

Keeping pace with demographic change:

Guidance on ageing for EU development policy



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Key messages

- The world is experiencing dramatic demographic change including population growth and rapid population ageing.
- European Union (EU) development policy has not responded effectively to global population ageing.
- EU Member States have an immediate opportunity to influence the post-2015 framework to support sustainable development for people of all ages.
- National social protection floors provide income security and access to essential services reducing poverty and inequalities at all stages of people's lives.

Introduction

The global population, while continuing to grow, is also ageing rapidly. Advances in healthcare, nutrition, sanitation, education and economic prosperity have led to declining fertility rates, lower infant mortality, and people living longer lives, resulting in larger numbers and proportions of older people, and this trend will continue (see Figure 1). By 2030, there will be more people over 60 worldwide than children under 10.¹

Population ageing is not limited to wealthy countries. Already, two-thirds of the world's over-60s live in developing countries.² Of 15 countries that currently have more than 10 million older people, seven are developing countries.³

Population ageing is a triumph of development, to which the EU, as the world's biggest donor, has made a significant contribution. However, responses to this trend are not yet adequately reflected in EU development policy.

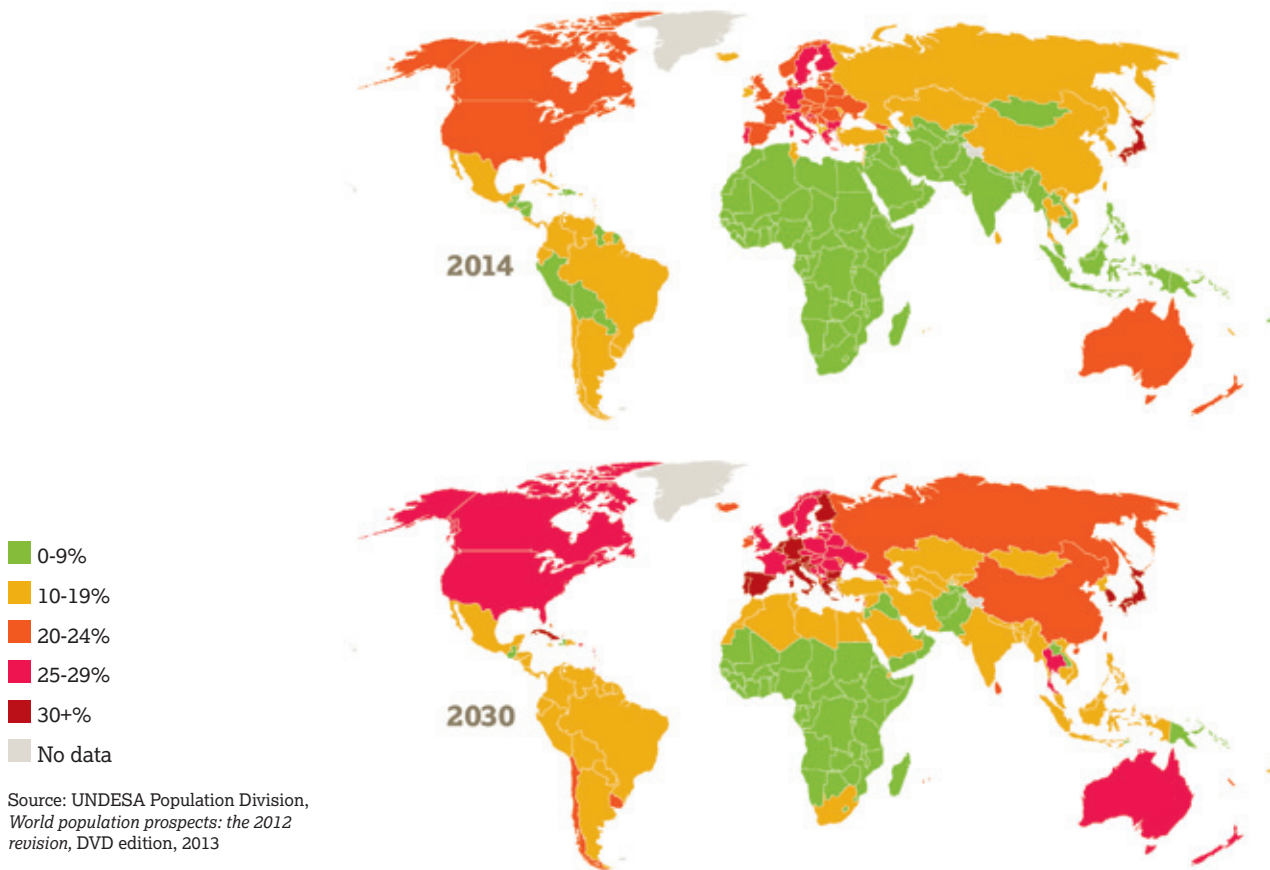
This briefing explains why responding to population ageing and furthering the rights of older people are urgent issues for the EU's development cooperation. It highlights gaps and proposes ways in which the EU can strengthen its development policy.



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Figure 1: Proportion of population aged 60 or over in 2014 and 2030



Issues facing older people

While many more people across the world are living their later years in better health and comfort than in the past, millions still face a bleak old age marked by poverty, abuse, poor health and exclusion.

Vital role in development

Older people are active contributors to development and this should be recognised and supported. For example, many people continue to work into old age, some because they must to support themselves and their dependants, and others because they choose to. Older people rely more heavily on agriculture as a source of employment than younger age groups. The ageing of farm populations in many countries is faster than that of the urban population and the overall rural population.⁴

But employment is often insecure, particularly in developing countries, where many older people work in the informal sector, without contracts, security or benefits. Many older people also do unpaid work, such as caring for spouses, children or grandchildren.

Higher risk of poverty

“Where poverty is endemic, persons who survive a lifetime of poverty often face an old age of deepening poverty.”

Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, paragraph 45

Poverty is one of the main threats to the wellbeing of older people worldwide. Surveys show that in most Latin American and sub-Saharan African countries, older people are over-represented among the poor.⁵ In low and middle-income countries, only one in four people over 65 receive a pension.⁶ Those without other sources of income and who are no longer physically able to work or who are prevented from working because of age discrimination are more likely to become or remain poor.

A lack of regular and predictable household income also acts as a key barrier to improving health and education outcomes for children. Evidence shows how universal social pensions have reduced poverty and benefited children living with older people, who are more likely to be healthier and attending school.⁷

1. UNDESA Population Division, Profiles of ageing, *World population prospects: the 2012 revision*, DVD edition, 2013, <http://esa.un.org/unpd/popdev/AgingProfiles2013/default.aspx>

2. UNDESA Population Division

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Changing needs for healthcare

Rising numbers of older people have led to an increase in non-communicable diseases (NCDs) such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and dementia, which disproportionately affect older people. In low and middle-income countries, people aged 60 and over account for 71 per cent of deaths from NCDs.⁸ Overburdened health systems, particularly in developing countries, are being challenged to meet the increasingly complex needs of a growing older population.

Discrimination against older women

Women form the majority of older people – 54 per cent of those aged 60 or over – and the proportion rises with age, reaching 62 per cent of those aged 80 and above.⁹ Women over 50 account for almost one quarter of the world's women.¹⁰ Both women and men face discrimination in older age. However, older women are affected disproportionately. After a lifetime of being discriminated against because of their sex, they then face discrimination because of their age, including lack of access to paid employment, loss of decision-making power in the family and loss of assets, as well as increased risk of violence and abuse¹¹ (see Nziku's story). This accumulation of discrimination over time can have devastating effects.

Nziku's story

“Soon after my husband died, two years ago, I received threatening letters. The letters came at night, in the dark. They put them on the wall outside the house so that no one knows who sent them. Many people have the attitude that when a woman ages she becomes a witch. I don't understand that! I am old now and unable to do some things – how would I therefore just be suddenly able to become a witch!”

Nziku, northern Tanzania



Jeff Williams/HelpAge International

8. United Nations, *Prevention and Control of Non-communicable Diseases: Report of the Secretary-General*, 2011

9. UNDESA Population Division, *World population prospects: the 2012 revision*, DVD edition, 2013

10. UNDESA Population Division

11. Gorman M and Zaidi A, *Global AgeWatch Index 2013: Insight report*, London, HelpAge International, 2013, p.7; UNFPA and HelpAge International, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century*, p.28

12. Albone R et al, *Older people count: Making data fit for purpose*, London, HelpAge International, 2014, p.1

13. UNDESA Population Division, *World population prospects: the 2012 revision*, 2013, Mortality data

14. Samman E and Rodriguez-Takeuchi LK, *Old age, disability and mental health: data issues for a post-2015 framework*, ODI Background Note, 2013

15. Full rankings, country reports and other data are available at www.helpage.org/global-agemwatch

16. http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_14560_en.htm (10 October 2014)

17. European Consensus on Development (2006/C 46/01), 2006; EC Communication (COM(2011) 637 final) 'Increasing the Impact of EU Development Policy: An Agenda for Change', October 2011 and related Council Conclusions, May 2012.

18. EC Communication 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development Cooperation' (COM(2007)100) and related Council Conclusions, 2007; EC Staff Working Document (SEC(2010)265) EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Development 2010-2015

19. EC Communication 'The EU Role in Global Health' (COM(2010)128) and related Council Conclusions, 2010

How is ageing reflected in EU development policy?

For the past 15 years, EU development policy has been strongly guided by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs have played an important role in reducing extreme poverty and hunger. However, they were not designed to take account of the massive demographic changes taking place. The lack of human rights-based approach and narrow focus of some MDGs on primary education, child mortality and maternal health exclude older people at the outset.

Furthermore, many population-based surveys used to measure development progress still do not go beyond the age of 49. For example, surveys on violence against women rarely collect data after the age of 49.¹² This means that at least one third of a woman's life is ignored.¹³ The shortage of data on older age groups makes it difficult to address age discrimination or get a complete picture of progress towards the MDGs.¹⁴

The Global AgeWatch Index, launched by HelpAge International in 2013, shows that gathering and analysing internationally comparable data on older people is possible. It highlights gaps in international datasets and progress on those issues that can be measured.¹⁵

“Monitoring of disparities will require further disaggregation of data by income, sex, disability, age, location, as well as different ethnic and other social groups.”

EU Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, speaking at the UN Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals, New York, 5 February 2014¹⁶

Older people are also consequently invisible in the overarching EU development policy frameworks. Human rights and inclusive development are strong features of the European Consensus on Development and the Agenda for Change policy frameworks.¹⁷ However, these policies do not take account of population ageing and its implications. Furthermore, the EU's policies on promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in development cooperation focus only on the earlier part of women's lives.¹⁸ And while EU policy on global health refers to population ageing and recognises the need to address NCDs, it makes no specific recommendations for how to do this.¹⁹

3 Keeping pace with demographic change

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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20. Secretary-General's message on the International Day of Older Persons, www.un.org/sg/statements/?nid=8075 (10 October 2014)

21. European Parliament resolution (2012/2289 (INI)) 'The Millennium Development Goals – defining the post-2015 framework', June 2013

22. EC Communication (COM(2013)92) 'A Decent Life for All: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future', February 2013

23. EC Communication (COM(2014)335) 'A Decent Life for All: From vision to collective action', June 2014

24. EC Communication (COM(2012) 446) 'Social Protection in European Union Development Cooperation', August 2012 and related Council Conclusions, 15 October 2012

25. National Social Protection Floors, Recommendation 202, ILO, June 2012. For examples of how countries are implementing social pensions and having an impact on older people's wellbeing, visit www.pension-watch.net

What are the opportunities now?

"The post-2015 development agenda offers a historic opportunity for the United Nations and its Member States to strengthen the rights and role of older persons in society as an integral part of our commitment to 'leave no one behind'."

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, 1 October 2014²⁰

The debate about what global framework should succeed the MDGs is already well underway and will intensify through 2015. There is evidence of increasing awareness among EU institutions for the post-2015 sustainable development framework to respond to population ageing as reflected in a number of EU contributions to the post-2015 process:

- A European Parliament resolution in 2013 highlighted the vulnerabilities of old age and the importance of social protection, including pensions.²¹
- In February 2013, a European Commission Communication 'A Decent Life for All: Ending poverty and giving the world a sustainable future' highlighted global ageing as an emerging challenge from a development perspective.²²
- The follow-up Communication in June 2014 highlighted the importance of data disaggregation and stated that population dynamics must be mainstreamed across all the targets in a post-2015 framework.²³

Another important step by the EU was the adoption of the European Commission Communication on Social Protection in Development Cooperation and subsequent Council Conclusions in 2012.²⁴ This describes how the EU will support the development and extension of social protection systems in partner countries. It supports the concept of national rights-based "social protection floors" providing income security and access to essential services for all people to reduce risks and vulnerabilities throughout their lives.²⁵

These positive developments must now be further integrated into future EU development policies and specifically its commitments in the post-2015 process.

Conclusions and recommendations

The HelpAge EU network urges the EU to keep pace with demographic change and include people of all ages in its development policy and programmes to promote the wellbeing of all people, backed with financial commitments.

We call on the EU and its Member States to agree commitments in the post-2015 framework to:

- Develop indicators that reflect the reality of older people's lives, based on data disaggregated by sex and age without upper age limits.
- Ensure the framework is grounded in human rights principles, including universality, non-discrimination, equality, participation, empowerment and accountability.
- Implement national universal social protection systems, including social protection floors, in all countries.
- Include universal, age-inclusive and appropriate health targets to tackle people's health needs in older age, including a standalone target on NCDs that emphasises prevention, treatment, management and care.
- Ensure that commitments on gender equality and women's empowerment are accompanied by the explicit recognition of "women of all ages".

We call on the European Parliament Committee on Development to ensure that approaches that are inclusive of people of all ages are embedded in EU development policy and the EU's broader external action:

- Consider ageing and its implications in all EU development-related reports.
- Submit written and oral questions to the European Commission and the Council about the inclusion of older people in development cooperation.
- Host debates to explore in more detail the issues of ageing and older people's rights.
- Develop an own-initiative report on the topic of ageing and development.
- Champion EU commitments to mainstreaming ageing into the post-2015 framework and support their implementation.

We call on the European Parliament, European Commission and EU Member States to champion the implementation of national social protection floors and support the full implementation of the Social Protection in EU Development Cooperation Communication of 2012.