



Population ageing and development: Ten years after Madrid

Population ageing, the shift towards an increased proportion of older persons in the population, is a global phenomenon resulting from rapid declines in fertility rates coupled with reductions in mortality and increased longevity. In 2012, there were 810 million people aged 60 years or over in the world, 178 million more than in 2002, when the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) was adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing. The MIPAA set a new international agenda that guides Governments, non-governmental organizations, and other actors to change the ways in which older citizens are perceived, integrated, and cared for, in order to achieve “a society of all ages”.

1. Population ageing is taking place almost everywhere in the world.¹

- **The age composition of the population is transitioning to an older structure in all regions of the world.** In 1970, the age pyramids had the triangular shape of a youthful population in both the less and more developed regions, although the base was much wider in the less developed regions (figure 1). In 2010, the age pyramid of the more developed regions had transitioned to one that bulged at the working ages, denoting a population where ageing was already under way. The pyramid was still triangular in the less developed regions, with a base that had started to narrow. In 2050, the age pyramids are projected to have a more rectangular, or older, shape in both the less and more developed regions, a sign of a more advanced stage of ageing.

- **The older population (aged 60 years or over) is growing at an accelerated rate.** In 2012, older persons accounted for 11 per cent of the world’s population. During the next four decades, the older population is projected to increase very quickly. By 2050, its size will reach over 2 billion, and its proportion will reach about 22 per cent (figure 2).

- **Much of the growth of the older population will take place in the less developed regions.** In 2012, the less developed regions accounted for two thirds of the global number of older persons. Asia has more than half (55 per cent) of the world’s older persons, Latin America and the Caribbean about 8 per cent, and Africa slightly more than 7 per cent. In the more developed regions, Europe accounted for 21 per cent of the world’s older persons, Northern America about 8 per cent, and Oceania less than 1 per cent. During the post-2015 period, the global growth of the older population is expected to continue to take place mainly in developing countries—8 out of 10 older persons will live in the less developed regions by 2050.

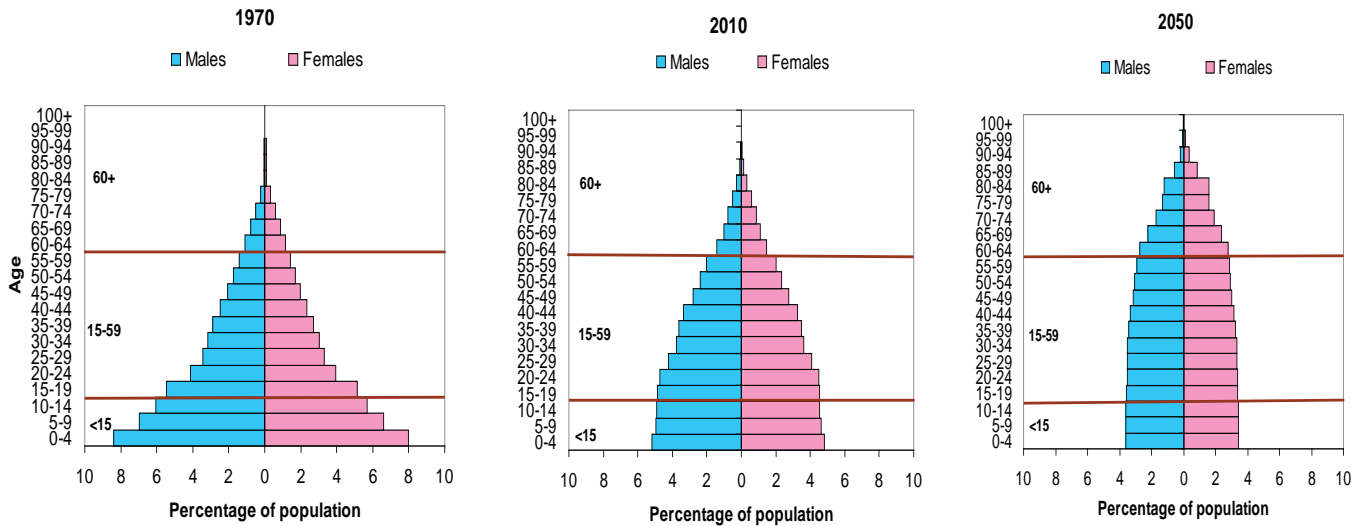
- **The older population itself is ageing.** Within the older population, the proportion aged 80 years or over, which was 14 per cent in 2012, is projected to reach 20 per cent in 2050. If this projection is realized, there will be 402 million persons aged 80 years or over by 2050, 3.5 times more than today. The number of centenarians will grow even faster, from less than 343,000 in 2012 to 3.2 million in 2050.

- **Older persons will outnumber children by mid-century.** Historically, the population of older persons in the world was small compared to the number of younger adults and of children (persons younger than 15 years). During the period spanned by the Millennium Development Goals (1990-2015), the population of children started levelling off while the growth of the older population accelerated. After 2015, the older population will increase much faster than the population of children or the population of younger adults. Consequently,

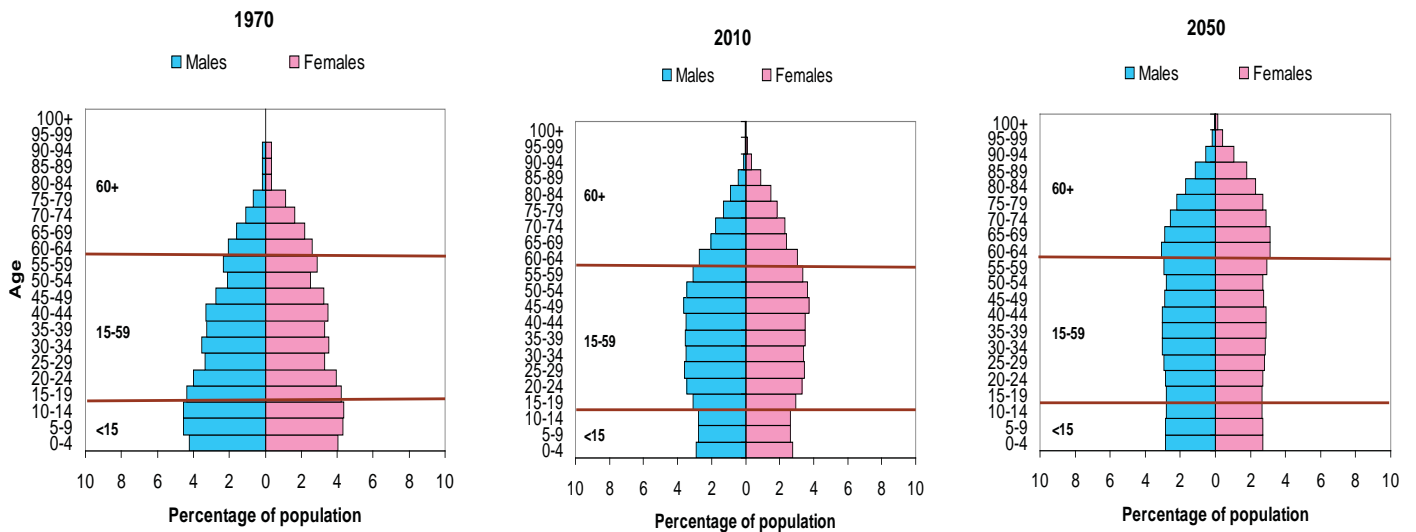
¹ Unless otherwise noted, the sources of the data in this Population Facts are *Population Ageing and Development 2012* (United Nations Publication, wall chart, Sales No. E.12.XIII.6), on the basis of data from *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, CD-ROM Edition—Extended Dataset (United Nations publication, Sales No. 11.XIII.7).

Figure 1. Age distribution of the world's population by development group, 1970, 2010, 2050

A. Less developed regions



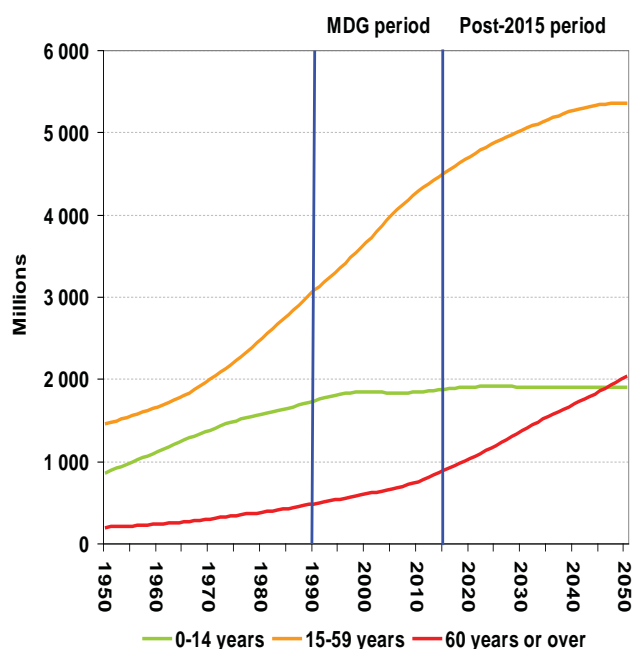
B. More developed Countries



the number of older persons is projected to surpass the number of children by 2047 (figure 2).

- **The older population will remain predominantly female despite gains in old-age survival among men.** In 2012, there were 84 men per 100 women in the age group 60 years or over, and 61 men per 100 women in the age group 80 years or over. In 2050, the sex ratio is projected to increase to 86 men per 100 women among persons aged 60 years or over, and to 67 men per 100 women among persons aged 80 years or over, denoting a faster projected pace of improvement of old-age mortality among males than among females.

Figure 2. World Population by broad age groups, 1950-2050



2. Population ageing brings many benefits to individuals and society

- **People are living longer.** Presently, life expectancy at birth is 78 years in the more developed regions and 67 years in the less developed regions. In 2010-2015, men reaching age 60 can expect to live 18 more years in the less developed regions compared to 21 more years in the more developed regions. Women reaching age 60 can expect to live an additional 20 years in the less developed regions compared with an additional 25 years in the more developed regions. As

populations become older, chronic non-communicable diseases account for a growing proportion of all deaths in both the less and more developed regions.²

- **Older persons make important financial contributions to their families.** In the majority of more developed and developing countries, older persons are net providers of financial transfers to their children and grandchildren.³ In some developed countries such as Austria and the United States, older persons do not become net receivers of private transfers even into the advanced older ages. In countries such as Brazil, Costa Rica and Japan, older persons begin to be net receivers of private transfers only after they are well into their seventies or older. Some Asian countries such as Thailand and the Republic of Korea are exceptions, as adults in their sixties begin to receive net transfers from their children.

- **Older persons contribute significantly to the global economy.** At the world level, the proportion of women aged 65 years or over in the labour force, grew from 10 per cent in 1990 to 13 per cent in 2012, and is expected to reach 14 per cent in 2020, thanks to sizeable increases in female participation in Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Northern America. During the same period, the participation of older men in the labour force is expected to remain at 31 per cent, due to some reduction in labour force participation of older men in the less developed regions, compensated by an increase in participation in the more developed regions.⁴

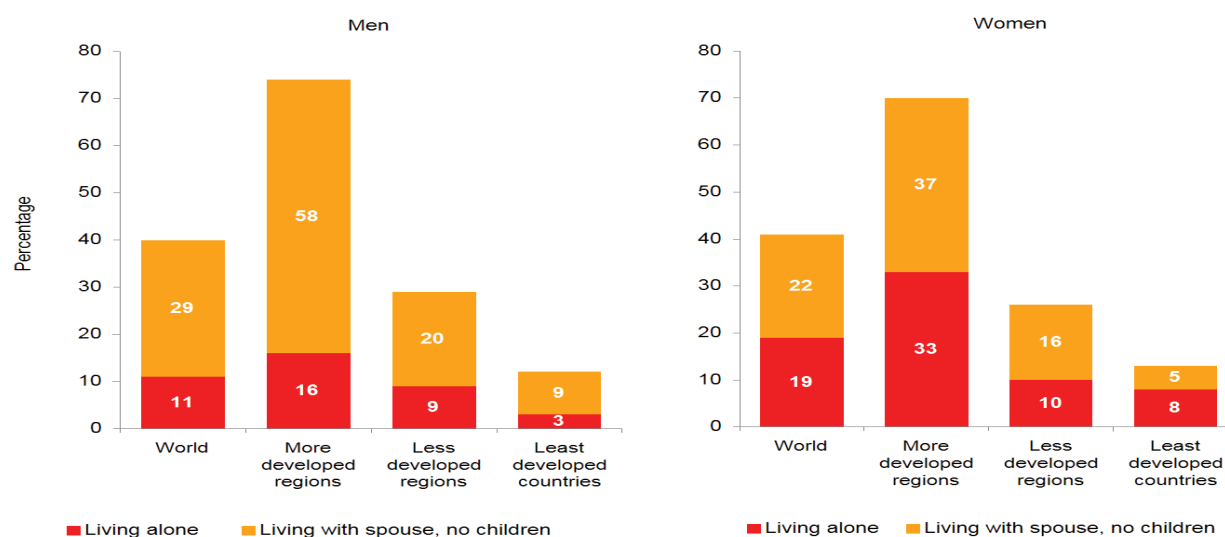
- **Older persons are increasingly able to live independently.** Forty per cent of the world's older population live independently, that is, either alone or with the spouse only. Living independently is the dominant living arrangement of older persons in the more developed regions, where almost three quarters of older persons live independently (figure 3). Almost half of older women living independently live alone. By contrast, only a minority of older men live alone. More

² United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2012). Population ageing and the non-communicable diseases. Population Facts, No. 2012/1.

³ Lee, Ronald and Andrew Mason (2011). *Population ageing and the global economy: A global perspective*. Edward Elgar: Cheltenham, UK.

⁴ International Labour Organization (2011). Database on labour statistics - LABORSTA. Economically Active Population, Estimates and Projections (6th Edition). Available at <http://laborsta.ilo.org>.

Figure 3. Proportion living independently (alone or with spouse only) among persons aged 60 years or over by sex: world and development regions, circa 2005



older persons living independently, a trend that may extend onto the future as populations become more aged.

3. Population ageing reinforces the need for social protection for older persons

- Less working-age adults are supporting an increasing number of older persons.** Working-age adults provide the bulk of the contributions to finance social security programmes and familial transfers for the older population. The “old-age support ratio”, the number of persons aged 15 to 64 years per person aged 65 years or over, has been falling in tandem with population ageing. Some developed countries are facing extremely low old-age support ratios, for instance, Germany, Italy, Japan and Sweden have only three working-age persons for each older person. European countries tend to have low support ratios, while countries in Western and South-Central Asia, as well as in sub-Saharan Africa, tend to have high support ratios. Most countries in the world are in an intermediate transitional phase, with old-age support ratios between 5 and 20 persons of working-age per older person.⁵

⁵ United Nations (2012). *Wall Chart on Population Ageing and Development*. Sales No. E.12.XIII.6

- In many countries, older persons lack adequate social protection and face higher poverty incidence than the general population.** Older persons are not significantly poorer than the general population in countries with adequate social security programmes in developed countries, some countries in Latin America, and a few countries in Asia and Africa. In about half of the developed countries with pertinent data, public transfers finance more than one half of the consumption of older people, and as much as 90 per cent in some countries.⁶ The adequacy of social protection varies greatly among developing countries. In most of sub-Saharan Africa, older persons are significantly poorer than the general population. A number of African countries have introduced a wide-base minimum “social” pension to good effect, although the benefits are relatively modest. In Latin America, old-age pensions have proven to be quite effective in reducing poverty among the older population, in many cases to levels below that of the general population. The countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development often have low poverty rates among older persons, thanks to adequate social safety net systems, but these programmes become more costly as populations continue to age.

⁶ Lee and Mason (2011). *Op. cit.*