

# Introductory overview

*Selected case studies of national population ageing policy interventions in the Asia-Pacific region*



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## Background and rationale

**Some of the world's most rapidly ageing populations are in the Asia-Pacific region. Population ageing has significant social, economic and political implications. Many countries are unprepared for how ageing will affect society, not only in terms of changes in health and social care expenditure, and changing work patterns, but also more broadly in terms of how they can successfully respond to the diverse needs of rising numbers of older people and fulfil their rights.**

Yet the need to address the opportunities and challenges of population ageing is becoming even more urgent as the world continues to grapple with the Covid-19 crisis and seeks to regain lost ground in achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with its central commitment to 'leave no one behind'. The year 2021 also marked the launch of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, led by the World Health Organization (WHO), which aims to improve the lives of older people and their families and communities. However, as the Covid-19 pandemic has also delayed progress on this front, it is now more critical than ever for countries in the Asia-Pacific region to recognise the demographic realities they face.

To help countries prepare for this, UNFPA's Asia-Pacific Regional Office (APRO) has produced and disseminated to APRO country offices two key publications providing guidance on population ageing. *Social policies catalogue on population ageing* (October 2020) → collates globally available population ageing policies, while *Addressing population ageing in Asia and the Pacific region: a life-cycle approach* (January 2021) → this examines selected analyses of population ageing and low fertility rate policies and issues, with suggestions for how to address these issues through policy solutions.

In developing these publications, it became clear to UNFPA that no country in the Asia-Pacific region has a single comprehensive policy that addresses all aspects of population ageing. These documents therefore aimed to enable governments to learn from and improve their existing ageing policies and to further efforts on successful ageing strategies across the region.

To this end, UNFPA and HelpAge International undertook a collaborative research project to identify and explore population ageing policy interventions that offer insights into potential good practice, which UNFPA could use to support national governments to review and adapt their population ageing interventions. These case studies are intended as a first step towards developing fuller guidance to support implementation and adaptation of ageing policies across the Asia-Pacific region.



**HelpAge**

**International**



Seven case studies are presented here in two categories:

**1. Those based on a review of documentation and key informant interviews:**

- **Malaysia:** National Policy for Older Persons, 2011 – this recognises older people’s right to access basic needs such as housing, food, and health care, in addition to age-friendly infrastructure and improved care services.
- **Maldives:** Old-Age Basic Pension and Retirement Pension Scheme, 2010 – this highlights how pension schemes can make a significant contribution to promoting healthy ageing for older people.
- **Sri Lanka:** Maternal and Child Health Programme 2017–2025, and National Strategic Plan for Well-Woman Programme, 2019–2023 (and Introduction of National Elderly Health Care Policy) – these contribute to the provision of a ‘continuum of care’ across the life-cycle, offering positive impacts on older people’s health and wellbeing.
- **Vietnam:** National Action Programme for the Elderly 2012–2020 – this explicitly adopts a lifecycle approach by instilling in younger people a positive attitude towards ageing and care for older persons, maintaining and further strengthening intergenerational linkages, providing an environment in which younger people can better prepare for ageing, and recognise the importance of promoting independence, and healthy and active ageing.

**2. Those based solely on a review of documentation (where key informant interviews were sought but could not be arranged within the study timeframe):**

- **Iran:** National Policy on Ageing and National Document for Older Persons, 2020 – this recognises that preserving and promoting health cannot be achieved without promoting healthy lifestyles and medical services across all age groups.
- **India:** National Policy on Older Persons, 1999 (and its extension in 2011) – this promotes the development of formal and informal social support systems by putting the family at the centre of caring for older people, so that home-based care is the preferred option, and families have support to carry out caring activities; this model offers a unique opportunity to maintain intergenerational solidarity.
- **Indonesia:** Strategic Plan of the Ministry of Health, 2015–2019 – this includes a commitment to implementing the ‘continuum of care’ approach, which involves expanding the scope, quality and sustainability of disease control interventions and healthcare provision for mothers, infants, children under five, adolescents, working adults and older people, including both social care and long-term care elements.

## Methodology

To select the case studies, we began with research aiming to identify, document and analyse examples of national population ageing policy interventions in the Asia-Pacific region that adopt life-cycle and rights-based approaches. The aim was to provide policy makers, implementers, researchers, civil society organisations, and others working on population ageing issues with unique insights into practices being adopted in national ageing policy interventions in the region. We prioritised depth rather than breadth of policy interventions, focusing on experience with implementation rather than policy development. The scope of our research was guided by six criteria (including those reflected in UNFPA's Social Policies Catalogue):

1. Protecting the entire population (that is, the policy intervention covers all ages, male and female genders, and all other population sub-groups)
2. Targeting older persons and ageing issues
3. Promoting healthy ageing
4. Addressing gender equality
5. Adopting a life-cycle approach
6. Adopting key elements of a rights-based approach

Our selection of the policy interventions for the case studies was guided by the two aforementioned UNFPA-APRO publications and HelpAge International's *Policy mapping on ageing in Asia and the Pacific analytical report* (2015) →. We also undertook desk research to identify and review relevant source documents (such as national ageing policies, policy planning, implementation and review documents) and extract policy examples related to the above criteria, particularly the life-cycle approach. This was conducted using Google Search engine and keyword search terms such as 'national policy on ageing', 'good practices' and 'life-cycle approach' with country names in the Asia-Pacific region.



For each country, there were many policy interventions but only a few aligned with our key criteria. A preliminary analysis was conducted after collecting information on each country's national ageing policy interventions. This research method was necessary to select an appropriate sample for each country.

By reviewing the available literature, we initially identified 25 major policy interventions in 17 countries that satisfied at least three of the six criteria. It was not always clear whether these interventions fully adopt a life-cycle approach, so we gathered further information through key informant interviews for specific countries, not only to ascertain deeper insights into how the policy meets each of the six criteria, but also to establish whether these policy interventions were considered innovative and were being successfully implemented. Key informants included policy experts and managers from governments, UN agencies, civil society organisations and academics actively involved in ageing policy studies. However, due to time and budgetary constraints, it was not possible to interview policy target groups (such as older women and men, and youth) to help validate policy outcomes (this is something that could be done in follow-up studies).

Through this process, we narrowed the selection to 20 policy interventions to be explored further in consultation with HelpAge and UNFPA-APRO. We focused on those that provided the strongest evidence in relation to adopting a life-cycle approach and at least some key elements of a rights-based approach (see Table 1 →). From this shorter list, we selected the final set of seven policy interventions for the case studies.

In developing the case studies, two key insights emerged:

- ageing policy interventions in each of the case study countries were inevitably at different stages of the policy implementation process, reflecting their different stages in the demographic transition, with those at earlier stages in this process offering more limited insights into policy implementation practices.
- while some of the policy interventions adopted certain key elements of a rights-based approach, none were able to demonstrate a fully rights-based approach – one that includes elements such as aiming to empower older people and strengthen their inclusion and participation in society. This highlights the need for more specific criteria with which to systematically appraise and categorise policy interventions as adopting a rights-based approach. It also calls for greater clarification and guidance as to what constitutes a fully rights-based approach, such as the *PANEL principles* → developed by the Scottish Human Rights Commission, and the *Elements of good practices under a human rights-based approach* → that UNFPA aligns with.



## Information/data collection methods

### Documentation review

- We carried out a review of documents relating to population ageing policy interventions through Google Search, identification of documents from government offices, national and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other United Nations (UN) organisations signposted by UNFPA-APRO and HelpAge International country offices, and academic networks. Search items used included:
  - ‘population ageing policies in (country name)’
  - ‘population ageing policy interventions in (country name)’
  - ‘good practice ageing policy interventions in (country name)’
  - ‘ageing policy interventions, life-cycle approach in (country name)’
  - ‘national ageing policies in Asia-Pacific region’.
- A brief questionnaire was sent to UNFPA-APRO and HelpAge International country offices, and other organisations working on population ageing in the region, to collect required information to enable an initial screening of potentially relevant information. Key questions included the following:
  - Does your country have national policies or interventions on ageing (in any sector) that you think are innovative, successful or popular, and can be shared and replicated widely in the region? If yes, please name them and provide a short overview.
  - Do these population policy interventions offer potential good practices? If so, please explain why. For example, is there evidence of successful implementation? How has this been assessed?
  - Can you provide any documents/online links related to the policies and their implementation, such as policy proposals, policy implementation evaluations or annual reports?

### Key informant interviews

- Once we had identified specific national policy interventions and screened them for evidence of alignment with our six criteria, we consulted national and regional key informants, in discussion with HelpAge International and UNFPA-APRO.
- Given some ongoing restrictions in relation to Covid-19 and the wide geographical scope of coverage, we undertook key informant interviews virtually. (For some case studies, discussions with key informants were attempted but ultimately did not take place, so these case studies are based on evidence from literature reviews only.)



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## Case study format

We developed a standard structure for the country case studies and refined this iteratively during case study development in agreement with UNFPA and HelpAge International. The final versions include the following key sections (with minor variations), based on the extent of information available.

- Introduction:
  - Population characteristics
  - Name of policy intervention
  - Level of intervention – national/regional
  - Year of intervention
- Elements of life-cycle approach integrated into policy intervention
- Drivers in enabling environment motivating policy implementation
- Key areas addressed – relating to the six selection criteria
- Rationale for policy intervention – challenges or opportunities
- Progress of intervention
- Implementation strategy for policy intervention
- Outcomes of intervention – based on key informant perspectives and documented evidence (where available)
- Conclusions – relating to evidence of alignment with our six criteria
- References – including key informants consulted.

**Table 1: Initial screening of population ageing policy interventions satisfying key criteria by country**

Country	Responsible agency	Year	Policy intervention	Key criteria addressed:					
				1. Protecting the entire population	2. Targeting older people and ageing	3. Promoting healthy ageing	4. Addressing gender equality	5. Adopting a life-cycle approach	6. Adopting a rights-based approach (key elements of)
Bangladesh	General Economic Division Planning Commission	2015	National Social Security Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cambodia	Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation	2017	Action Plan 2018–2020 of National Ageing Policy, 2017–2030	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
China	China National Working Commission on Ageing	1996, 2012	National Plans on Ageing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Law on Protecting the Rights of Older Persons (1996, revised in 2012)</li> <li>Plan for Development of Elderly Programmes in Twelfth Five-Year Plan Period (2011–2015)</li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hongkong, China (SAR)	Hong Kong Council of Social Service	2008 /2016	Age-friendly cities and communities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cook Islands	The Committee for Action on Ageing/Ministry of Health and Ministry of Internal Affairs	2012	Cook Islands Policy on Ageing, 2012–2017		✓		✓	✓	✓
India	Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment	1999 and 2011	National Policy Statement – 1999 and 2011 for the Aged	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Indonesia	Ministry of Social Welfare (Menko Kesra)	1998	The Old Age Welfare Law of 1998 (Law No. 13/1998)		✓		✓	✓	✓
Iran	Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare	2004	National Council on the Elderly	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
	Office for Elderly Health	2007	Programme for promoting ‘healthy lifestyle during old age’		✓		✓	✓	✓
Fiji	Ministry of Social Welfare, Women and Poverty Alleviation	2011	National Policy on Ageing 2011–2015	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Lao PDR	Ministry of Health	2004	National Policy for Elderly Persons	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Malaysia	Ministry of Health	2008	National Health Policy for Older Persons, 2008		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Maldives	Maldives Pension Administration Office	2009	Maldives Retirement Pension Scheme and Old-Age Basic Pension	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mongolia	Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour	2009	National Strategy for Population Ageing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Myanmar	Ministry of Planning and Finance	2018	Myanmar Sustainable Development Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nepal	Nepal Law Commission	2006	Senior Citizens Act, 2006	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

*continued over >*

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Philippines	Congress	2010	Expanded Senior Citizens Act of 2010 (Republic Act No. 9994)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Republic of Korea	Ministry of Health and Welfare/ Ministry of Labour	2006–2020	Ageing Society and Population Master Plans		✓	✓		✓	✓
Sri Lanka	Ministry of Health	1968 and subsequent revisions	Maternal and Child Health Programme: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Strategic Plan – Maternal and Newborn Health</li> <li>National Strategic Plan – Child Health</li> <li>National Strategic Plan – Adolescent Health</li> <li>National Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding (2015–2020)</li> </ul>	✓			✓	✓	✓
	Ministry of Health	2019	National Strategic Plan 2019–2023 for Well-Woman Programme	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Thailand	National Health Security Office	2006/2009/2011	Sub-district Health Fund	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
	Ministry of Social Development and Human Security	2009 (revised)	Second National Plan for the Elderly	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Vietnam	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs	2012	National Action Programme for the Elderly, 2012–2020		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

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The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent the views of UNFPA, the United Nations or any of its affiliated organisations.

**HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.**

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