

Critical choices in developing comprehensive policy frameworks on ageing in Asia and the Pacific

Overview

- Governments in the Asia and Pacific region need up-to-date national policies, plans and laws on ageing in order to address the needs of older people and be prepared for the effects of demographic change on their societies and economies.
- Three broad types of national instruments on ageing are common in Asia and the Pacific:
 - A *national policy on ageing* outlines a government's broad vision for older people and ageing, identifies the key opportunities and challenges, and proposes how to address them. Ideally it should be introduced first.
 - A *national action plan* or strategy, accompanying or combined with a policy document, details how each policy objective will be achieved.
 - *Legislation* on ageing provides an important binding force to underpin policy.
- A national policy on ageing must be based on the country's context and the issues affecting older people who live there, so governments should begin by collecting data and conducting a situation analysis. This analysis should cover the situation of older people but also the trends and implications of population ageing.
- A country's policy should identify an overarching national vision and principles for older people and ageing, as well as reference the government's national, regional and international commitments on ageing.
- A national policy on ageing should lay out clear policy goals and objectives, embracing all major thematic areas related to later life. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing structures these thematic issues around three pillars: older persons and development; advancing health and well-being into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments.
- A critical element for every policy on ageing is participatory stakeholder consultation throughout the policy process, especially with older women and men themselves.
- Arrangements for the implementation and monitoring of a national policy on ageing must be clear. Each country should have a national focal point on ageing. The policy or an accompanying action plan should specify how the country will achieve its aims and measure its progress.



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This policy brief provides an overview on the need for countries in the Asia and Pacific region to put in place comprehensive policy frameworks on ageing, including laws, policies, action plans and other instruments. This is aimed at governments and advocates for ageing and emerges from collaboration between HelpAge International and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

Why develop or revise a policy on ageing?

Governments in Asia and the Pacific should urgently consider whether they need to adopt or revise national policies, plans and laws on ageing because countries need to be prepared for the impact of demographic change on their societies and economies. Aside from future scenarios, today's older generation is a potentially vulnerable group, so governments should provide a clear vision and specific course of action to meet their needs.

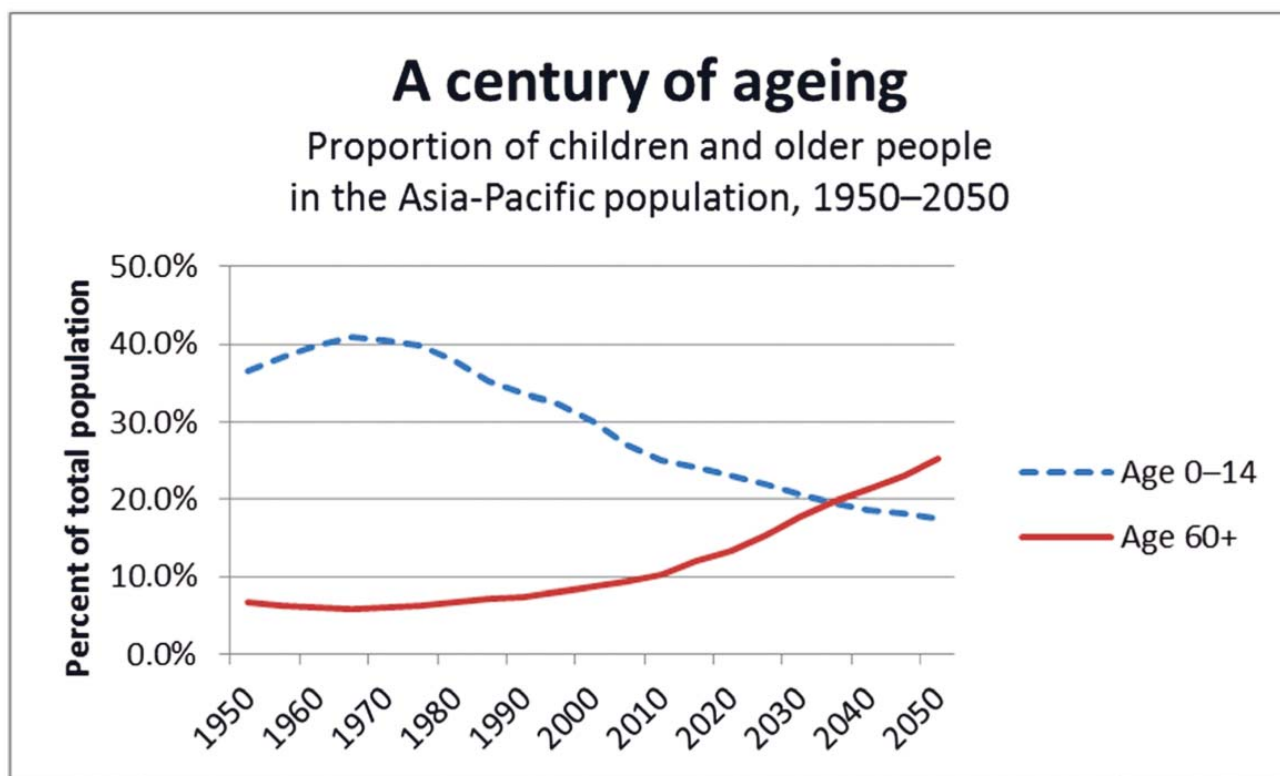
Population ageing is being driven by lower birth rates and an increase in life expectancy, and some of the most rapidly ageing populations in the world are found in this region. Even countries with lower rates of population ageing, such as India or the Philippines, have very large and growing populations of older people. While Western nations have had decades to adapt to shifting demographics, the ageing of Asian populations is taking place in a compressed time period, often within a single generation. As the chart below shows, before 2040 older people (60 years and older) will account for a larger share of the region's total population than children (aged 0–14).¹ The oldest old (aged 80 and older), predominantly women, will form an ever-larger part of the older population. This group is the most likely to need care for chronic illness and disability.

At the same time, accelerating rural-urban migration resulting from economic change and globalisation means that older persons are now less likely than in the

past to live with or nearby their adult children. The trend towards smaller and more scattered families implies that households in the future will have fewer members available to contribute practically or financially towards the care of parents and grandparents as they age. This trend also means that countries unprepared for this shift may face challenges in financing services and benefits for the growing number of older people.

These emerging ruptures in traditional patterns of life have profound policy implications and bring challenges – but also opportunities. Good policy can help to capture the resources and contributions that older people offer to their families and society. These contributions include using the skills acquired over a lifetime to continue working in later life, providing community leadership, and caring for grandchildren so that younger adults in the household can be economically productive. Governments can put in place policies to maximise those contributions, for example, by expanding employment opportunities in later life, encouraging lifelong learning and promoting healthy ageing.

If the government can manage and take best advantage of the inevitable social changes, the country's future development will be on a stronger foundation.



1. Table based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*, 2015, custom data acquired via website. Medium variant. Includes sub-regions of Eastern Asia, Southern Asia, South-eastern Asia and Oceania.

What types of policy instruments are needed?

Three broad types of national instruments on ageing are common in Asia and the Pacific: policies, action plans and legislation. They are described here along with examples of good practice. Ideally they should be introduced in each country in this sequence, starting with a national policy. Policy frameworks need to be comprehensive and take into account the need for multi-sectoral action.

National policy on ageing: The policy on ageing outlines a government's broad vision for older people and ageing. It also identifies the key opportunities and challenges and defines how to address them. There is no set format for a national policy on ageing, but as discussed later, it should:

- be set within evidence-based analysis of the *national context*
- reference national, regional and international *commitments*
- articulate a *national vision and core principles* related to ageing and older people
- set clear *policy goals and objectives* appropriate for a country's context
- take into account other *related policies and laws*
- ensure that *arrangements for implementation* are clearly specified.

Example:

The Fiji National Policy on Ageing 2011–15 reviews the country's demographic and socio-economic situation in relation to ageing and explains the government's vision for older people and ageing within this context. It also sets the policy within the context of international and regional frameworks on ageing and references them in relation to the policy's key principles. This is followed by a detailed outline of the policy's goals and objectives.



Action plan or strategy on ageing: Accompanying or combined with a policy document, a national action plan or strategy details how each policy objective will be achieved. It specifies the responsibilities of various actors, additional instruments required such as legal or regulatory frameworks, financial and human resources required for implementation, monitoring and evaluation frameworks, and a realistic timeframe. This instrument is crucial for the successful implementation of policy and forms the basis for assessing budgetary allocations.

Example:

Thailand's Second National Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021), revised in 2009, includes an implementation strategy for each policy objective. Each policy measure within a strategy is outlined alongside the responsibilities of specific bodies for implementation, indices for measuring outcomes of the policy measure, and clear targets with dates. It also outlines the process for regular review of the Plan, including the establishment of a responsible committee and how the findings will be used.

Legislation on ageing: Laws provide a binding force to underpin policy. Such legislation is important for securing older people's rights and entitlements; budget allocations; lines of responsibility and accountability for policy; and the establishment, functions and operations of related institutions and funds. Complementary documents should provide more detailed implementation arrangements related to legislation, such as regulations and guidance.

Examples:

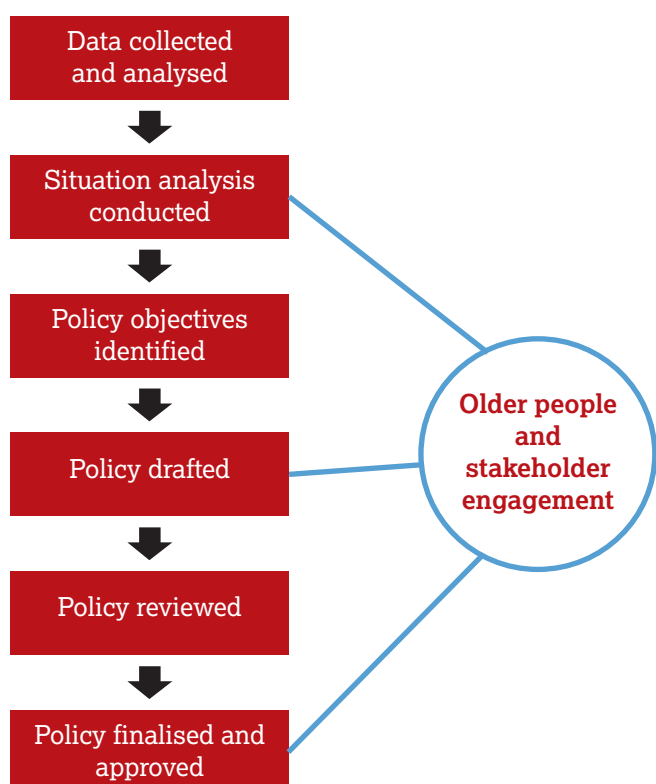
China's National Law on Protecting the Rights of Older Persons (1996, revised in 2012) provides a legal framework for the family's responsibilities for older people, as well as the rights to social security, social and medical services, and a welcoming and participatory social environment. The Nepal Senior Citizens Act (2006) provides a legal framework for the establishment of a Senior Citizens Welfare Committee and Senior Citizens Welfare Fund. India's Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act (2007) lays out simple and inexpensive mechanisms for protecting the life and property of older persons.

It is good practice to *adopt a combination of these instruments*, because they serve different purposes. In the Asia and Pacific region, the terms ‘policy’ and ‘action plan’ are often used interchangeably, and many such documents are similar in content. In some cases, an action plan is built into a policy document. For example, the Philippines National Plan of Action for Senior Citizens 2006–2010 merged the key elements of a policy document and a plan of action. While merging

instruments is not necessarily a problem, the critical functions described above should somehow be covered by the country’s mix of instruments.

The *time period* covered by such documents varies, although five years is common. Longer term strategic plans may cover up to 20 years and could be implemented through a series of five-year plans. It is useful to align the timeframe with wider national, regional or international review processes.

How should the policy be developed?



As illustrated above, the policy development process has several main stages. At all stages of the process, but especially those marked in the diagram, it is vital to engage with stakeholder groups, particularly older men and women.² Bottom-up stakeholder participation enables policy to be tailored to reality, improving its chance of success; allows expertise and a wide range of perspectives to be captured; and builds political legitimacy and support. Wide stakeholder participation also implies comprehensive and multi-sectoral action, not only limited to the actors who routinely work on ageing.

Example:

In Thailand, the process used for revising the Second National Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021) in 2009 was informed by findings of the National Committee on the Elderly’s monitoring and evaluation of progress to date in implementing the Plan. This included a review of outcome measurements and extensive stakeholder engagement at the national, provincial and local level, including delegates from older people’s organisations. A wide range of data sources was reviewed, including the national survey on older people conducted the previous year, government data and academic research.

Collecting data to support an analysis of the country’s situation

Policy is made within specific social, economic, political and cultural contexts that influence the choices made and the processes by which plans are implemented. A national policy on ageing must therefore be based on a sound understanding of the country’s context and issues. A wide range of data, disaggregated by age and sex, should be collected and analysed.³ The policy should respond to not only the *situation of older persons* but also *population ageing*; they are related but not the same. That is, in addition to addressing the needs of today’s older citizens, governments should anticipate how demographic ageing trends in the country will affect the entire society and economy over time.

2. MIPAA attached priority to consultation with older women and men in assessing the implementation and impact of policies and plans. United Nations, *Guidelines for the Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Bottom-up Participatory Approach, 2006*, <http://undesadspd.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=yBeXlt-ApZ8%3d&tabid=333>

3. Guidance on how research and data should be used in the policy process is provided in *The Research Agenda on Ageing for the Twenty-First Century, 2007* and in the *Guidelines for Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2006*.

Situation of older persons: In presenting the situation of older persons, the policy document should reflect awareness that they are not a homogeneous group. Most ageing policies and plans in the region go beyond a simple chronological definition of old age and examine the wide range of capacities and circumstances of older people – not only their vulnerabilities but also their capacity to contribute. Some dimensions of this discussion include:

- **Age:** Starting with chronological age and following the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA 2002), most governments define ‘older persons’ as men and women who are aged 60 years and older. Some countries, such as Mongolia and Iran, set the threshold at age 65. The country’s definition of older people should be guided by average life expectancy but also by healthy life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy. Reflecting the social, functional and health determinants of ageing, the older population is often sub-divided into two or three age groups.

Examples:

The Sri Lanka National Policy for Senior Citizens (2006) identifies three age groups: ‘oldest old’ who are 80 years and older (10 per cent of the older population); the ‘old old’ aged 70–79 years (30 per cent); and the ‘young old’ aged 60–69 years (60 per cent). This disaggregation allows for a more accurate analysis of the situation of older people and helps inform policy responses. In most countries the oldest old, who face greater risk of health complications and disability, are the smallest but fastest growing group. The Cook Islands National Policy on Ageing (2012–2017) notes common variations in socio-economic status by age. Many people aged between 60 and 70 are still independent and active, but after age 70 dependency often increases. Those aged 80 and older are at risk of increased health problems and other sources of vulnerability.

- **Gender:** Women on average live longer than men, so there are more older women than older men in nearly all countries of the region. The gender disaggregation of data is essential to capture the different ways in which women and men experience older age and the impact of different life experiences. Women generally report poorer health than men in old age and are also much more likely than men to be widowed. They are also, on average, less educated and more likely to be financially dependent.

Example:

The India National Policy for Senior Citizens (2011) recognises that many older women have suffered a lifetime of discrimination and often have a lower social, educational and health status than men, especially if widowed. The India policy therefore prioritised older women in a number of ways, such as through support provided to older women’s associations and health check-ups. Many national ageing policies in the region address issues related to older women but may not be backed up with nuanced analysis of how ageing affects women and men differently.

- **Intersecting vulnerabilities:** Age and gender as well as health, disability, ethnicity, location, education and especially socio-economic status are all characteristics that shape how people experience later life. Access to income through formal or informal work, pensions or other benefits, assets, savings and family support are important aspects of the socio-economic status of older women and men. A comprehensive understanding of these characteristics, and how they intersect to create multiple disadvantages for some groups, can enable policy to be better targeted to meet the diversity of needs. When developing ageing policies it is therefore good practice to disaggregate data to identify vulnerabilities within the older population, guide targeting and monitor impact.

Examples:

The Second Bangladesh National Policy for Older Persons (2013) takes into consideration potential intersecting vulnerabilities, including the specific needs of older people in indigenous communities and those impacted by HIV/AIDS or climate change. In response, the Policy includes specific objectives to address and mitigate these vulnerabilities. Another example is Thailand’s Plan, which tracks intersecting vulnerabilities to monitor the impact of the policy on specific groups of older people – for example, access to community based care for older people with disabilities.



Teerapong Laptwan/HelpAge International

Population ageing: In responding to the unique national context, policies on ageing should take a wider societal perspective and address the challenges and opportunities associated with population ageing. For example, this means analysing the population dynamics of the country, anticipating how the nature of old age will change in the future, and considering how such trends will affect perceptions of ageing in the society.

- **Population dynamics:** Although the primary purpose of a national ageing policy is to address the challenges and opportunities facing older people, these should be understood within a context of population ageing and how population dynamics impact more widely on society. These population dynamics include trends in population growth, fertility, longevity, epidemiology, gender, urbanisation and migration. An understanding of major shifts in a country, such as the stage of the demographic or epidemiological transition, should underpin national ageing policies and also inform population-wide policy such as national development plans, national social protection strategies and health policy. This type of analysis can help avoid assumptions based on popular misperceptions and stereotypes, such as that older people are typically dependent or always treated with respect.

Examples:

Although most national ageing policies do not consider the impact of population ageing on society in depth, the Mongolia National Strategy for Population Ageing (2009) flags two issues that require separate analysis and strategic responses: preparing for population ageing and improving the livelihood of older people. The Sri Lanka National Policy for Senior Citizens (2006) analyses the social, economic and political consequences of population ageing and the impact of international migration on the poor and disadvantaged. This analysis of the consequences of ageing leads to policy objectives on the fuller integration of older people into society.

- **The changing nature of old age:** An analysis of the situation of current older people is insufficient for developing ageing policies, which should be anticipating the future. For example, substantial social change may result from shrinking family sizes, expanding incomes or savings, migration, improved welfare benefits, changing health profiles or access to information and technology. Therefore, it is important to consider the characteristics and changing needs of today's younger cohorts in preparing for the needs of future generations of older people, as well as how these might be positively influenced, for example, by adopting policies that promote better health across the life-course.

Examples:

The Islamic Republic of Iran's draft National Strategic Plan for the Elderly (2013) highlights some differences expected between current and subsequent generations of older people, for example those resulting from increasing levels of literacy and education. Many ageing policies in the region address health across the life-course and healthy ageing.

- **Perceptions of ageing:** The ways in which people experience old age are defined also by the socio-cultural perceptions of ageing, the status of older men and women, and the ways these are changing. Positive perceptions of old age have a beneficial effect on life in old age. Addressing negative stereotypes of ageing is an important component of national ageing policies and plans as it promotes the inclusion of older people in communities and the recognition of their contribution. At the same time it can reduce the risks of isolation and challenge age discrimination. It is also vital to ensure that older persons themselves perceive later life positively.

Examples:

The Mongolia, Thailand, India and Myanmar national ageing plans recognise the importance of fostering positive views of old age and improving attitudes towards older people. The Sri Lanka National Policy for Senior Citizens (2006) recognises the importance of raising awareness of ageing and nurturing positive values. Its strategy for this includes promoting positive images of ageing through mass media and formal and informal education, and mobilising community leaders as change agents. It also promotes projects that foster intergenerational learning and that highlight the abilities of active, creative and productive older people.

Identifying policy objectives

Policy objectives should emerge from a national vision for older people and ageing and be set within a framework of commitments accepted by the government.

National, regional and international commitments: The formulation of national ageing policies should be based on a thorough review of national, regional and international instruments relevant to older people, especially those that have been signed and ratified by the state. Referencing such policy foundations and commitments helps to ensure that all critical issues are covered and that best practice and international obligations are embedded in policy design. Aligning

policy with these instruments also aids in monitoring and evaluating progress and sharing lessons across countries.

Important country documents to reference include the national constitution as well as existing legislation, policies and plans relevant to older people, including sectoral policies such as health and social welfare policies. At the international level, a Convention on the Rights of Older People is under consideration by the United Nations but not yet approved. In the meantime, an essential international instrument is the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing along with its subsequent regional reviews of progress. Other documents include the United Nations Principles for Older Persons (General Assembly resolution 46/91, 1991) and relevant international human rights instruments agreed by the government, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Regional bodies such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also develop important documents related to old age.

Aside from broad international mandates on ageing, the policy document should also refer to any sectoral plans or strategies it aims to align with. At the international level, for example, this might include the World Health Organization's policy frameworks and action plans on active ageing or age-friendly cities.

Example:

The Philippines National Plan of Action for Senior Citizens (2006–2010) recalls the commitments made by the state in signing the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, the subsequent Shanghai Implementation Strategy, and the UN Principles for Older Persons. It sets its goals and priorities in line with those documents. It also references the 1987 Constitution and relevant laws and presidential proclamations. Finally, it refers to administrative orders related to social welfare, health, and education, housing, transport, agriculture, trade and industry. This approach enables the ageing policy to be aligned with sectoral policies and implementation to be coordinated with various ministries.

National vision and principles: The policy's objectives should be based on an overarching vision of older people and ageing and some guiding principles. The government's vision should be framed within the discussion of the country's demographic and socio-economic situation in relation to ageing. The Fiji National Policy on Ageing 2011–15 explains the government's vision for older people and ageing within the national context, in a section titled 'Rationale for the

Policy'. Its vision statement is 'An inclusive society that instils dignity, respect for human rights and meets basic needs through empowerment of older persons'.

The vision should be linked to some fundamental principles that reflect the society's perspective. These principles should also provide the framework for mainstreaming ageing into national or sectoral policies. In many cases they capture the national governments' overall orientation or philosophy on ageing and older people. These are some of the most important principles to consider:

- **Recognising and protecting the rights of older men and women:** A definition of these rights should reference national and international instruments including human rights conventions and ageing specific instruments. The right to food, shelter, income, health, security, learning, cultural and political participation, and freedom from violence and abuse are rights most typically guaranteed by the national ageing policies in the region. Rights to autonomy and non-discrimination in old age, as well as related principles of inclusion and participation, should also be considered. The purpose of taking a rights-based approach in policy and legislation on ageing is to clearly identify specific rights, empower older men and women to claim them, and identify the actors and their responsibilities and actions necessary to fulfil these rights.

Example:

A declaration of rights should be paired with ways to access them. The Plan for Development of Elderly Programmes in China during the Twelfth Five-Year Plan Period (2011–2015) articulates the need to improve the mechanisms for protecting legal rights and providing legal services to older people.

- **Establishing how responsibility should be shared among the state, the individual and the family:** The majority of national ageing policies in the region emphasise the importance of the family and the responsibilities of children to respect their parents and also to provide for their socio-economic security and care in later life. In light of rapidly changing population dynamics, however, continuing to rely as heavily on traditional family arrangements may not be feasible and may be insufficient for protecting older people's rights. These questions should be resolved by each country based on a national discussion and evidence-based analysis of the context. Communities, including older people's groups, can facilitate the social participation and well-being of older people. The role of the state in safeguarding and protecting all older men and women should be clear and go well beyond basic responsibilities such as assisting older people who are not able to care for themselves or have no family support.

Examples:

Some national ageing policies, including those of Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Bangladesh, India and the Philippines, promote the involvement of communities in supporting older men and women. Promoting community engagement includes the development of older people's organisations. Policies in the region frame family obligations in varying ways. Vietnam's Law on the Elderly (2009) states that it is the right of older people to choose not to live with their family if they want to live separately. This is a recognition that the right of older men and women to independence and autonomy needs to be considered within the context of family responsibility and changing population dynamics.

- **Addressing the needs but also maximising the contributions of older persons:** Older people are often seen in terms of their needs and frailties, or even as a problem or burden for societies, and their contributions may not be highlighted.⁴ The policy should seek to balance perceptions, reframing the discussion about ageing in a more positive light and affirming reciprocal obligations. Many countries in the region, including India for example, are experiencing ageing of their population at the same time as an increase in the number of young people (the so-called 'youth bulge'). A perception of increased competition between young and old generations should be countered by promoting societal harmony and equity and minimising the risks of intergenerational conflict – building a 'society for all ages'.

Examples:

The Thailand Second National Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021), revised in 2009, and Sri Lanka's National Charter for Senior Citizens and National Policy for Senior Citizens (2006) are particularly strong in promoting this perspective across their national ageing policies. Thailand describes older people as an asset to society and Sri Lanka describes them as a resource for the family and the community, and as consumers but also as producers. Both policies mention the importance of investing in older people to maximise their well-being and their ability to contribute to society.

Policy goals and objectives: The policy on ageing should outline each objective consecutively, giving an explanation of the problem and how the policy aims to address it. The plan of action can then complement the policy by providing implementation details and targets. National ageing policies should embrace all major thematic areas related to later life. A broad document promotes joined-up policy and helps to streamline a country's approach to ageing.

While each country's policy development process will identify unique priorities for ageing, there are a number of critical issues and questions that should be considered in each thematic area. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing structures these issues around three pillars:

- **Older persons and development:** This includes topics such as work, social protection, lifelong learning and humanitarian response. For example, the national ageing policy should consider how older men and women could be supported to remain economically active for as long as they desire. As the vast majority of older people in this region live in rural areas and depend on farming, it is important to address agriculture and other informal work. To improve income security, the policy needs to consider which social protection measures to adopt, such as social (non-contributory) pensions and other forms of social assistance and social insurance, as well as employment and employability.

Examples:

National ageing policy can articulate a right to income security in old age, but implementation details of pensions schemes are often captured in separate legislation. Pension designs in China and across the region facilitate a flexible transition from an economically active to a less economically active life, including for example an increase in the amount of the pension for the oldest old as promoted by China, Thailand and India. The national ageing policies and laws can also assist with setting a flexible retirement policy.

- **Advancing health and well-being into old age:** Health is often the sector with the most in-depth policy provisions, yet wide variation exists between countries by specific issue – for example, mental health, HIV/AIDS or nutrition. The national ageing policy should encompass health promotion and healthy ageing, self-care and access to adequate and affordable health care. All countries in the region face a significant rise in non-communicable diseases and

4. For example, a common indicator used for policy planning is the 'dependency ratio', which represents the number of people under 15 and over 65 per 100 persons aged 15–64. There is significant debate on the dependency ratio because it fails to take into consideration the contributions made by people over the age of 65 or the lack of work contributions of some people aged 15–64.

mental health issues. Policies should therefore address how such diseases can be prevented or delayed by promoting health and well-being across the life-course, not simply in old age. Policies should also address how older men and women suffering from these diseases can be supported to manage them and maintain their functional independence to the greatest extent possible.

Examples:

Most national ageing policies commit to strengthening health promotion and health services. Many policies also discuss wider behavioural change policies and campaigns, with the aim of encouraging healthier lifestyles. For example, the China Twelfth Five-Year Plan for the Elderly (2011–2015) and the Cook Islands Policy on Ageing (2012–2017) promote self-care, active lifestyles, physical exercise and the prevention of injuries. China's Plan states that all older people will have access to basic medical insurance both in rural and urban areas. Malaysia's National Health Policy for Older Persons (2008) includes measures for promoting health and disease prevention activities throughout the life-course. The national ageing policies of India, Fiji and Cambodia include specific attention to mental health.

- **Ensuring enabling and supportive environments:** An enabling and supportive environment includes such considerations as housing, infrastructure, elder abuse and positive societal and intergenerational relations. The policies of most countries in the region address enabling and supportive environments, but there are wide variations in the breadth and depth of such policy provisions. The most expansive policies illustrate a comprehensive consideration of issues affecting older people within housing and the living environment; long term care; care and support for care givers; neglect, abuse and violence; and images of ageing in the society.⁵

Examples:

China's Twelfth Five-Year Plan for the Elderly (2011–2015) aims for an 'old-age service system that is based on families, reliant on communities and supported by government agencies'. This Plan includes multiple actions to develop and expand home care services for the elderly; to coordinate the development of elderly care institutions and rehabilitation nursing services; and to improve the care industry. The Senior Citizens Act in the Philippines and the two plans of action include measures outlining policy on housing and the living environment; care and support for care givers; neglect, abuse and violence; and promoting positive images of ageing.



Wang Jing/HelpAge International

This MIPAA structure can be a starting point but adapted as countries see fit. For example, 'enabling and supportive environments' is sometimes split into two parts: 'social participation' and 'enabling environments'. The former could cover themes such as interdependence of the generations, community engagement and volunteerism, while the latter could address issues such as physical infrastructure, transport and mobility, and care and support.

Drafting, reviewing and approving the policy

Each country will have its own approach and structures for policy drafting, review and approval. As noted above, a critical element for every policy is participatory stakeholder consultation, especially with older women and men. National stakeholders should be involved not only in consultations for the situation analysis early in the process but also in reviewing and revising policy drafts. Line ministries may be tempted to aim for a document requiring a lower level of approval in order to avoid the scrutiny of parliaments, but policy should

5. Williamson C, *Policy Mapping on Ageing in Asia and the Pacific*. HelpAge International and UNFPA, 2015

carry authority from the highest levels possible and be underpinned with legislation.

Experts with a participatory approach who have a deep understanding of the country's policies and laws should coordinate drafting of the documents to ensure good linkages with other policies. A national policy on ageing will not cover details of every issue of concern to older people or related to population ageing. The policy on ageing should complement, and help to join up, other relevant laws and policies in the country which may not have older people as their main target group. This is particularly important considering MIPAA's focus on mainstreaming ageing issues into the national policy agenda. If the country has mainstream policies which explicitly and comprehensively address the needs of older people, the national policy on ageing may simply articulate key principles and refer to the mainstream policy.

Even in countries without national plans on ageing, a number of mainstream national policies explicitly address older people. The Maldives, for example, has no national plan on ageing but does provide a social (non-contributory) pension. A number of countries have policy addressing non-communicable diseases (NCDs), which affect older people but also other age groups. For example, some Pacific Island Countries (Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands and Tonga) have independent strategies on NCDs, though age-specific NCDs are not always explicitly targeted. Some countries have not included an issue within their national ageing documents, but have addressed the needs of older people in mainstream policy documents such as on migration, emergency response, and work and labour. These examples illustrate the importance of considering mainstream policy documents when developing comprehensive policy frameworks on ageing.

How can the policy be implemented?

Comprehensive policy frameworks on ageing will be effective only to the extent that arrangements and financing for their implementation and monitoring are put in place. As a start, each country should have a national focal point on ageing, responsible for ageing affairs and for coordinating action across all policy areas related to later life. In addition, the policy on ageing or an accompanying document should specify how the country will achieve its aims and assess its progress.

Institutional arrangements: focal points on ageing

Focal points and institutions on ageing refer to government institutions and/or independent bodies which are responsible for ageing and older people within a country and for carrying out related activity. Most countries in the Asia and Pacific region already have a named focal point. It is common for the role and function of these bodies to be established within the national ageing policy.

There are four main approaches to national focal agencies and coordinating bodies on ageing: (1) a ministry for ageing or an office for senior citizens; (2) a national committee on the ageing or an elderly commission; (3) an inter-agency body or inter-ministerial committee on ageing; or (4) a ministry or department of social welfare/social justice/labour.⁶ In some cases, an overarching coordinating agency is served by an office or committee as its secretariat.

These focal institutions have varying responsibilities and functions, including advising on policy; designing and/or coordinating policy; conducting research and managing data; engaging with stakeholders and older people; advocating on older people's issues; and implementing, monitoring and evaluating national policy, laws and plans on ageing. In addition, these institutions also arrange and lead the country's participation in regional and global initiatives.

A number of countries name a *specific ministry or department* as the focal point for ageing and related matters. One benefit of this approach is that it ensures clarity of responsibility for developing and implementing policy within a country and streamlining activity. However, a single ministry is unlikely to have power over and knowledge of the full range of policy issues that are related to ageing and older people. A minister of welfare, for example, is unlikely to possess authority over health services or housing. This limited remit could make it difficult to address all areas of life related to ageing and to convince other ministries to take action.

Conversely, one benefit of *splitting responsibility between ministries* is that it ensures multiple bodies have responsibility for taking action on ageing and providing technical expertise and other resources for implementation. An inter-ministerial group or national committee could play an important role here by ensuring that there is a system of monitoring and evaluation and that policy is coordinated. An inter-ministerial group or committee should have clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

6. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *Regional Dimensions of the Ageing Situation*, 2008. The *Guide to National Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)*, 2008 also emphasises the essential role of academic institutions and research centres in supporting evidence-based design, monitoring and evaluation of policies on ageing.

Some countries also have an *independent national body* on ageing or an *elderly commission*. These may allow non-government voices to be represented and to be slightly distanced from government and include independent expertise. This structure can be useful but as a United Nations report points out ‘can also add a further layer of bureaucracy’, though this tendency can be mitigated ‘if the committee falls under the auspices of a prominent person such as the Prime Minister’.⁷

Engaging older people and other key stakeholders can capture expertise and build legitimacy and public support. Countries should explicitly detail the inclusion or representation of older people within bodies and institutions on ageing and within the design and/or monitoring of national policy. Countries that do so include Bangladesh, Cambodia, the Cook Islands, Fiji, India, Myanmar and Pakistan.

Examples:

Some country examples illustrate the range of institutional approaches:

The China National Working Commission on Ageing formulates major ageing policies, coordinates the relevant government departments, and leads and supervises implementation of policies related to older men and women. The China National Committee on Ageing is an executive body under supervision of the Working Commission.

In the Cook Islands Policy on Ageing (2012–2017), the National Council for Older Persons acts as an advisory body and oversees the implementation of the policy. It stipulates that the National Council will be accountable to the relevant minister and includes the terms of reference for the Council and its role and responsibilities.

In India, an autonomous, registered National Association of Older Persons has national, state and district level offices to mobilise senior citizens, articulate their interests, promote and undertake programmes and activities for their well-being, and advise the government on all matters relating to them. Including national, state and district level offices is helpful at the implementation stage as local and regional bodies will play a significant role in turning policy into practice.

In the Philippines, the National Coordinating and Monitoring Board for the Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010 is responsible for formulating a National Plan of Action for Senior Citizens and for monitoring its implementation. It is chaired by the Secretary of the Department of Social Welfare and Development but also includes representatives from other ministries and from five accredited non-government organisations.

Action plans or implementation strategies

As noted earlier, accompanying or combined with a policy document, a national action plan or strategy should detail how policy objectives will be achieved. The document should take into account not only the role of the public sector but also effective partnerships between governments, civil society and the private sector. This implementation document should include:

- the *responsibilities* of different actors/agencies for implementation, encompassing the local, regional and national infrastructure that will support it
- any *additional instruments* necessary for implementation (for example, legislation, regulation or further guidance)
- *financial and human resource requirements* for implementation – ideally with detail on how funding

will be allocated and with budgets underpinned with legislation

- detailed *monitoring and evaluation frameworks* to be used for reviewing implementation, including the outcome measures for each objective/goal, and time-specific targets for implementation and conducting reviews.



7. UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Report of the Capacity-Building Workshop to Support National Policy Responses to Issues of Ageing in Asia and the Pacific*, 2012, p.8

Examples:

In ageing policy documents in this region, the level of detail on implementation arrangements varies significantly. Bangladesh, for example, includes the responsibilities of specific ministries, departments, committees and other organisations for the implementation, monitoring, review, development and assessment of policy, as well as plans for research and surveys. The Philippines indicates specific targets, responsibilities and timeframes for review in the National Action Plan for Senior Citizens 2006–2010, including undertaking a survey

every year. Thailand's Second National Long-term Plan for Older Persons (2002–2021) includes a detailed framework for monitoring and evaluation, to be undertaken every five years (see excerpt below). In Thailand's table format, each policy measure within a thematic strategy is outlined alongside the implementation responsibilities of various institutions; indices for measuring outcomes of the policy measure; and clear targets with dates.

Strategy 1 - Strategy on readiness preparation of the people for their quality ageing

| No. | Measures | Focal Points | Indices | Targets | | | |
|----------|---|---|---|------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| | | | | Year 2006 (5 years) | 2011 (10 years) | Year 2016 (15 years) | 2021 (20 years) |
| 1 | Measures on the income security for old age | | | | | | |
| 1.1 | Extend the old age security to cover all target groups* | 1. Ministry of Finance 2. Ministry of Labor 3. Ministry of Interior (Local Administration Department/Local Administration Organizations) 4. Bangkok Metropolitan Administration, Pattaya City Administration | Index 1 coverage rate of the official old age security** in the populations aged 30-59 | 30% | 50% | 80% | 95% |
| 1.2 | Encourage and establish saving disciplines in all ages | 1. Ministry of Finance 2. Ministry of Education | Index 2 rate of family savings*** Index 3 numbers of members of the Mutual Fund and total sum in the Mutual Fund per one member (excluding the village funds) including the defined contribution funds | ← | continually Increasing | continually Increasing | → |

Definitions:

* **All target groups** refer to all groups of population regardless of whether they are in the formal or self-employment or unemployment group.

** **Official old age security** refers to the social security fund, the pension system for public servants of both central and local authority, the pension system of state enterprises, other pension systems and any other systems rendered by the government such as a national fund contributed by the government.

*** **Rate of family savings** refers to $\frac{\text{personal savings of each individual}}{\text{personal income of each individual}} \times 100$

Remarks: The focal points are put in sequence of their importance: the 1st – the 2nd ones are the main agencies in charge, while the next ones are the joint agencies.

Source: The National Committee on the Elderly and the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security, Thailand [2010]. *The 2nd National Plan on the Elderly (2002–2021)*, 1st Revised of 2009

The most important step is ensuring that policies are put into action and bring the benefits anticipated. To protect the rights of older people and to respond to current and future needs, as well as to take advantage of what they can offer society, policy directions in ageing can learn

from regional and international experience. In light of those lessons from experience, every country in Asia and the Pacific should review its policy frameworks to ensure they are prepared for the rapidly changing dynamics related to ageing.

This booklet is based on the findings of a report 'Review of Good Practice on National Policy and Laws on Ageing' by Silvia Stefanoni and Camilla Williamson. Their full report, along with links to national policy documents, can be found at <http://ageingasia.org/good-practice-policies-on-ageing>. HelpAge appreciates the review provided by external experts Thelma Kay and Ghazy Mujahid.

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HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives.

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