

## HelpAge International Webinar Summary Report

### Rapid population ageing: a global call to action

24 and 25 January 2024

#### Purpose of the webinars

Two multi-regional webinars were convened by HelpAge International, in partnership with AARP, to explore our responses to the challenges and opportunities of population ageing as we celebrate 40 years of the HelpAge global network and think ahead to our next 40 years.

These webinars primarily aimed to foster debate and advance network action to address the challenges and opportunities presented by rapid population ageing over coming decades, but they also provided a moment to celebrate the first 40 years of the HelpAge global network as it prepares for the next 40 years. The webinars also drew from multiple events and publications from WHO, ILO, UN bodies as well as on key issues and calls to action arising from [AARP's Global Thought Leadership Conference 2023](#) in USA in Oct 2023 ("The Power of Global Aging in an Interdependent World"). Further details and resources from this conference can be found in Annex 2.

#### Background – why this webinar?

The world has witnessed significant transformations in the four decades since HelpAge International was founded, with a multitude of crises, conflicts, and disasters leaving their mark on global history. The end of the Cold War in the late 1980s and early 1990s marked a pivotal moment, ushering in a new era of geopolitical dynamics. However, this period also witnessed numerous regional conflicts and humanitarian crises, such as the Balkan Wars, the Rwandan Genocide, and various Middle East conflicts, which underscored the fragility of global peace and security.

The emergence of new global mega-trends, such as demographic change, global warming and artificial intelligence, as well as pervasive inequity and unequal distribution of wealth is shaping the trajectory of our planet.

- Population ageing is rapidly changing national demographic configurations, more swiftly in some regions of the world than others. This has deep implications for economies and societies.
- Climate change, barely a matter of global concern 40 years ago, is now the most pressing global challenge, with rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental degradation threatening ecosystems, economies, and societies.
- Artificial intelligence and automation have revolutionized industries, offering opportunities for innovation and economic growth, but also raising concerns about job displacement and ethical considerations.

In the coming 40 years, with the world set to undergo even more profound changes driven by various interconnected mega-processes, demographic change will play a pivotal role in shaping the global landscape. While some regions will witness burgeoning youth populations, others will confront the challenges of an increasingly aged society.

In a world characterised by rapid change and interconnected challenges, finding sustainable solutions to the complex issue of population ageing is imperative for the well-being of societies and economies alike.

#### The role of HelpAge International and the HelpAge global network

Organisations like HelpAge International and its global network of partners will be crucial in supporting systemic adaptations to ageing societies. They can work to promote dialogue and cooperation between generations, fostering innovative solutions for sustainable, age-friendly

societies that are resilient to the challenges of climate change. The role of HelpAge and like-minded organisations will be essential in navigating this complex future, ensuring that the rights of older people are upheld, and their contributions are valued.

HelpAge International and the HelpAge global network, since their inception, have played pivotal roles in advocating for the rights of older people to lead dignified lives, to have their voice heard and their wellbeing assured. HelpAge has acquired distinctive competencies in the development of community-based organisations of older people (Older People's Associations), social protection and non-contributory pensions, in homecare approaches, fighting abuse and neglect and advocating for the rights of older people.

Older People's Associations and similar community-based organisations provide a platform for older individuals to come together, share experiences, and collectively address issues that affect them. Through these associations, older people can actively engage in their communities, improve their income security, lead healthier lives, have a stronger voice advocating and claiming their rights, and promote social inclusion.

The swift response of members of the HelpAge global network when humanitarian emergencies strike has been crucial in delivering targeted aid to older people affected by crises, as well as promoting their inclusion in responses to the disasters. Its efforts ensure that older individuals receive the necessary assistance and support during these challenging times.

In various scenarios and at global forums, the HelpAge global network has been a relentless advocate for the rights of older people, working to create a world in which ageing is seen as an opportunity rather than a problem, and where older people are recognised as rights-holders not just as an economic resource or a care burden.

### **Structure of the webinars**

The webinars were moderated by Mr. Ong Chi Keong Paul, Chief Strategy Officer of Tsao Foundation, Singapore (on 24 January 2024), and by Eduardo Klien, HelpAge's Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific (on 25 January 2024). They began with an [animation on global population ageing trends](#), followed by opening remarks by Cherian Mathews, CEO of HelpAge International, who welcomed speakers and participants and outlined the purpose of the webinars, highlighting that population ageing is a global mega trend that needs urgent action.

*"By 2050, 80% of older people will live in low- and middle-income countries. Population ageing will have profound social, economic, and political ramifications. There is an urgent need to educate and create awareness among the public, CSOs, governments, international organisations and the private sector about this evolving phenomenon. It is critical that we mobilise and support systematic adaptation to ageing societies. Any delayed policy action can cost us in future. There is a business and economic case on why we should act now.*

*The HelpAge global network is celebrating 40 years of its mission and work across the globe. From five national organisations at the inception stage, the network has grown to more than 180 members and is now present in over 90 countries. HelpAge has been in the forefront of promoting the rights of the older people to lead a dignified and healthy life. As we come together and foresee the next 40 years of our work, we are determined to step up and amplify our work to inspire a movement for change that addresses the issue of population ageing and promotes the wellbeing dignity and voice of older people. Our strength comes from older people themselves who have organised themselves into older people associations in many parts of the world.*

*The HelpAge global network is relentless in promoting a world which ageing is seen as an opportunity rather than a problem. Where older people are considered as a contributor and right holders than an economic burden. We believe that working across all ages, we can build a*

*society where everyone thrives as they age. Younger generations today are the older generations of tomorrow. Hence, the fight for adapting to population ageing is the collective responsibility of older people of today and of the older people of tomorrow.*

*As the HelpAge global network, we know that we cannot address this alone and we need to collaborate with other civil society organisations, movements, governments, and the private sector to prepare and adapt to population ageing.*

*The main purpose of this webinar is to foster a debate and share learning to advance joined-up action to address the challenges and opportunities that population ageing present. We intend to use this platform to galvanise ourselves as a network to unleash our collective power and demand urgent action from key stakeholders."*

Cherian introduced the two segments of the webinars:

## **1. 40 years gone**

We looked at the past from the perspective of older people from different contexts along with a [video-interview with HelpAge Ambassador, Mark Gorman](#), celebrating what progress has been achieved for older people in the 40-year history of HelpAge and the global network. Mark highlighted how HelpAge has evolved over the years, focusing on key successes and initiatives, including: greater social protection for older people, the evolution of universal social pensions, the growth of inclusive, multi-functional Older People's Associations (OPAs), HelpAge's contribution to the humanitarian sector, and the growth of the global network.

We shared a [short video of the voices of older people](#) looking at how their lives have changed in the last 40 years: one from South Korea and one from Lebanon.

## **2. 40 years ahead**

This segment began with a [short pre-recorded video of interviews with a group of younger people from Uganda](#), thinking 40 years ahead on how they would wish to age, produced by HelpAge partner, [Reach A Hand Uganda](#).

This was followed by a [pre-recorded keynote presentation from Stuart Gietel-Basten](#), Professor of Social Science at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, on social and economic trends over the next 40 years, focusing on key demographic changes and narratives around population ageing and its implications. Here is the link to [Stuart's full slide presentation](#).

This summarised Stuart's broader [discussion paper](#) for HelpAge on the challenges and opportunities of rapid population ageing.

A moderated panel discussion followed, responding to the issues raised in the keynote presentation and focusing on the implications of population ageing and what key actions CSOs like HelpAge and members of the global network, as well as governments, policy makers, the UN and others, can take to ensure the wellbeing of current and future generations of older people. Panellists across the two webinars included:

- Professor Sarah Harper, Clore Professor of Gerontology and Director of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, UK
- Rohit Prasad, Chief Executive Officer, HelpAge India
- Sabine Henning, Chief, Sustainable Demographic Transition Section/Social Development Division, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Thailand
- Alexandre Sidorenko, Board Member of HelpAge International, Austria
- Daniel Cotlear, Board Member of HelpAge USA

Dolline Busolo, a health consultant and activist in human and people rights on ageing, nutrition, gender and social protection from Uganda also contributed to panel discussions via the chat box as she was unable to join with full audio.

### Key panel discussion points

- Young people who will be 60 in 2050 are more educated, equipped with more skills and healthier, and this will change the nature of older people in future. They will also be facing very different challenges from older people today, including economic challenges, homeownership struggles and climate change.
- Population ageing affects all aspects of life: family, community, economy, social behaviour, environment, gender equity, inequalities, public transportation, urban design, agriculture, private sector, social protection, health system, intergenerational connection.
- There is an urgent need to educate and create awareness among the public, CSOs, governments, international organisations, and the private sector about this evolving phenomenon. It also needs to be reframed to a more positive narrative.
- Over the last 40 years, there has been a transformation in the perception of older people. Increasingly, older people were viewed as a triumph of humanity. Although progress is made, ageing is still being referred to in negative and ageist tones, such as a 'Silver Tsunami' and a 'population time bomb'. Getting our definitions correct is important: "population ageing" is about overall changes in age composition of the population.
- The way we address issues impacting older people today may be deemed irrelevant for older people of the future. Today, we may be discussing adequate pensions and decent work, and in future, life-long learning may also become a key issue. Artificial intelligence will also have a key role to play, as with technology in general, to change the experience of old age, including on healthy ageing and productivity increases within the labour market.
- Ageing affects all ages and is a life-long process, so adopting a life-cycle (or life-course) approach to ageing will help provide a more comprehensive response to population ageing.
- In the past, organisations related to older people in terms of their vulnerability, support needs, and advocating for their rights and services; later, this understanding moved beyond vulnerability to focus more on ageing policies and older people's wellbeing.
- Population ageing is a human success story, with gains made in terms of greater access to sanitation, food, education, healthcare, and increased agency of women and girls, all resulting in longer life. This is the result of economic and social development and is something to celebrate.
- Population ageing in Asia and the Pacific is rapid relative to other regions; the transition from high to low fertility, as well as the expanding longevity, have been rapid and there is an increased demand on society and policy makers to address the challenges and opportunities arising from this change.
- This year the UN will convene a Summit of the Future and future generations are featuring highly in this agenda. It is important that this discussion includes current older people as well as future older people.
- In 30 years, India will face the impact of longevity, as around 500 thousand people will be centenarians. While the second largest population will be older people, 65 percent will be below the age of 35 and 50 percent will be below 25 years old. The opportunity here is around ageing preparedness. HelpAge India has been emphasising this to all key stakeholders.
- The term 'Silver Tsunami' was based on economics, but in many countries, including India, the social value of ageing has been predominant, so we should be looking at ageing from multiple perspectives.
- In India, based on a survey by HelpAge India, 40 percent of older people said that they want to work, volunteer and participate in activities but do not have the opportunity. Advancements in digital technology have left older people behind.

- Academics have had a good understanding of population ageing and its impacts for at least a decade and have a lot of evidence on falling mortality and fertility, but data must be translated in a way that policy makers and the public can understand.
- We need to find ways to make sure that all generations are supported and can contribute. We also need to adjust our society to respond to the increase in the average age of the population.
- A big challenge in tackling population ageing is how to connect siloed responses within coherent strategies. HelpAge's effort to connect relevant actors across sectors is commendable.
- In the three years leading up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the drafting of MIPAA (the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing) again overlooked the concept of a 'society for all ages'. However, MIPAA engaged governments, policy makers and CSOs in the drafting of the guidelines and key directions of action related to ageing. Although it is not a legally binding covenant, it represented a huge motivation for governments to understand and act on policies on ageing.
- From the India perspective, the management of health costs significantly impacts a country's economic balance and societal well-being, with opportunities for those with future foresight to address ageing, non-communicable diseases, and preventive measures to promote healthy aging effectively. The future of care systems lies in re-evaluating the intersection of community-based and institution-based care, particularly considering that a significant portion of the population is projected to continue living in families by 2050. It is necessary to reexamine what community care systems can provide.
- The role of the private sector is pivotal in countries' development plans due to limited government resources, yet its engagement remains minimal; there exists significant potential for sectors such as real estate, finance, insurance, and technology to address ageing-related issues; we should be urging global philanthropy to adopt a life course approach in their philanthropic strategies to effect meaningful change.
- In 2005, the first global ageing study took place, looking at older adults aged 40-100 across 24 countries. The study is being revisited using the survey material by the health and retirement group, to see what changes have occurred over the last 20 years. This reveals three notable findings (for which data is available):
  - **Policies in health and education and work opportunities:** health and education are included in most government agendas but need to be tailored for all ages to ensure education and opportunities around work and care are for all ages.
  - **Build on families and community strengths:** LMICs that are ageing rapidly possess inherent strengths such as families, households, intergenerational relationships, and community ties, which governments should leverage for older people's care and integration into society. We should learn from the mistakes made by high-income countries.
  - **Changing the perception of society:** Changing perceptions and views on ageism and human rights will allow society to move forward.
- The Asia-Pacific region is still facing a lack of data. Often data has age caps, so we do not have disaggregation by older ages and women are falling behind. Even under the 2030 Agenda, many SDG indicators are missing out on data disaggregation and countries are basing their policy agendas on these.
- We need a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People to address the rights of older people. A legally binding document would formulate the principal approaches to addressing their rights and will oblige Member States to report on what they have done in that area. Now we have voluntary reports on MIPAA every five years and with no legally binding commitment to be fulfilled.

- Mainstreaming is a concept that originated in 1985 with the gender mainstreaming movement, and has evolved to encompass ageing, yet its true implementation extends beyond mere mention in policies. Its essence lies in recognising not only the needs of ageing but also leveraging the potential of ageing populations to enrich all policy domains, highlighting the integration of longevity perspectives.
- Older people play vital, often unrecognised, roles in household activities and the care economy; by assuming caregiving responsibilities for grandchildren, older people free-up parents and younger generations to enter the labour market. This is a significant aspect in many countries, driven by declining fertility rates reshaping family dynamics.
- Older people also have productive roles in community activity, demonstrated by HelpAge's multifunctional Older People Associations (OPA) model.
- HelpAge USA is currently piloting a model, initially tested in Zimbabwe, known as the Friendship Bench, which involves training older people to offer mental health services within the community.
- Population ageing is a result of demographic transition which is a slow process foreseen by demographers, yet overlooked by policymakers due to its long-term nature, extending beyond election cycles. Addressing population ageing requires broad and long-term perspectives, not just siloed policies, as well as political will, which is informed -but not determined- by evidence of good practices.
- We need to inspire young people so that they see reasons to pursue education, careers, and family-building with a focus on their futures, rather than seeing the later years of life solely as a time of decline.
- We must move away from dividing life into set stages and embrace a fluid continuum where periods of labour withdrawal can occur at any age, and education and lifelong learning can be pursued across different life stages.
- While there are excellent policies on ageing in Europe and Southern Asia, comprehensive policies specifically addressing longevity are rare.
- Age-disaggregated data is important, most policy schemes stop at the age of 60 and see ages after this as a homogeneous population (60 to 90). For evidence-based advocacy, data on the diversity of older people within this age group is needed.
- Health systems are highly fragmented, and part of this fragmentation comes from the influence of segmented donors. Changing this will require a new form of dialogue between developing countries and donor countries.
- We need to move towards developing an international policy framework of longevity, including all generations, towards a society for all ages.
- Ageing demographics in Africa are different but longevity is steadily increasing due to improved health, income and education. Key anxieties are:
  - the huge population of educated skilled youth who lack employment and the potential for conflict in accessing limited jobs.
  - insufficient policies that address youth unemployment, income security, universal access to quality health care, healthy ageing (including promotion of well-being and nutrition); knowledge about population ageing for policy implementation is limited; awareness on universal social pension is only at a formative stage in several countries. This must continue in the near future. Learning from COVID19 proved that social pensions can provide ageing populations with a dignified life and with livelihoods but access to them remains an issue. Many policy makers do not prioritise population ageing mainly due to short election cycles. Corruption also needs to be confronted.

- The intergenerational approach thrives very well in the informal sector. Where all ages thrive. What's the secret?
- Let's not shake the Universal Social Protection debate in Africa. Let's allow for countries in Africa to adopt the African Union policy on social pensions, which is all-encompassing. The Africa Platform on Social Protection (APSP) believes this is the solution for Africa.

### **Key points raised by participants via the chat box (see full text in Annex A)**

- How can youthful countries integrate ageing into policies and programmes, with examples of best practices?
- How to integrate older people's needs into public policies, such as establishing sustainable departments within social ministries?
- Empowering older people to participate in the formulation of public policies and development plans is key.
- Need to address the needs of older people in emergencies, particularly in LMICs where they are often overlooked.
- Older women face poverty and discrimination despite their significant contributions to care services.
- Need to emphasise equity in the distribution of resources for older people and shift the population ageing narrative to one of social justice.
- Need to advocate for the inclusion of ageing and older people's issues in wider policies beyond health and income security.
- Need to recognise the importance of intergenerational issues and the life cycle approach in population ageing policy development.
- Need to urge for a gender-based approach in public policies concerning older people.

### **Five calls to action:**

In his closing remarks, HelpAge's CEO, Cherian Mathews, thanked moderators, speakers and participants and highlighted next steps that HelpAge would like to take forward with the global network membership and partners at national, regional, and global levels, including its partner and network member, AARP, which has already convened a conversation on global ageing in its USA conference and supported a number of studies and evidence gathering on this issue. Cherian thanked AARP for partnering with HelpAge to organise the webinars and ended with the following calls to action:

1. We urge governments to adopt age inclusive policies and programmes, in the scope of integrated strategies, to address population ageing and ensure the participation of all ages. We also urge member states to agree on a comprehensive international legally binding instrument to protect the rights of older people.
2. We ask multilateral banks, international financial institutions and regional institutions to embed ageing in their policies and plan their investments accordingly.
3. We challenge the private sector to make global ageing a business imperative via product and job development, and investment in employee health and well-being.
4. We urge the UN and international development organisations to integrate ageing issues and promote the rights of older people.
5. We call upon civil society organisations, older people's associations and others to inspire a movement to educate others on population ageing, to elevate this topic in national, regional and global agendas, and demand action from governments.

## Annex A: Questions and comments from attendees (via the chat box)

- How can countries that are still predominantly youthful (with up to a third of the population below 15 years, for example) better integrate ageing into their policies and programmes? Are there any examples of best practices for addressing ageing within a youthful demographic profile?
- What about older people in emergencies? 80% of the world refugees are in LMICs where they are invisible to humanitarian responses?
- In Mozambique there are few international resources (financers) to support organisations that work in assistance to people. Can the HelpAge Global Network support the mobilisation of international organisations including the United Nations to direct funds for assistance to people?
- How could we integrate elder people's needs in public policies, like adopting a sustainability department in social ministries?
- How could we raise the voice of older people to take part in the construction of public policies and development plans?
- Please provide comments on older women's poverty and the discrimination they face given that their numbers are higher than older man and their contribution in care services.
- The problem is not the scarcity of resources that older people are depleting (which is fueled by ageism) but rather equity in the distribution of resources.
- The rights of older people should remain unchanged whether they are "productive" or not, so the narrative needs to shift to a social justice logic/lens.
- Isn't the policy challenge to insert ageing or longevity and older people's issues into wider policies - not just health and income security, but transport, environment and housing etc?
- It is very important that the intergenerational issue be addressed, across the life course using different approaches, particularly in Colombia where the armed conflict must be taken into account. In this sense, the quality of life of old age depends on how it is lived and how it has been lived, the awareness of aging as normal, showing society worldwide that diseases are not only the property of older people, but that we can get sick at any age. There must be structural state policies that guarantee employability, social security, and inclusion. From the Colombian network we are attentive to this intergenerational work, which is purposeful.
- Adopting a life cycle approach, which takes into account roles and needs of each human being at all stages of life, [is important] when developing public policies.
- We need to adopt a gender-based approach during developing public policies concerning older people.

## Annex B: Resources from AARP's Global Thought Leadership Conference on Global Ageing, October 2023

- [AARP Conference Website](#)
- [AARP sizzle reel on their global ageing webinar](#)
- Lina Walker (Senior Vice President, AARP Global Thought Leadership) [interview with Devex](#) on "What to Expect at the 2023 AARP Global Thought Leadership Conference" – the interview covers the reasons for their conference and calls to action
- Deb Whitman (Executive Vice President/Chief Public Policy Officer) [post-conference interview](#) with Devex on the importance of the conference and why there was a focus on LMICs and what AARP hopes the global community of stakeholders should address.
- A [short AARP video](#) shown at the conference

Three reports which helped frame and motivate the AARP conference:

- The [Aging Readiness and Competitiveness Report](#) focused on achieving health equity in LMICs
- The [Global Longevity Economy Outlook](#) report which captures economic contributions of older adults across 76 economies
- The [Harnessing the Potential of Population Aging](#) report which highlights ways multilateral development banks/international financial institutions can become better engaged on the topic of population ageing.