members move to cities or abroad

### Advancing health and well-being into old age

- Ensure the lifecourse approach to health and non-communicable diseases and encourage health promotion for all ages
- Adapt age-friendly, affordable primary and secondary health-care services to promote healthy ageing and deliver care in the home
- Include older people in HIV and AIDS prevention, care and treatment programmes and support them in their role as caregivers

- Provide priority programmes with accountable budgets to secure older persons' access to basic social services including water and sanitation
- Provide geriatric and gerontological training in schools of medicine and social work

### Ensuring enabling and supportive environments

- Introduce, implement and monitor national legislation to protect and promote the rights of older persons and to end age discrimination
- Expose, investigate and work to prevent abuse and violence against older persons
- Promote positive images of ageing, particularly through the media
- Provide support to caregivers of older persons, including family members and community care programmes, and to older people who care for others
- Promote age-friendly cities where housing, transportation and the living environment take into account the needs of older persons

### Capacity building, research and data

- Provide training for policymakers to sensitize them to rapid population ageing and the need to address the concerns of older persons
- Establish a national ministry or office on ageing with a separate budget and ensure a multi-sectoral approach and coordination with other ministries
- Support the development of national surveys that map and monitor the situation of older persons in all its dimensions
- Disaggregate all data (from census, surveys or administrative data) relating to older persons by age and sex
- Develop age-inclusive indicators for the post-2015 process
- Strengthen mechanisms at international level to drive the implementation of the Madrid Plan

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“As the international community now embarks on an effort to articulate the post-2015 development agenda, it is clear that the issue of population ageing should be fully addressed as part of this process.” *Ban Ki-moon*