



Facing the facts:  
**The truth about ageing and development.**

Executive summary

# *Age International*

Age International is the only UK charity working for and with older people in developing countries. We are the UK member of the global HelpAge network.

This report brings together experts in the fields of ageing, and international development, to focus on the often unexplored issue of global ageing and development.

We are grateful to all of the contributors who gave their time freely.

The views expressed in the articles are not necessarily those of Age International.

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# Contents

- 5 **Foreword**  
Chris Roles
- 6 **Fact file on ageing and development**
- Challenging preconceptions about ageing
- 10 **The changing shape of society**  
Professor Jane Falkingham
- 11 **A person at any age: the elderly are people too**  
Professor Sarah Harper
- 12 **Ageing is a development fact**  
Mark Gorman MBE
- 13 **Are older people a burden? Challenging the myths**  
Dr Penny Vera-Sanso
- 14 **Older people and the future of sub-Saharan Africa**  
Dr Isabella Aboderin
- Health and care in an ageing world
- 15 **Healthy ageing is vital to social and economic development**  
Dr Margaret Chan
- 16 **Investing in health: the case of hypertension**  
Professor Peter Lloyd-Sherlock
- 17 **Living longer, living well? The need for a culture of care**  
Dr Alex Kalache and Ina Voelcker
- 18 **The care challenge: experience from Asia**  
Eduardo Klien
- 19 **Dementia is global**  
Professor Martin Prince
- Ageing is about more than older people
- 20 **Inequality and ageing**  
Sir Richard Jolly
- 21 **Disability and ageing**  
Professor Nora Groce
- 22 **Who is caring for the kids?**  
Richard Morgan
- 23 **Understanding ageing and gender**  
Baroness Sally Greengross OBE
- 24 **Experience, dignity, respect**  
Mary Robinson
- Global ageing: taking action
- 25 **The human rights of older persons: international law's grey area**  
Craig Mokhiber
- 26 **Data means action**  
Clare Melamed, Emma Samman and Laura Rodriguez Takeuchi
- 27 **Ensuring income security in old age**  
Professor Armando Barrientos
- 28 **Older people in emergencies**  
Sir Brendan Gormley KCMG MBE
- 29 **2020 vision: the future face of development**  
Ken Bluestone
- 30 **Why I am an activist for older people**  
Blandina Mbaji



**Chris Roles** held senior positions at ActionAid and Christian Aid before serving as Chief Executive of Y Care International from 2004 to 2012, when he became Director of Age International.

***‘The message that resonates throughout the report is that older people have a right to be valued for who they are, have needs that must be taken into account and are a global asset, making contributions to their families and communities that need to be recognised and supported.’***

## Foreword

We all know that we are living through a time of unprecedented global population growth. But less well-known is the fact that the world is also ageing; there are currently 868 million older people in the world and, by 2047, this will have reached more than 2 billion, with more people aged 60 and over than children under 16.

Yet to listen to most discussions about international development, you could be forgiven for thinking that it was only younger people who mattered.

We have produced this publication because, while the number and proportion of older people in the world grows so dramatically, discussions about international development do not give sufficient consideration to its implications – to the challenges and opportunities this remarkable reality present.

The articles within this report represent a range of views from high profile thought leaders, development experts and academics. What unites them is the conviction that ignoring population ageing is not an option. The message that resonates most loudly is that older people are both vulnerable and valuable, and that the outcome of development depends on our response to an ageing world.

We all experience different challenges and have different needs at different stages of life – this is what we mean when we refer to the ‘life course’. Each and every one of us should be supported to fulfil our potential at every age, in childhood, youth, middle-age and later life.

We hope that this publication will help you to understand the importance of facing the facts about global ageing and international development and, in turn, help you to decide how to respond to the benefits and challenges this worldwide phenomenon brings.

# Fact file on ageing and development



Today,  
**868 million people**  
are over 60.

## Demography

- Today, **868 million** people are over 60.<sup>1</sup>
- In 1980, 8.6% of the global population was aged 60 years or over; by 2014, this had risen to 12%; **by 2050, it is predicted that it will rise further to 21%.**<sup>2</sup>

- 62% of people over 60 live in developing countries; by 2050, this number will have **risen to 80%.**<sup>3</sup>

- Over the last half century, **life expectancy at birth has increased by almost 20 years.**<sup>4</sup>

- By 2047, it is predicted that for the first time in human history **there will be more older people** (aged 60 and over) **than children** (aged under 16).<sup>5</sup>

- It is estimated that **by 2050 there will be over 2 billion people aged 60 and over**, more than twice the number measured in 2000 (605 million), with almost 400 million of them aged 80+.<sup>6</sup>

## Livelihoods

- **Some 340 million older people are living without any secure income.** If current trends continue, this number will rise to 1.2 billion by 2050.<sup>7</sup>

- 80% of older people in developing countries have **no regular income.**<sup>8</sup>

- **Only one in four** older people in low- and middle-income countries **receive a pension.**<sup>9</sup>



**Only one in four** older people in low- and middle-income countries **receive a pension.**

## Health and care

- For every year of life gained from the age of 50, **a person gains only about 9.5 months of healthy life expectancy.**<sup>10</sup>
- In South Africa, **78% of people aged 50 or over are hypertensive**, the highest recorded rate for any country in history.<sup>11</sup>
- **Less than one in 10** hypertensive older people in China, Ghana and South Africa are managing their condition.<sup>12</sup>
- **Nearly two-thirds** of the 44.4 million people with dementia live in low-or middle-income countries.<sup>13</sup>

**Nearly two-thirds** of the 44.4 million people with dementia live in low-or middle-income countries.

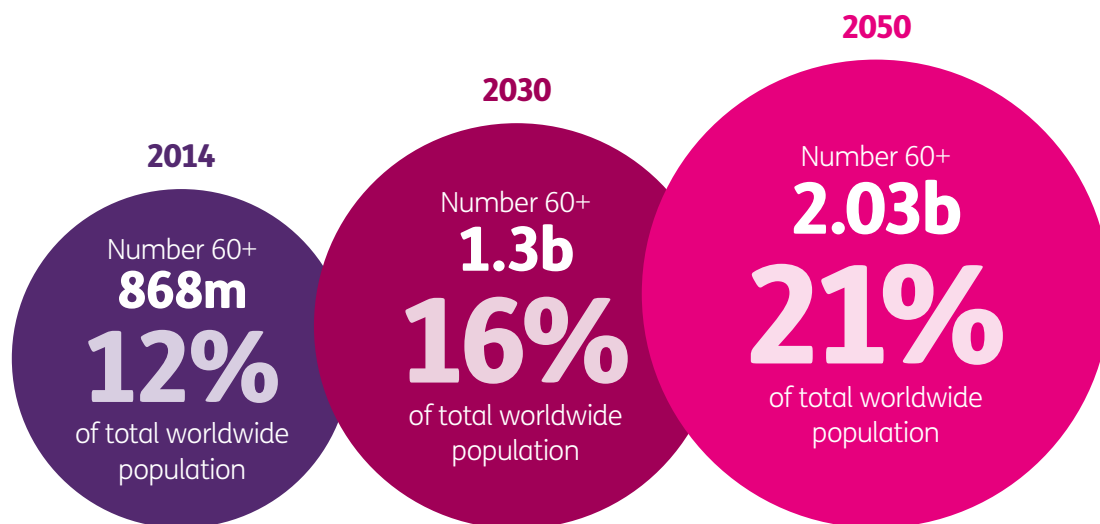
- The prevalence of disability among persons under 18 years is 5.8%; among 65 to 74 year olds, the rate increases to 44.6%; the rate rises further to 63.7% among people aged 75 to 84 and **climbs to 84.2% among people aged 85 and over.**<sup>14</sup>
- In countries like Zimbabwe and Namibia, **up to 60% of orphaned children live in grandparent-headed households.** In these situations, grandmothers are more likely to be the main carers.<sup>15</sup>

## Emergencies

- **Eight out of 10 of the most populous cities are vulnerable to earthquakes**; six out of 10 to storm surges and tsunamis.<sup>16</sup>
- **97% of people killed by disasters live in developing countries.**<sup>17</sup>
- **26 million older people are affected by natural disasters** every year.<sup>18</sup>

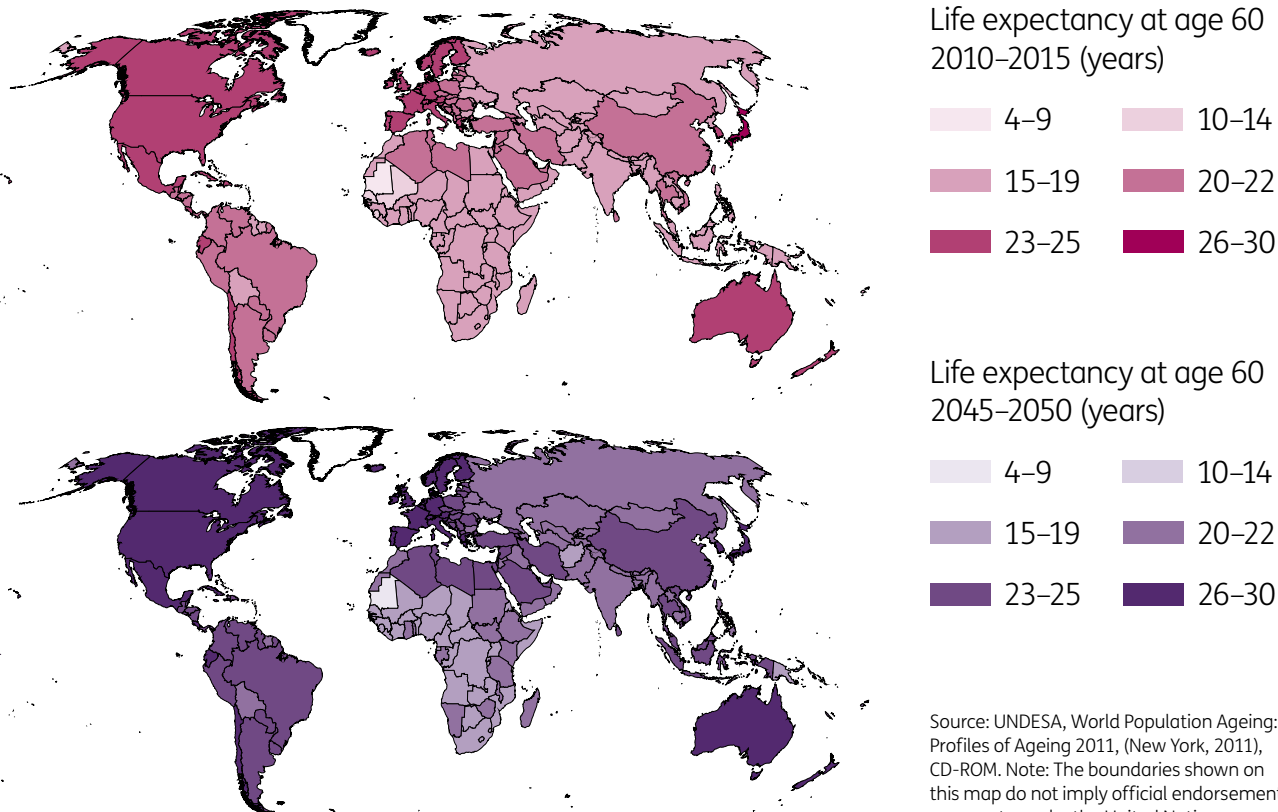
**26 million older people are affected by natural disasters** every year.

## Number and proportion of people aged 60-plus worldwide in 2014, 2030 and 2050



Source: UNDESA Population Division, Population Ageing and Development 2012, Wall Chart, 2012; UNDESA Population Division, World Population Prospects: the 2012 Revision, 2013.

## Life expectancy at age 60 in 2010–2015 and 2045–2050

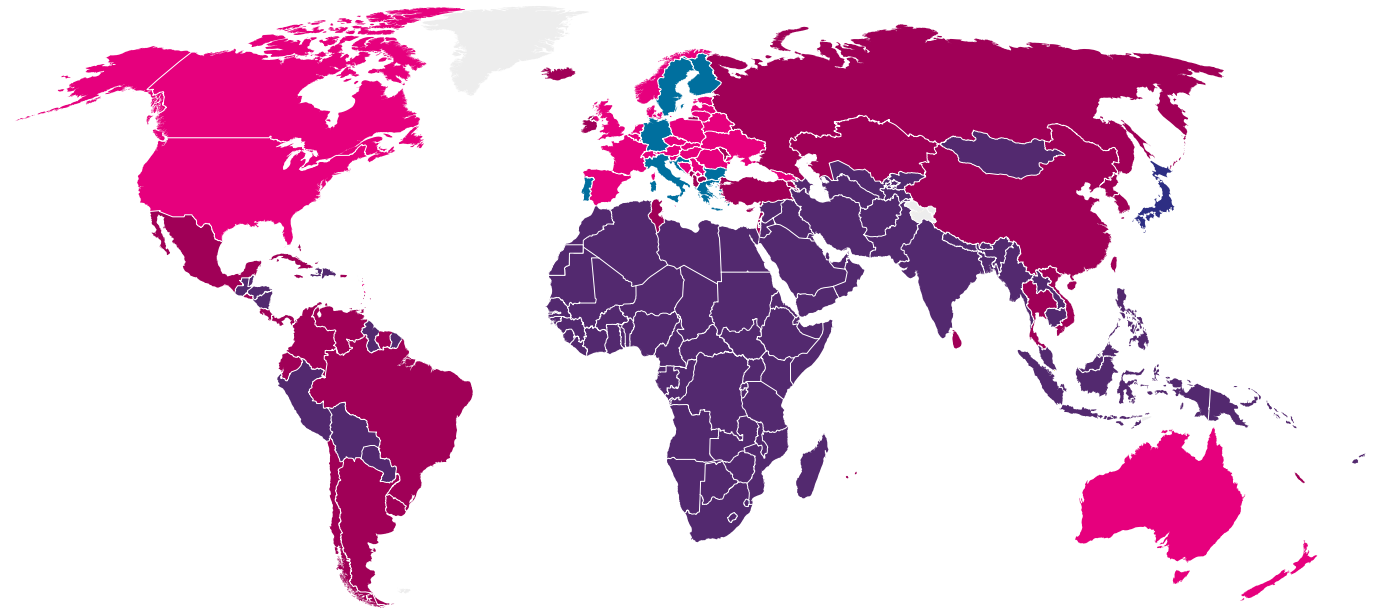


Source: UNDESA, World Population Ageing: Profiles of Ageing 2011, (New York, 2011), CD-ROM. Note: The boundaries shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

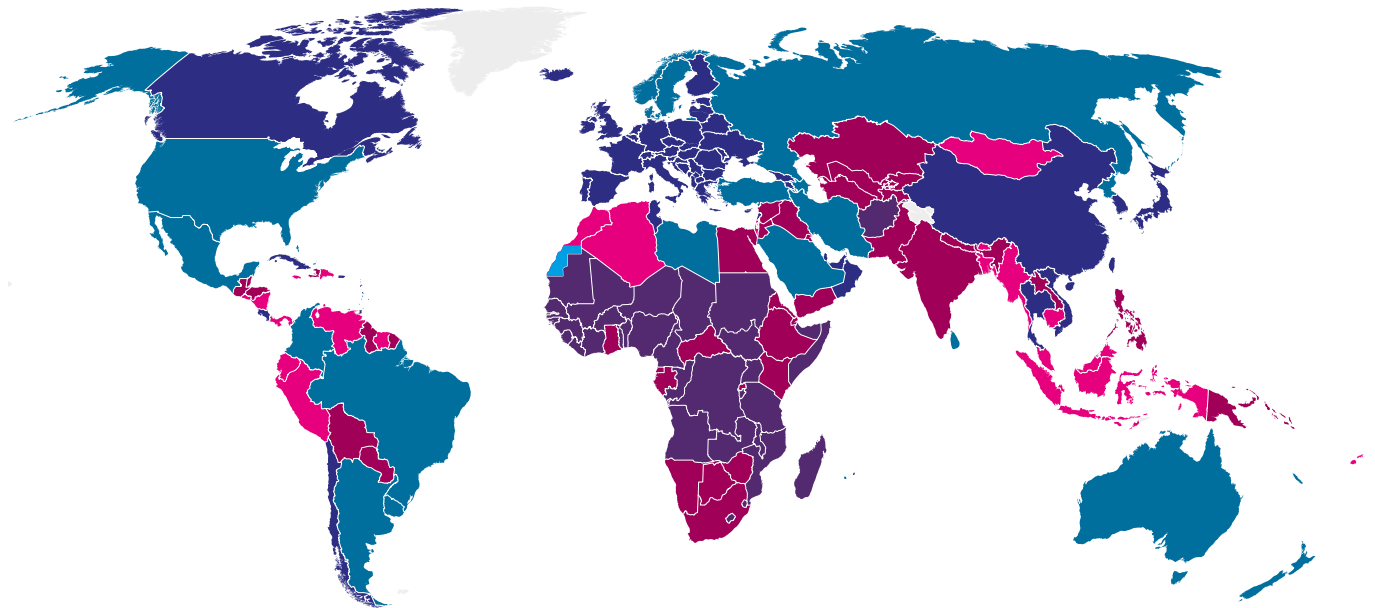


## Proportion of population aged 60-plus in 2014 and 2050

2014



2050



Source: UNDESA Population Division, World population prospects: the 2012 revision, DVD edition 2013.  
Note: the boundaries shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



**Jane Falkingham** is Professor of Demography & International Social Policy and Director of the ESRC Centre for Population Change at the University of Southampton, UK.

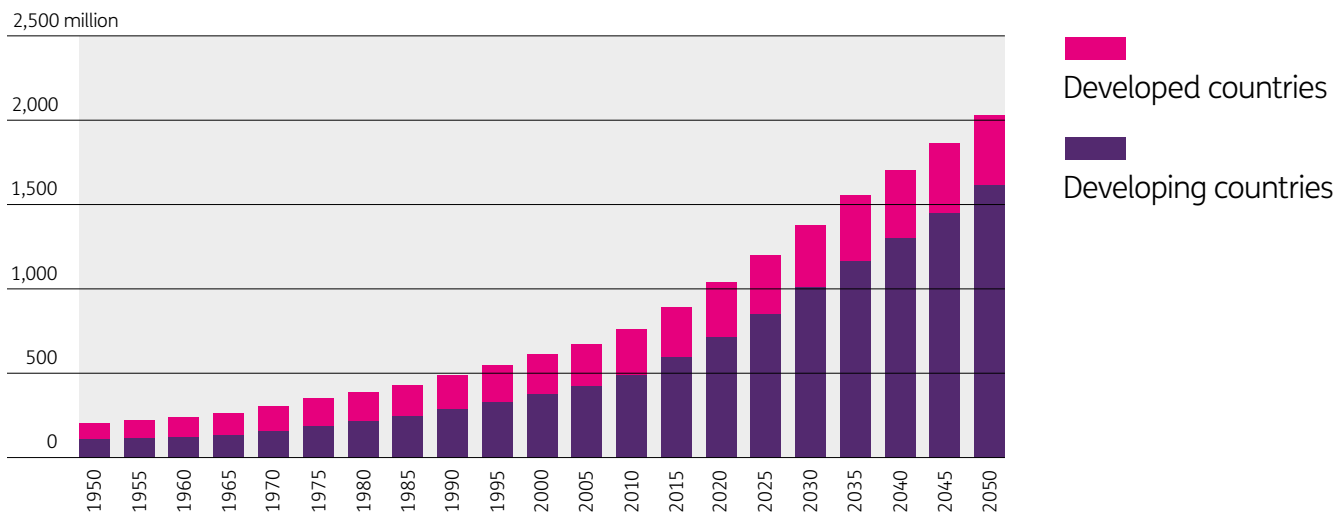
***'Population ageing is something to celebrate... it also presents challenges, particularly in those countries which have grown old before they've grown rich.'***

## The changing shape of society

The global population is ageing at an unprecedented pace, with the most rapid changes taking place in developing countries, presenting us with challenges that can no longer be ignored.

- Over the past 60 years, the size and shape of the world's population has transformed.
- The ageing of the globe is transforming society.
- By 2050, eight in 10 of the world's elders will live in low and middle-income countries.
- We need policies in place to support older people to live active, healthy lives.

Number of people aged 60 or over developed and developing countries, 1950–2050



Source: UNDESA, World Population Ageing 2011 (2012; forthcoming), based on UNDESA Population Division medium projection scenario, World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision. Note: The group of 'developed countries' corresponds to the 'more developed regions' of the World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision, and the group 'developing countries' corresponds to the 'less developed regions' of the same publication.



**Sarah Harper** is Professor of Gerontology at the University of Oxford, Director of the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing and Senior Research Fellow at Nuffield College.

## A person at any age: the elderly are people too

Mohammad, 73, from Bangladesh works as a brick-breaker. He has no contract and is paid a daily wage.



© Antonio Olmos/HelpAge International

It is often assumed that older people are less productive and less innovative than younger people but the evidence tells us that older adults have a tremendous amount to offer.

- There are growing numbers of older people, particularly in developing countries.
- Many presume that older people are less productive and less innovative.
- There is much evidence to show that older people contribute in a wide range of ways.
- We need to stop seeing older people as unproductive; they can be as capable as other adults.

*‘...from across developing countries there is evidence of the productivity, creativity, vitality and participation of older adults in workplaces, communities, households and families.’*



**Mark Gorman MBE**, is Director of Strategic Development at HelpAge International. He joined HelpAge in 1988.

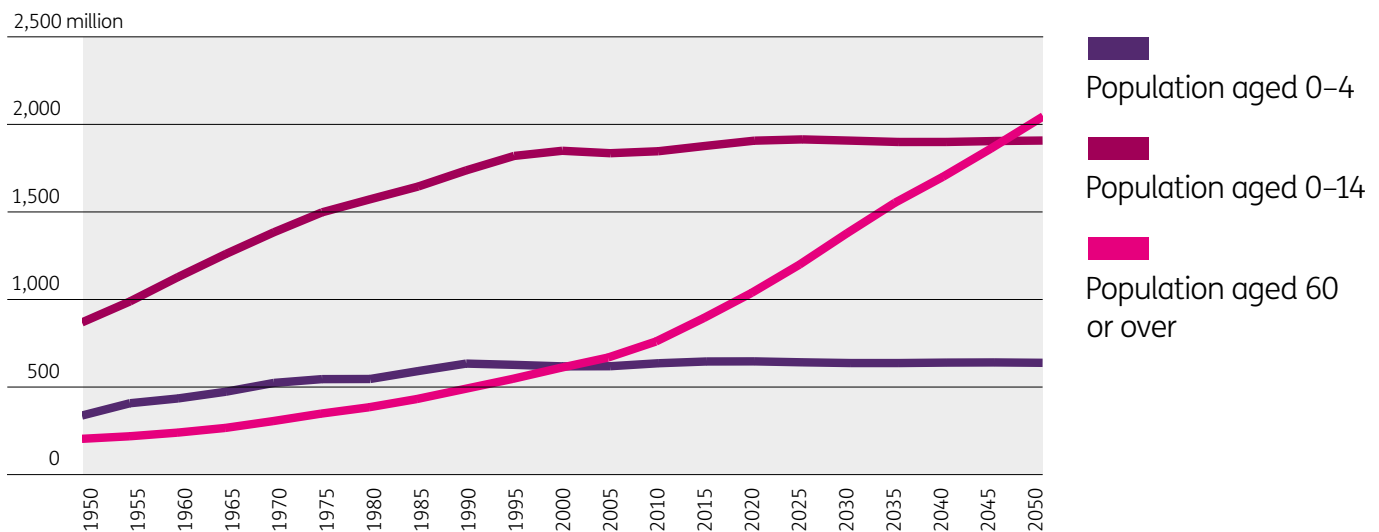
***‘We need to see ageing not as a burden but as a triumph of development, with older people not a problem but part of possible solutions.’***

## Ageing is a development fact

The success of future development efforts depends on facing up to global population ageing and maximising the benefits of longer lifespans.

- International development success means population ageing.
- We need to celebrate the success and achievement of longer lives.
- The world needs to prepare for the challenges that population ageing brings.
- International development policies that do not engage with population ageing distort our understanding of the world and hinder us from preparing for the future.

Population aged 0–4, 0–14 and aged 60 or over, 1950–2050



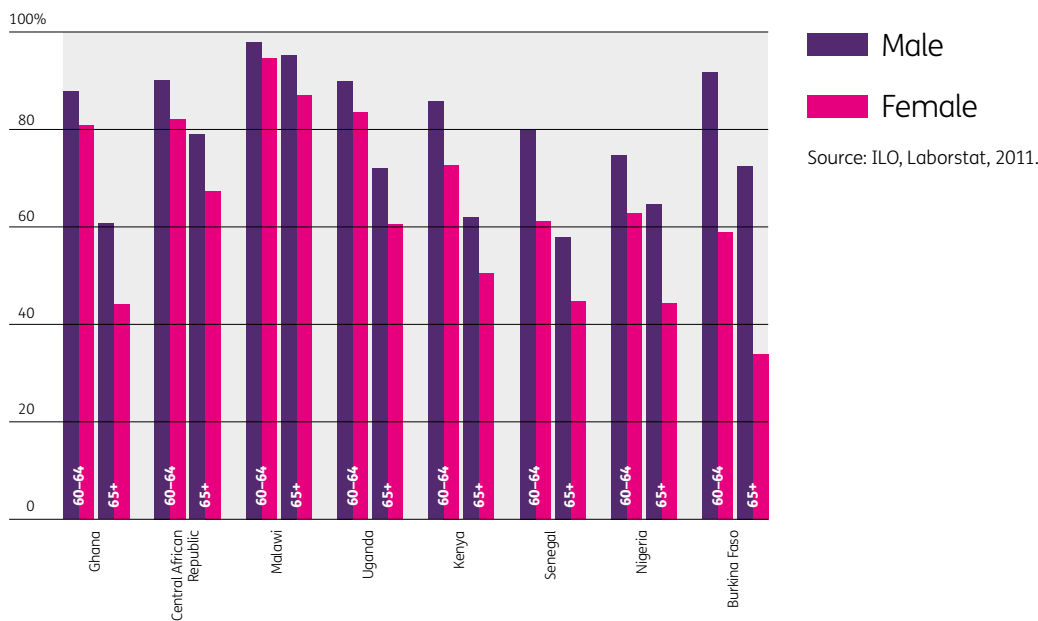
Source: UNDESA Population Division, World Population. Prospects: The 2010 Revision (New York, 2011).



**Penny Vera-Sanso PhD**, is a Senior Lecturer at Birkbeck, University of London. She has researched ageing and poverty in India for 25 years.

## Are older people a burden? Challenging the myths

Labour force participation among older people in selected African countries, 2011



Older people contribute in multiple ways, not only to their families and households, but also to the wider communities and economies in which they live.

- Old age does not equal dependency.
- Ageism blinds analysis; as there is an assumption of little or no productivity, there is no data on the diversity of work by older people.
- The value of unpaid and informal work is critical for economic growth – but invisible in analysis.
- We can't assume that older people will be provided for by family members; the state and the community must play a more significant role.

***'Older people are generally not recognised for the paid and unpaid work that they do. Instead they are thought of as dependants and burdens.'***



**Dr Isabella Aboderin** is a Senior Research Scientist and Head of the Programme on Ageing and Development at the African Population and Health Research Center (APHRC) in Nairobi, Kenya, and an Associate Professor of Gerontology at the Centre for Research on Ageing, University of Southampton.

## Older people and the future of sub-Saharan Africa

Although sub-Saharan Africa is still a primarily young region, older people's roles are essential to reaping the economic rewards of the 'youth bulge'.

- Sub-Saharan Africa's older people receive little, if any, consideration in core development agendas.
- We need to consider the diversity and marked disparities in status and well-being that exist within Africa's older population.
- Older people continue to be economically active.
- There are widespread intergenerational connections.

*'...for a certain window of time, there will be more adults of traditional working age than children and older people than is usually the case, providing greater opportunity for enhanced production, investment and saving.'*



© Antonio Olmos/HelpAge International

In Uganda, Barton (76) and Namale (56) look after their son – who has an AIDS-related illness – and their two grandchildren.



**Dr Margaret Chan** is Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), appointed by the World Health Assembly on 9 November 2006. The Assembly appointed Dr Chan for a second five-year term at its 65th session in May 2012.

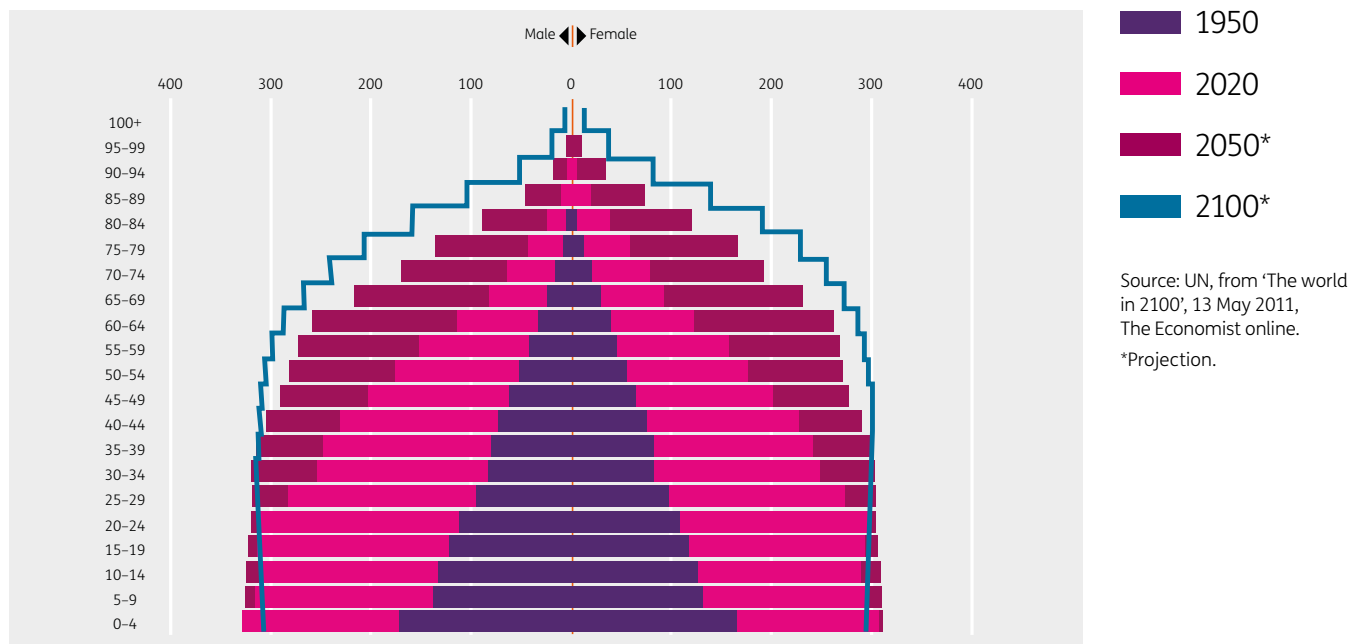
## Healthy ageing is vital to social and economic development

Older people's health is worth investing in, because being in good health could enable them to continue to make valuable contributions to their families, communities and economies for longer.

- Older people's health is worth investing in.
- In developing countries older people contribute to the economy.
- People tend to work/contribute for as long as they are able.
- Ensuring that older people stay active and healthy is crucial for keeping economies moving.

*'Current health systems, particularly in low and middle-income countries, are often poorly designed to meet the chronic care needs that arise from this complex burden of disease.'*

### World population ageing pyramid by five-year age group





**Peter Lloyd-Sherlock** is Professor of Social Policy and International Development at the School of International Development, University of East Anglia.

*'The reluctance to address the effects of conditions such as hypertension on older people in low and middle-income countries represents one of the largest public health failures in human history.'*

## Investing in health: the case of hypertension

Population ageing is driving an increase in chronic or non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and many of these conditions can be managed with the right health care; hypertension is a case in point.

- Older people's health needs are routinely neglected.
- Investing in the health of older people can be very cost-effective.
- Interventions need not be expensive or resource-intensive.
- Addressing health issues, such as hypertension in a timely manner, can bring considerable social and economic benefits.



Dr George checks the blood pressure of older people on his rounds in the mobile medical unit in India.

© Judith Escribano/Age International





**Alexandre Kalache MD PhD**, is the President of the International Longevity Centre Brazil and Global Ambassador of HelpAge International.

**Ina Voelcker** is Project Coordinator at the International Longevity Centre Brazil.

## Living longer, living well? The need for a culture of care

### Life expectancy and healthy life expectancy at 60



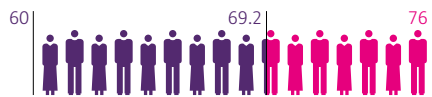
#### Japan

- Life expectancy at age 60 – 26 more years
- Healthy life expectancy at 60 – 20.3 more years



#### Turkey

- Life expectancy at age 60 – 21 more years
- Healthy life expectancy at 60 – 15.6 more years



#### Afghanistan

- Life expectancy at age 60 – 16 more years
- Healthy life expectancy at 60 – 9.2 more years

Source: Global AgeWatch Index 2014 – Insight Report, HelpAge International, 2014.

Longer life spans are a triumph of development, but unfortunately people are simply living in poor health for longer as healthy life expectancy is increasing more slowly than life expectancy.

- Healthy life expectancy is increasing globally, but not as fast as life expectancy.
- People are losing more years of healthy life to disability today than they did two decades ago.
- We now need to focus not only on death rates but also rates of illness and disability.
- Health care systems should shift resources from communicable disease to non-communicable (chronic) disease.

***'In many countries, even though the global disease burden has changed, health systems are still focused on communicable diseases and on cure.'***



**Eduardo Klien** is the East Asia/Pacific Regional Director for HelpAge International. He has more than 25 years' experience in social and economic development.

## The care challenge: experience from Asia



San, a home-based carer in Burma, visits Tin to give her massages and medicine.

© Joanne Hill/HelpAge International

***'The great successes of the 20th century of decreasing fertility and dramatically improved health and education, have led to smaller families, with fewer children to care for elders who are living longer.'***

Ageing populations have created an urgent need for health and social care, and we cannot rely on volunteers alone to provide this.

- In Asia, we see countries that are amongst the most aged in the world and others whose populations are only beginning to age.
- An urgent need for the ageing population is care (both social care and health care).
- Who provides care? There are volunteer home-based care models.
- But this should not be the only solution.



**Martin Prince** is Professor of Epidemiological Psychiatry, Head of Department of the Health Service and Population Research department, and joint-Director of the Centre for Global Mental Health.

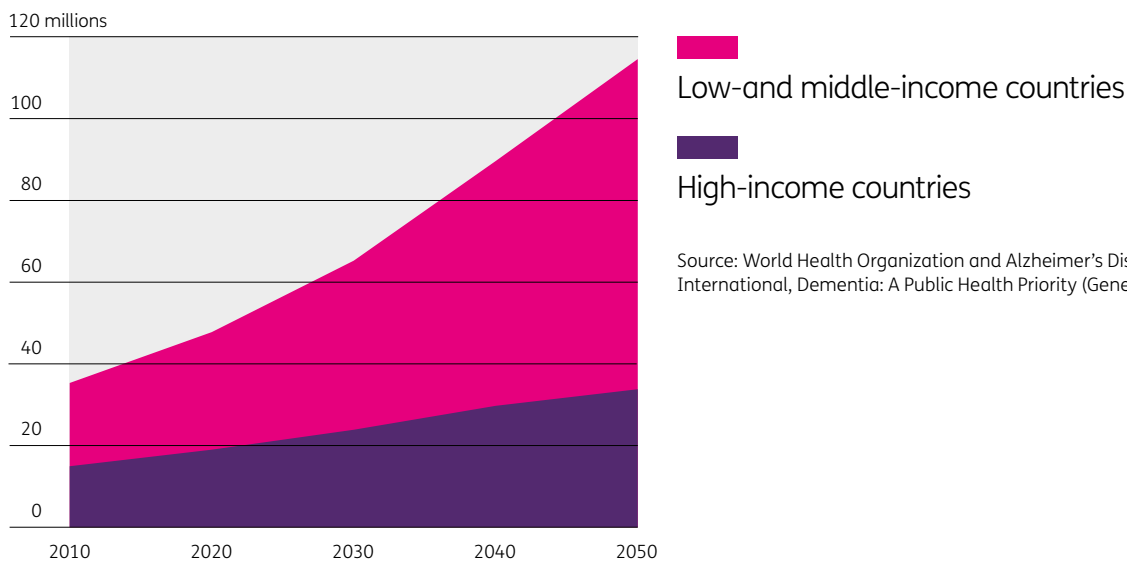
## Dementia is global

Dementia is becoming increasingly prevalent as the global population ages, particularly in developing countries, and it needs to be addressed urgently due to its economic and social impact.

- Dementia is even more of a problem in developing countries than it is in developed countries.
- However, it is possible to ‘live well with dementia’ with early intervention and the right support.
- We need to bolster traditional care systems, to supplement and support the unpaid inputs of informal carers.
- Policy makers need to prioritise this issue, anticipate the need, and develop efficient and effective integrated systems.

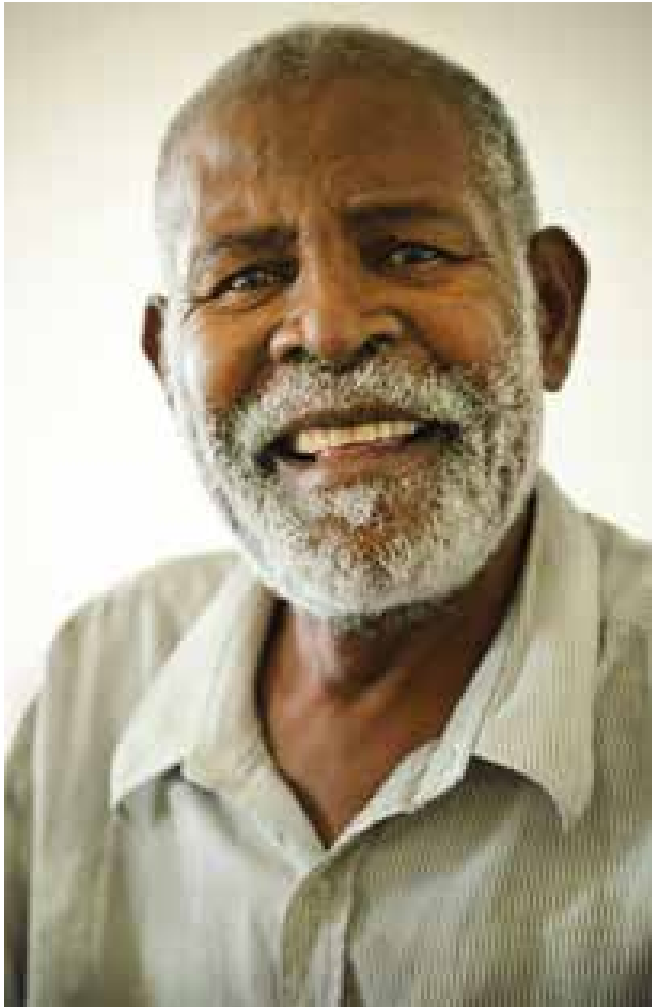
***‘The number of people with dementia worldwide will nearly double every 20 years... Nearly two-thirds of all people with dementia live in low or middle-income countries, and that is set to increase to three-quarters by 2050.’***

### Growth in numbers of people with dementia in high-income and low-and middle-income countries





**Sir Richard Jolly** is an Emeritus Fellow and Honorary Professor at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sussex.



© Frederic Dupoux/HelpAge International

Roger was treated in a geriatric ward – set up with Age International funding after the earthquake in 2010. It is the first and only geriatric ward in the country.

## Inequality and ageing

Existing inequalities compound in old age; this is a major development issue because inequality affects individuals and whole societies.

- Inequalities accrue and get reinforced over a person's life.
- Poverty, poor health, discrimination and marginalisation are common for many older people around the world.
- Inequality has significant impact on ability of countries to develop and progress.
- Older people have an important role to play in reducing inequalities.

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***'The question should now no longer be whether we address inequalities or not, but how and with what urgency.'***

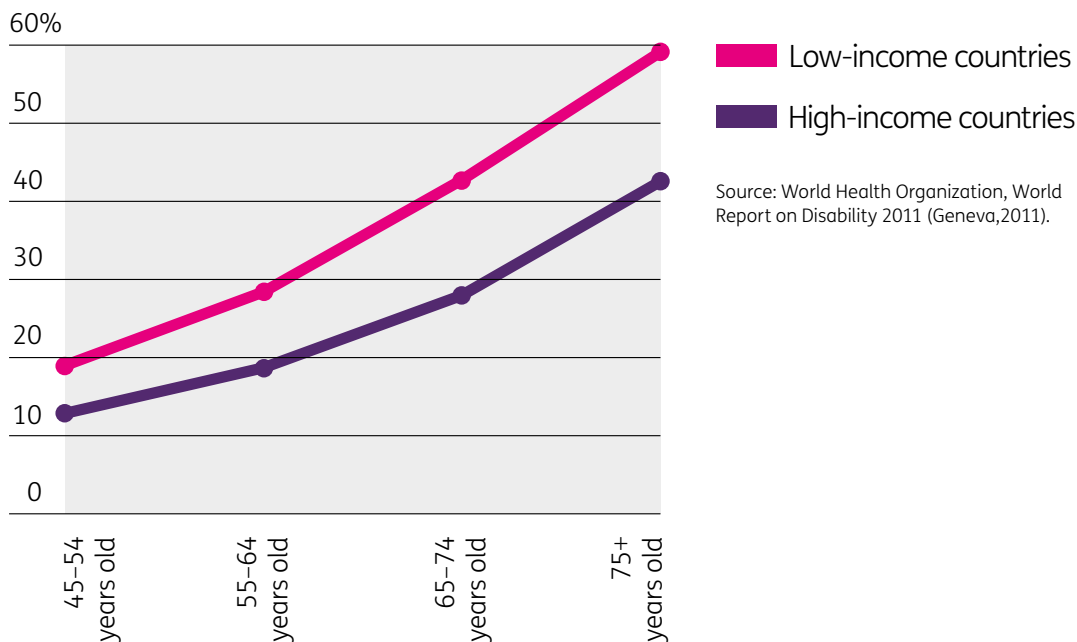
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**Professor Nora Groce** is the Leonard Cheshire Chair and Director of the Leonard Cheshire Disability and Inclusive Development Centre at University College London. An anthropologist, her research has concentrated on persons with disabilities in both developed and developing countries.

## Disability and ageing

Age-specific disability prevalence by country income level



Although not all older people have disabilities, there is a higher prevalence of disability in older people, and their potential and capacity is often under-estimated.

- Not all older people are disabled, but prevalence of disability is higher in older adults.
- Disability means a higher likelihood of poverty and isolation.
- Older, disabled people can experience compounded discrimination and poverty.
- Older disabled people often don't consider themselves as disabled, just 'old'.

*'...both disabled persons and older adults are more likely to live in profound poverty; however disabled older adults are more likely to be the poorest of the poor.'*



**Richard Morgan** is the Director of the Child Poverty Global Initiative at Save the Children. Previously, he was the Senior Advisor on the Post-2015 Development Agenda at the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

## Who is caring for the kids?



In Kenya, Lilian cares for three orphaned grandchildren and took in two boys abandoned by their alcoholic parents.

© Phil Moore/Age International

***'Addressing the rights and needs of older people is not only imperative on its own terms; it can also help realise the rights and meet the basic needs of children.'***

Children, older people and other relatives do not live in isolation from each other; their lives are intertwined and policies that help older people often also help the children in their care.

- Older people and children do not live in isolation from each other.
- Particularly in parts of Africa, high numbers of AIDS orphans are being cared for by older people.
- Pension payments benefit children as well as older people.
- But pensions should not be a substitute for focused and sustained social protection measures that ensure adequate care for children and help poor families to invest in child survival, growth and development.



**Baroness Sally Greengross OBE**, is Chief Executive of the International Longevity Centre-UK (ILC-UK) and Co-President of the ILC Global Alliance. She has devoted her career to ageing and older people.

## Understanding ageing and gender

Women are more likely to live longer than men, but they are also more likely to live out their years in poor health and to experience violence, abuse and discrimination.

- Women are more likely than men to outlive their partners, but more likely to experience poor health in later life.
- Older women experience specific types of discrimination and abuse due to both their gender and their age.
- More and better data disaggregated by age and sex would help improve appropriate programmes and laws.
- Policy makers must include older women in all efforts to achieve gender equality.

*‘...as women in some societies lack access to property rights, a woman who becomes widowed may find herself turned out of her home. A combination of age and sex discrimination also puts older women at increased risk of violence.’*

Peruvian Octavia, an 80 year old widow, has to work on her farm every day because she has no pension.



© Antonio Olmos/HelpAge International



**Mary Robison** is a member of The Elders, a group of independent global leaders working together for peace and human rights. She was the first woman President of Ireland and is a former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

*'It is a sad irony at a time when the world has more older people than ever before – living longer with even greater wisdom and experience to offer – that they are often not respected as they have been in the past.'*

## Experience, dignity, respect

Although there are more older people than ever before, they are not respected as they should be and their rights need more protection.

- Every person has the right to live with dignity at any age.
- Society should value people at any age.
- Older people's experience and their contribution to society used to be valued and respected.
- Even if they become frail, older people have rights and need to be shown respect.



Domador Dahal, 72, is the treasurer of a local Older People's Association in Nepal.

© Sarah Hertzog/HelpAge International





**Craig Mokhiber** currently heads the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Development and Economic and Social Issues branch in Geneva.

## The human rights of older persons: international law's grey area

In Tanzania, Mageni was accused of being a witch, partly due to her age. She survived a vicious machete attack.



© Judith Escribano/Age International

The rights of older people are often neglected and an International Convention on the Rights of Older People is needed to protect them from vulnerability, exclusion and discrimination.

- Human rights should be equally respected across all age groups.
- It is essential that decision makers ensure their plans are rooted in rights for all people of all ages.
- Each and every person should be seen as an individual.
- A convention would strengthen the rights of older people that are not sufficiently protected by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

***'The Universal Declaration of Human Rights explicitly prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, not a word about age.'***



**Claire Melamed:** director of the Growth, Poverty and Inequality Programme at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI).

**Emma Samman:** Research Fellow at ODI.

**Laura Rodriguez Takeuchi:** Research Officer at ODI.

## Data means action



© Peter Caton/HelpAge International

When carrying out surveys following natural disasters, such as Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, Age International always ensures that older people are counted.

***'More inclusive data collection is not just a question of making technical adjustments to data collection instruments – it will require greater resources and/or capacity for data collection, and the political will to ensure that older people are counted.'***

More and better data is needed in order to understand the experiences of people of all ages and respond in the right way.

- There is an urgent need to address the gaps in data about older people.
- The concentration on younger age groups has effectively made older people invisible to policy makers around the world.
- Existing household surveys can be adapted to cover the whole household, including older people.
- National household surveys should address the issues affecting older people (in the information they collect and in the reporting of their findings).



**Armando Barrientos** is Professor and Research Director at the Brooks World Poverty Institute, University of Manchester. His most recent book is *Social Assistance in Developing Countries* (2013, CUP).

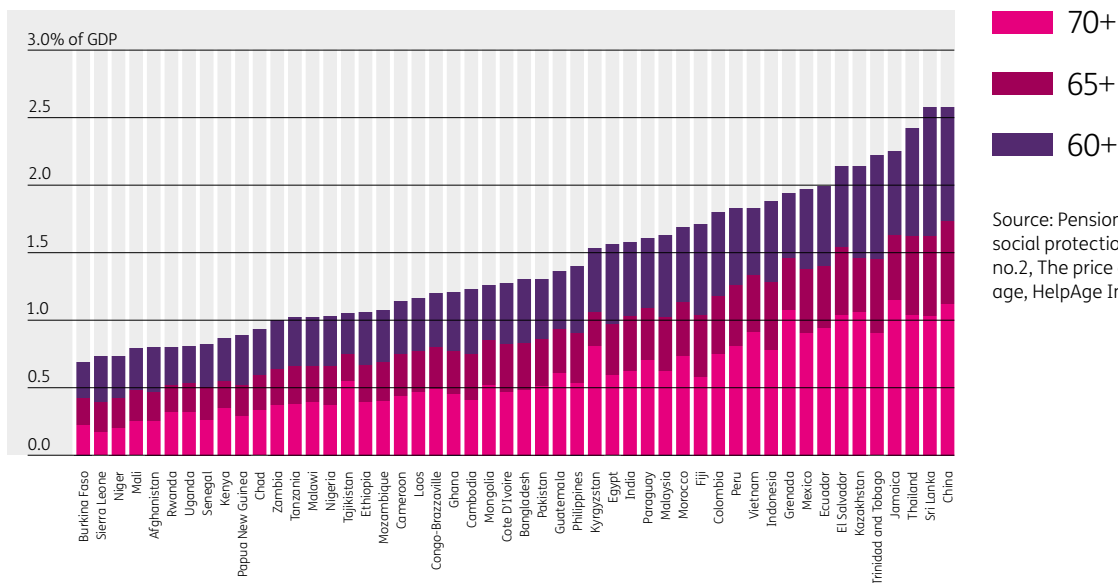
## Ensuring income security in old age

Providing older people with non-contributory pensions not only gives individuals security but also helps bolster economies and protect families.

- Population ageing will transform income security in old age.
- Introducing non-contributory pensions is an alternative to the ‘Bismarckian’ model.
- Pensions benefit all generations.
- No pension system will fix inadequate discriminatory labour market policies and access to services.

*‘Today, pension schemes are the largest component of social expenditure in high income countries and don’t necessarily provide a blueprint model for addressing the income security needs of older people in other economic contexts.’*

### Cost of a universal pension in 50 low-and middle-income countries



Source: Pension watch briefings on social protection in older age, Briefing no.2, The price of income security in older age, HelpAge International, March 2011.



**Sir Brendan Gormley KCMG MBE**, is an international development consultant, advising the UK Government on natural hazard risk. He also serves as Chair of the CDAC Network and Chair of the INGO Accountability Charter Company.

***‘There is a need to recognise that the needs of older people are different from those of children or the more able-bodied.’***

## Older people in emergencies

Older people are particularly vulnerable in emergencies and states that we need to act now to ensure their needs are adequately met in responses.

- Humanitarian relief is supposed to help those who are most in need, but frequently it excludes them.
- Assistance is often not suitable for older people’s needs and they often get left behind.
- Climate change is leading to an increasing frequency of emergency situations, and population ageing means the number of older people affected is growing fast.
- Mainstream emergency responses should be age-tested as well as gender-tested, and monitored to make sure they are up to standard for people of all ages.



After fleeing the conflict in Syria, Ahmed then faced a further challenge when he reached Lebanon: finding more insulin when his ran out.

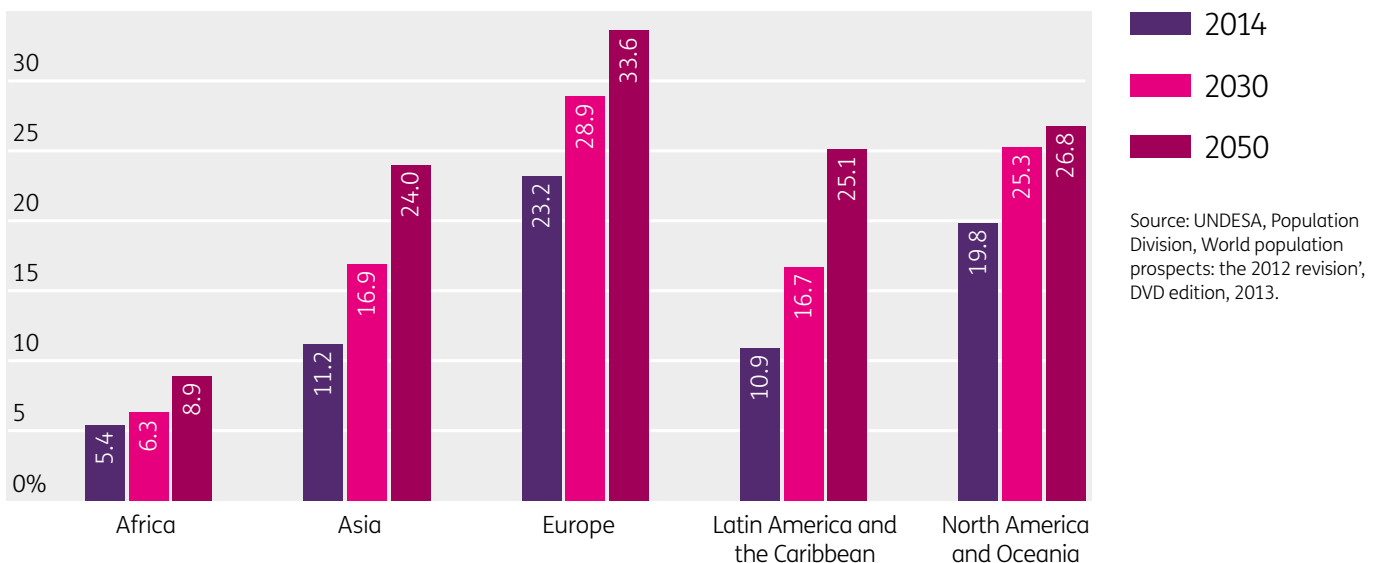
© Lydia de Leeuw/Handicap International



**Ken Bluestone** is the Political and Policy Adviser for Age International and leads the organisation's international influencing work.

## 2020 vision: facing the future of development

Proportion of population aged 60-plus by region in 2014, 2030 and 2050



As the global population rapidly ages, we have no time to lose in protecting older people's rights, harnessing their contributions and meeting their needs; measures which will benefit all of us.

- We are all ageing, and this requires action.
- Older people's rights are often not recognised and need further explicit protection.
- Older people are part of an intergenerational community of people who all have demands and make contributions.
- Addressing the specific needs that older people have will benefit the whole society.

***'Despite the obvious achievement that being old signifies, decision makers often give short shrift to the notion that spending money on people in later life is an investment in development.'***



**Blandina**, is an older people's activist in Kibaha, Tanzania. After receiving non-communicable disease training from Age International's local partner, the Good Samaritans, she set up an Older People's Association (OPA) in her community.

*'I decided to become an activist for older people because I saw that older people were being forgotten and their rights were being ignored.'*

## Why I am an activist for older people

Blandina Mbaji, an older people's activist in Kibaha, Tanzania, explains why she became an activist; how older people's rights are routinely ignored; what governments need to do to start addressing the issues faced by older citizens in their own countries.

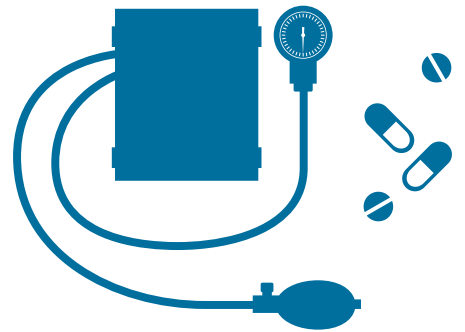
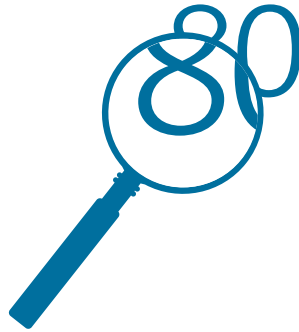
'Firstly, older people should have the right to be recognised and acknowledged as people. Secondly, they should be allowed to participate in decision-making processes. Thirdly, they should have the right to universal health care. And finally, older people should have the right to receive seed capital so they can set up their own small businesses to support themselves.

Older people are forgotten. Children have a department and a ministry; women have a department and a ministry; but older people have no place. They are not even recognised as a group of people who not only have value, but can also be vulnerable.

Their issues are not brought to parliament. When politicians talk about how a country can develop, they talk about other age groups; they don't even mention older people. So we have to advocate for older people so politicians can do something to help us.'

# Endnotes

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