



Government policies to address population ageing

1. Well-designed policies on population ageing can help to achieve the SDGs

Population ageing is a universal phenomenon. Nearly every country in the world is experiencing growth in both the size and the proportion of older persons in the population. Currently, there are an estimated 728 million persons aged 65 years or over in the world. In the next 30 years, this number is expected to increase to more than double its present value, reaching 1.5 billion older persons in 2050. The share of the global population aged 65 years or over is expected to increase from 9.3 per cent in 2020 to around 16.0 per cent in 2050. The largest increase (+300 million persons) is projected to occur in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, from 272 million persons aged 65 years or over in 2020 to 572 million in 2050. Other regions expecting major increases in the number of older persons in the next 30 years include Central and Southern Asia (+204 million persons) and Europe and Northern America (+91 million persons).ⁱ

As the number and proportion of older persons in the world increase, a central question is whether older people will benefit from improved health and a better quality of life, as well as social inclusion and income security. Policy measures to address population ageing are critical for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular for ending poverty in all its forms everywhere (SDG 1), ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages (SDG 3), achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG 5), promoting full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG 8), and reducing inequalities within and among countries (SDG 10).ⁱⁱ

2. Population ageing is a major policy concern for the next 20 to 30 years

The relevance of population ageing for government policies is well documented in the responses provided to the Twelfth United Nations Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development, which was conducted during 2018-2019.ⁱⁱⁱ One third of the Governments with available data (27 out of 81) consider

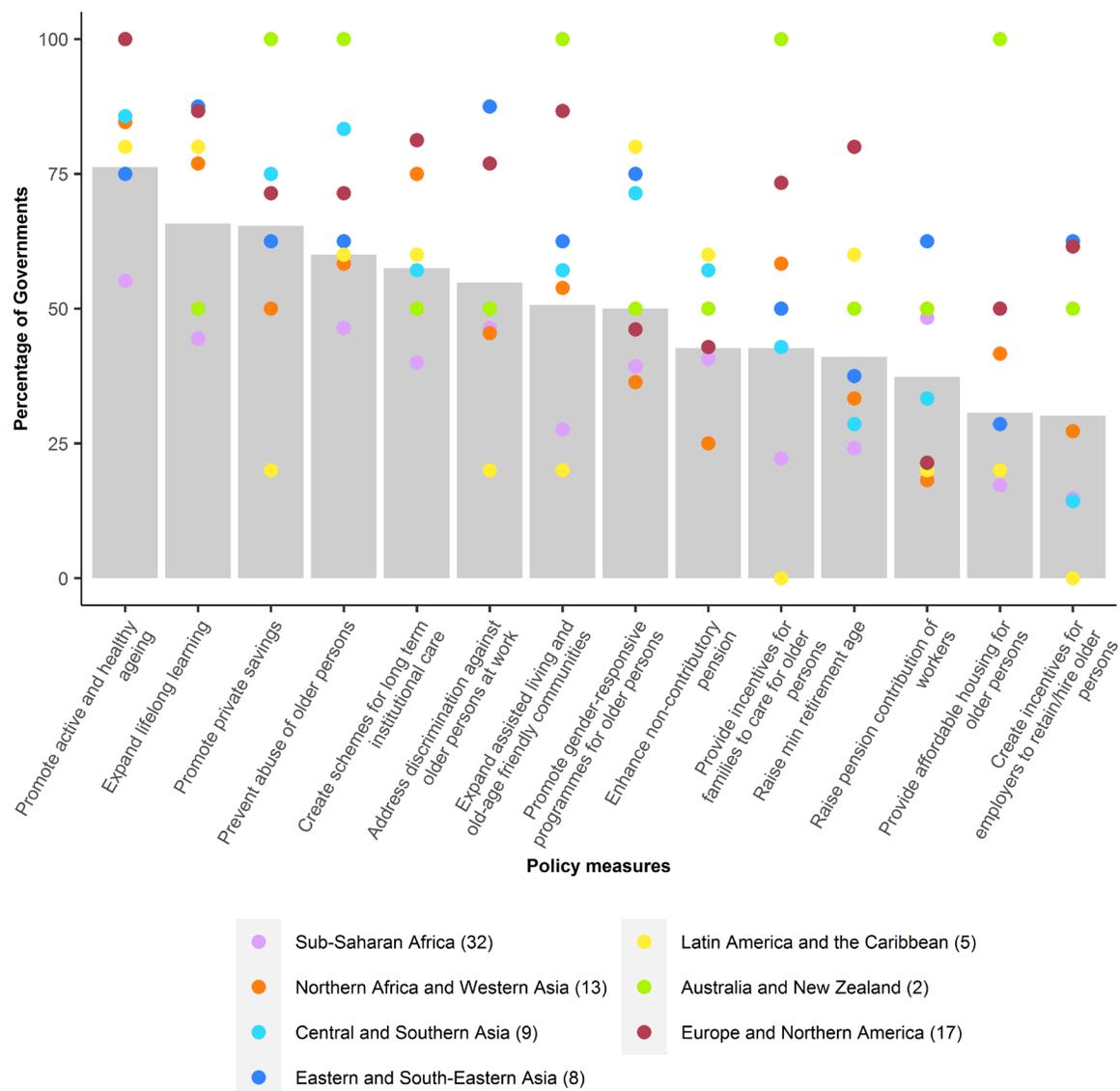
population ageing to be a matter of major policy concern at the present time, and two thirds mark it as a concern for the coming decades. This outlook is shared across regions. The proportion of Governments that considered population ageing to be a major concern for the next 20 to 30 years was highest in Europe and Northern America (94 per cent), followed by Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (88 per cent), Central and Southern Asia (85 per cent), Latin America and the Caribbean (60 per cent), sub-Saharan Africa (50 per cent), Australia and New Zealand (50 per cent), and Northern Africa and Western Asia (46 per cent). Among countries that consider population ageing to be a major concern for the next 20 to 30 years, three fourths (38 out of 50) have enacted a national policy on population ageing.

3. Common policy measures promote active ageing, lifelong learning and retirement savings

As seen in figure 1, among the fourteen policy measures on population ageing listed in the Twelfth Inquiry, the three most commonly adopted by Governments during the past five years were promotion of active and healthy ageing (76 per cent), expansion of lifelong learning (66 per cent) and encouragement of private savings (65 per cent). The figure also shows differences across regions in the policy measures most commonly adopted.

In countries of Europe and Northern America as well as Australia and New Zealand, promoting life-long learning and expanding assisted living and age friendly communities were consistently among the policy responses adopted by Governments. In Central and Southern Asia, preventing abuse and violence against older persons was often listed among the policy responses to ageing. In countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, addressing discrimination against older persons at work was the most widely adopted policy. Governments in Latin America and the Caribbean prioritized programmes for older persons that are responsive to the needs of both women and men. In Northern Africa and Western Asia, creating schemes for long-term and institutional care was a common policy response to population ageing. In sub-Saharan Africa, many Governments prioritized raising the level of pension contributions made by workers.

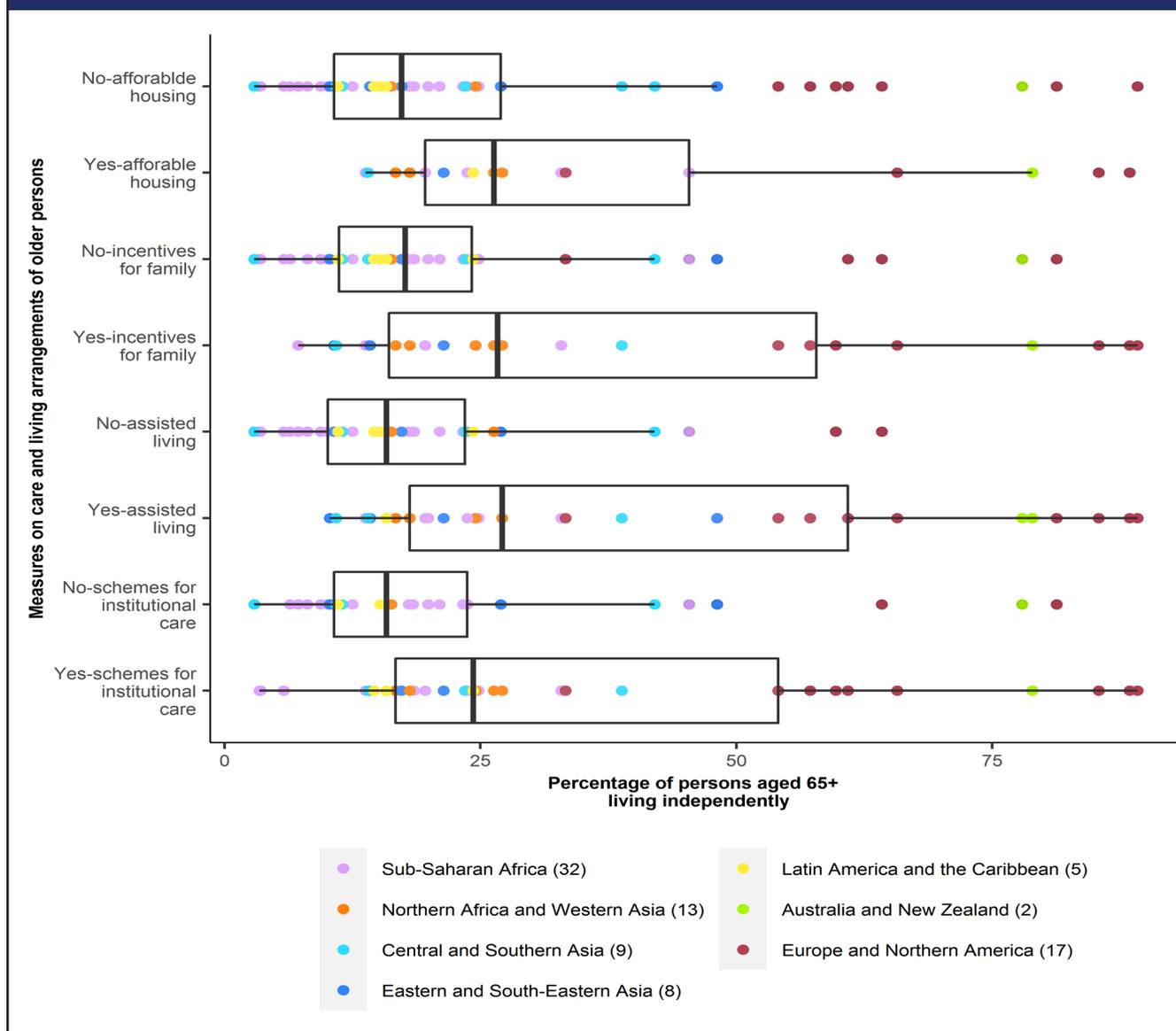
Figure 1. Percentages of Governments, globally and by region, that adopted specific ageing-related policy measures during the five years prior to data collection (roughly 2014-2018)



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *Twelfth Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development*.

Note: Figure 1 presents the 14 policy measures on population ageing included in the survey. The grey bars represent global values while the dots represent regional values, based on data from countries that responded to the Twelfth Inquiry. Those countries, grouped by region, were as follows: Australia and New Zealand (Australia/New Zealand); Afghanistan, India, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan (Central and Southern Asia); Cambodia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam (Eastern and South-Eastern Asia); Belarus, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom (Europe and Northern America); El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras and Uruguay (Latin America and the Caribbean); Armenia, Egypt, Georgia, Iraq, Libya, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, State of Palestine, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia, Turkey and Yemen (Northern Africa and Western Asia); Angola, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Togo and Zambia (sub-Saharan Africa).

Figure 2. Percentages of persons aged 65 years or older living independently in countries that did or did not adopt four specific policy measures on the care and living arrangements of older persons during the five years prior to data collection (roughly 2014-2018)



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *Twelfth Inquiry among Governments on Population and Development*, and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020). *Database on the Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2019*. Available at: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>

Note: The dots represent countries that responded to the Twelfth Inquiry. A “box-and-whiskers” plot depicts the distribution of relevant countries in terms of the percentage of persons aged 65 years or older living independently. For each region, the vertical line inside the box represents the median, and the left and right vertical lines (sides) of the box mark the first and third quartiles (25th and 75th percentiles), respectively, of the distribution. The horizontal lines (“whiskers”) extend to the lowest and highest reported values.

4. Countries with older populations have adopted more policy measures on population ageing

In the five years prior to data collection in 2018 and 2019 (roughly 2014-2018), countries with more than 11 per cent of the population aged 65 years or older – located in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia and in Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand – have adopted, on average, nine or more policy measures to address population ageing, whereas most countries with 6 or less per cent of the population aged 65 years or older – predominantly in Central and Southern Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa – have adopted at most six measures. Nevertheless, an early preparation for population ageing was evident in some countries with a relatively low percentage of population at ages 65 and above, such as in Angola, Cabo Verde, Egypt, Mali, Morocco, Mozambique and Myanmar. These countries reported having adopted eight or more policy measures related to population ageing among the 14 measures listed in the Twelfth Inquiry.

5. Countries with more older persons living independently prioritize care and living arrangements

The proportion of older persons living independently – that is, living alone or with a spouse or partner only – varies widely across countries. Living independently at older ages is quite common in Australia and New Zealand and in Europe and Northern America. For example, more than 75 percent of persons aged 65 or above live independently in Australia, Czechia, Finland, Germany, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. However, living independently at older

ages is significantly less common in other regions. For example, less than 15 percent of older persons live independently in Burkina Faso, Botswana, Honduras, India, Myanmar, Pakistan, Mali, Namibia, Sudan, Thailand, Senegal and South Sudan.^{iv}

Most countries where independent living among older persons is widespread have adopted policy measures to address the care and living arrangements of older persons within the last five years. Accordingly, the percentage of older persons living independently tends to be higher in countries that adopted relevant policy measures compared to those that did not (figure 2). Policy measures adopted to improve the care, living arrangements and well-being of older persons have included the expansion of opportunities for assisted living and age-friendly communities. Governments have also created schemes for long-term and institutional care of older persons and provided incentives and support for families to care for older persons at home. As independent living at older ages becomes more widespread,^v countries outside of Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand are increasingly adopting policy measures to address population ageing. For example, long-term and institutional care schemes were extensively adopted in Northern Africa and Western Asia (75 percent of the Governments) in the last five years (figure 1). Assisted living and age-friendly communities were supported in several countries of Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Central and Southern Asia, and Northern Africa and Western Asia (figure 2). Nevertheless, countries in these regions had significantly lower proportions of older persons living independently than in Europe and Northern America or Australia and New Zealand.

Notes

ⁱ United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). *World Population Prospects 2019, Volume I: Comprehensive Tables* (ST/ESA/SER.A/426).

ⁱⁱ United Nations General Assembly (2015). *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1).

ⁱⁱⁱ The Population Division conducted the Twelfth Inquiry in early 2019. Eighty-one countries responded to Module 1 addressing policies on population ageing. Responses were received for more than 50 percent of the countries in the following five regions: Sub-Saharan Africa (32 out of 48 countries), Northern Africa and Western Asia (13 out of 24), Central and Southern Asia (9 out of 14), Eastern and South-Eastern Asia (8 out of 16), and Australia and New Zealand (2 out of 2). However, data were obtained for less than 50 percent of the countries in three regions: Europe and Northern America (17 out of 46), Latin America and Caribbean (5 out of 33), and Oceania excluding Australia and New Zealand (0 out of 14). See also figure 1.

^{iv} United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020a). *Database on the Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2019*. Available at: <https://population.un.org/>.

^v United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2020b). *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights: Living arrangements of older persons* (ST/ESA/SER.A/451).



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. For more information, please see: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>
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