

34th United Nations International Day of Older Persons

Ageing with Dignity: The Importance of Strengthening Care and Support Systems for Older Persons Worldwide

Monday, 7 October 2024 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM
ECOSOC Chamber, UN Headquarters, New York

Mission Statement

Theme

Population ageing is a major global trend that is reshaping the demographic makeup of societies worldwide. This significant shift in population age structures results from decreases in fertility rates and increases in life expectancy. Today, life expectancy at birth exceeds 75 years in half of the world's countries or areas, 25 years longer than those born in 1950. Individuals reaching the age of 65 are now expected to live an additional 16.8 years on average. In 2018, a historic milestone was reached when the number of older persons outnumbered children under five for the first time globally. By 2030, the global population of older persons is projected to exceed the number of youth and double the number of children under five. This increase is anticipated to be most rapid in developing countries.¹

Given this global demographic shift, the caregiving landscape is undergoing significant transformations, encompassing a wide range of needs for both paid and unpaid support, in both formal and informal settings. Recent decades have seen shifts in living arrangements for families and older persons in both developed and developing nations. Combined with overall ageing trends, this has heightened demand for different forms of care provision. Amid rising demand for long-term care, growth in the number of caregivers is not keeping pace. As of 2015, there was a global shortage of about 13.6 million formal care workers.² These deficits translate to half of the older population globally not having access to quality formal long-term care.

As populations age, the demand for comprehensive healthcare, care, and social support services has grown substantially. This is particularly critical for older persons with conditions such as dementia, which is a leading cause of care dependency and disability in old age worldwide.³ The

¹ DESA (2022), [World Population Prospects 2022](#)

² DESA (2023), World Social Report 2023 [Leaving No One Behind In An Ageing World](#)

³ WHO (2021), [Global Status Report on the Public Health Response to Dementia](#)

need for specialized care has become integral to the broader healthcare demands of ageing populations. However, most caregivers, both paid and unpaid, have insufficient training to meet these complex needs. Consequently, there is an urgent worldwide need to expand training and educational opportunities in the fields of geriatrics and gerontology for health professionals, social care professionals, and informal caregivers who work with older persons.

Older persons constitute a heterogeneous group with diverse health needs, requiring different levels of care and support. Traditionally, the care burden has fallen on co-residing, multigenerational extended families, thus relying on the family as an informal system of support. However, changes in family size and dynamics, population ageing, and other social and economic trends are undermining these traditional support systems. The implications for societies and individuals depend significantly on the type of care required and who provides it. Women, who comprise most care recipients and caregivers, contribute roughly 70 per cent of global informal care hours.⁴ This is especially true in low- and middle-income countries where care policies and services are insufficient, leaving women more vulnerable to experiencing poverty in old age. Family caregivers often have multiple responsibilities, leaving them overworked and at risk of providing poor-quality care.

Some of the rights related to care and support are explicitly guaranteed in existing human rights treaties, for example social security and education, while others such as long-term care and support, are not, as examinations of the General Assembly Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing show.⁵ Protecting the human rights of both caregivers and recipients is fundamental to implementing effective care strategies, which must recognize and value the diverse contributions made by caregivers. These contributions range from family members offering unpaid care to professionals delivering targeted services, including palliative, rehabilitative, and long-term care. Rethinking approaches to care and support systems will benefit today's older persons and those who care for them, as well as future generations of older persons. Care and support systems for older persons should be tailored to the needs, values, and preferences of care recipients and caregivers. They should go beyond the medical aspects of care, to adopt a life-course approach that encompasses an individual's culture, life history, social support network, and identity, and giving recipients control over care decisions.

Member States should pursue a more equitable, person-centered approach to care, safeguarding the human rights of both caregivers and their care recipients. This approach should operate across Governments, civil society, communities, and households, as well as the private sector, to address the needs in the provision of both formal and informal care.⁶

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ [A/HRC/49/70](#)

⁶ DESA (2023), [Policy Brief No. 143 Caregiving in an Ageing World](#)

Objectives

The 2024 Commemoration of the United Nations International Day of Older Persons will bring together experts to discuss policies, legislation and practices that strengthen care and support systems for older persons. The event will host the launch of the United Nations Postal Administration Commemorative Stamp in celebration of the United Nations International Day of Older Persons.

Objectives:

- Emphasize the roles of national policies and legislation⁷, family, and community in ensuring full respect for the dignity, beliefs, needs and privacy of older persons, and for the right to make decisions about their care and quality of their lives.
- Foster greater knowledge and awareness of the global shortage of care workers and the challenges in establishing comprehensive care and support systems for older persons beyond formal healthcare settings, particularly in the context of population ageing.
- Learn from caregivers' experiences and discuss the challenges and opportunities of ageing in place versus long-term care facilities.
- Highlight innovative initiatives providing quality care and support systems for older persons, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive care and social support services, particularly for older persons with conditions such as dementia. Promote the need for specialized training and education for caregivers to address the diverse health needs of older persons, and stress the importance of geriatrics education.
- Advocate for the recognition of the diverse contributions of caregivers, from family members providing unpaid care to professionals offering specialized services, ensuring that their rights are respected. Address the challenges faced by informal caregivers, especially women, and promote policies that support them in balancing multiple responsibilities.

⁷ [General Assembly resolution 46/91](#) Annex: United Nations Principles for Older Persons