

# Intergenerational relations

Creating a world for all ages  
so that no one is left behind



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This publication was authored by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

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## Intergenerational relations: creating a world for all ages so that no one is left behind

### Action points:

- Promote intergenerational solidarity.
- Combat ageism and eradicate age discrimination in all its forms.
- Create decent and inclusive work for all.
- Create multigenerational workforces.
- Enhance women's participation in the labour force.
- Promote equity in care provided and care received.
- Promote decent work in the care economy.
- Develop long-term care systems.
- Increase the inclusivity and sustainability of social protection systems.
- Prioritize continuing education and training over the life course.
- Ensure digital inclusion of all groups.
- Support varied living arrangements, respecting cultural nuances and norms.
- Invest in the collection, analysis and dissemination of age- and sex-disaggregated data.
- Change the narrative on ageing and future generations.
- Strengthen collaboration and partnerships.

## Introduction

Populations globally are changing in fundamental ways. Although the world's population continues to grow, the pace of growth is slowing. A result of the demographic transition, or the shift from high to low mortality and fertility rates, this slower population growth is also accompanied by a shift towards a greater number and share of older persons. At the same time, the number of youth is at an all-time high in many parts of the world. Never before in history have so many people of different age cohorts been living together. These global trends, however, differ markedly by region and country. Moreover, the onset and duration of these demographic shifts vary considerably across and within regions.

These changes are the result of improved sanitation, hygiene, nutrition and medical advances, greater access to education and family planning, and strides towards gender equality and empowerment of women and girls, and as such they are cause for celebration.<sup>1</sup> Yet, they also present challenges, in particular if the change is rapid, and if it happens in times of rising inequalities and lack of decent jobs, climate change and environmental crises, rapid urbanization, a growing digital divide, political and economic crisis, and setbacks to women's rights and the empowerment of women.

The topic of intergenerational relations is at the core of United Nations frameworks and mandates. In the fields of population and social development, for example, the 1994 Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development<sup>2</sup> called on Governments to develop social security systems that ensure greater intergenerational and intragenerational equity. Similarly, the Copenhagen Declaration of Social Development of the first World Summit for Social Development in 1995, acknowledged and encouraged the

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa\\_pd\\_2023\\_wsr-fullreport.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2023_wsr-fullreport.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> A/CONF.171/13/Rev.1.

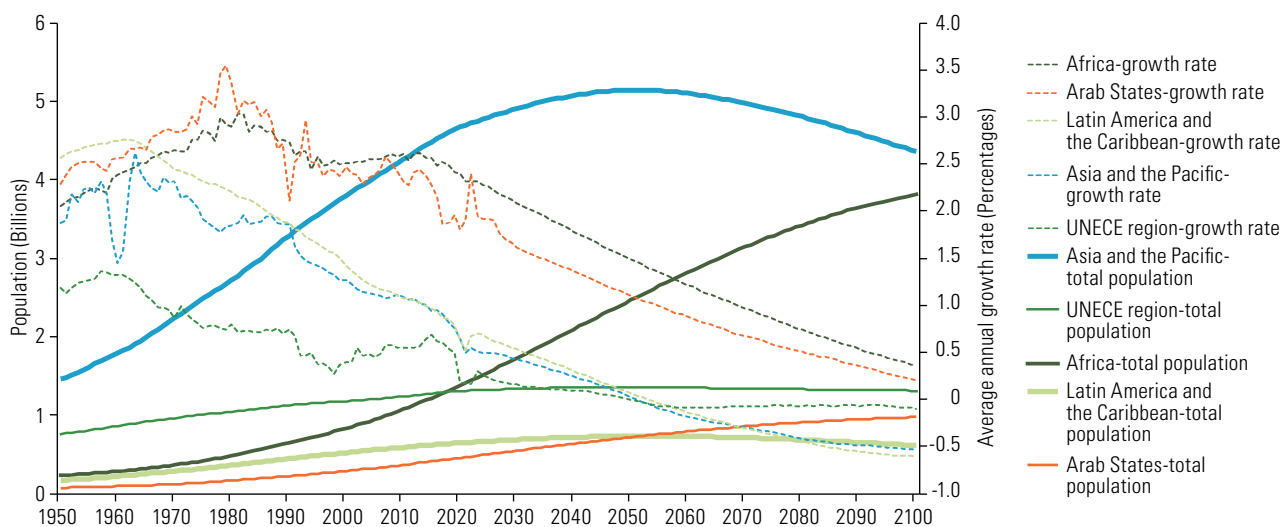
contribution of people of all age groups as equally and vitally important for the building of a harmonious society and called for fostering dialogue between generations.<sup>3</sup> In the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 2002, Governments called for solidarity between generations at all levels—in families, communities and nations—which they perceived as fundamental for the achievement of a society for all ages.<sup>4 5</sup> The Secretary-General’s vision for the future of global cooperation, outlined in Our Common Agenda of 2021, highlights the principle of intergenerational equity—recognizing responsibilities towards future generations and calling for solidarity between people, countries and generations.<sup>6</sup>

This paper, prepared jointly by the five regional commissions of the United Nations,<sup>7</sup> explores the social and economic challenges and opportunities of demographic shifts towards multigenerational societies across the countries covered by the five regional commissions. It discusses the latest evidence on demographic trends and intergenerational relations, labour markets, social protection, care, living arrangements and digitalization across regions, and it provides recommendations to build societies for all ages. With a strong interdisciplinary and interregional focus, the paper addresses intergenerational relations from a variety of perspectives and highlights common actions required, while also acknowledging regional differences.

## Demographic trends and intergenerational relations

The world’s population is projected to grow from 8.2 billion in 2024 to a peak of 10.3 billion in the mid-2080s. After peaking, the global population is projected to start declining gradually, returning to 10.2 billion people by 2100. Today, the world’s population is still growing, but at declining rate. Growth rates among regions vary with some projected to experience population decline in the near future (figure 1).<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 1**  
Total population and population growth rates, by region, 1950–2100  
(Billions of people and percentages)



**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

<sup>3</sup> A/CONF.166/9.

<sup>4</sup> Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the concepts of intergenerational relations, solidarity and equity as they relate to ageing, see also the report of the Secretary-General A/79/15.

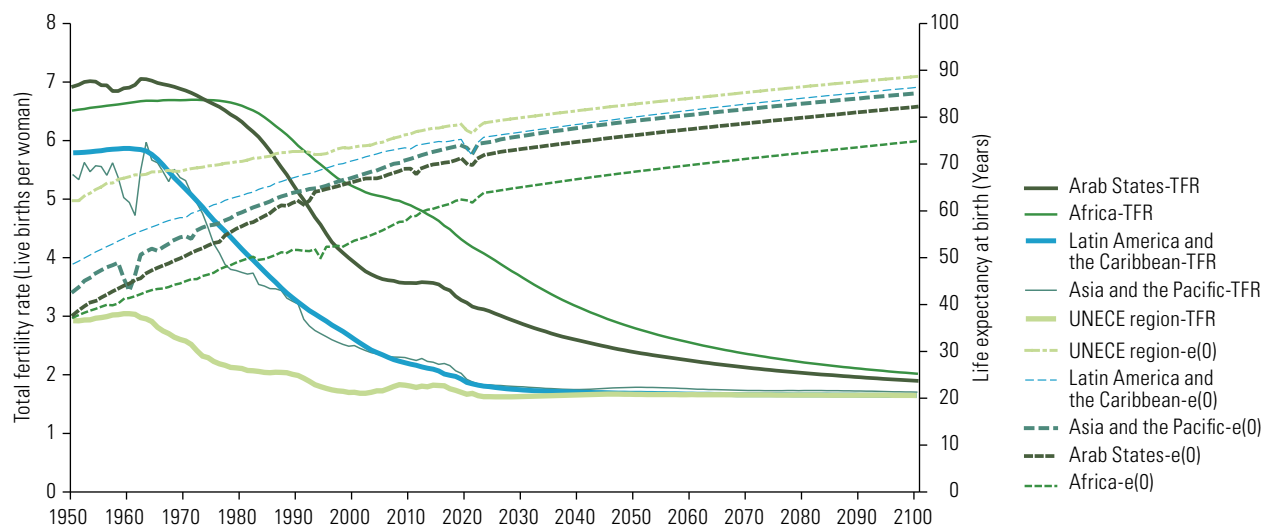
<sup>6</sup> A/75/982.

<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise mentioned, the reference to the regions in this document is with reference to the membership of the different regional commissions of the United Nations and the regions covered by them. For example, the aggregates for the UNECE region also include the United States of America and Canada and the Central Asian republics. For more information on the listing of countries that belong to the different regional commissions, see: [The UN Regional Commissions -- Summaries of Work, Resolutions and Decisions | Regional Commissions New York Office](#).

<sup>8</sup> If not noted otherwise in the text, the demographic data were derived from United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition and follow the aggregation lists of countries for the regional commissions as per World Population Prospects 2024.

Population change across all regions of the world has been affected by the demographic transition or the decline in fertility and mortality, coupled with increased migration (figure 2). This change has also been affected by the epidemiological transition, which refers to the shift in the leading causes of death from infectious and acute conditions associated with childhood to chronic conditions. As a result, people are living longer, but not necessarily healthier lives.

**Figure 2**  
Total fertility and life expectancy at birth, by region, 1950–2100  
(Live births per woman and years)



**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

**Note:** TFR = total fertility rate (live births per woman, 15–49); e(0) = life expectancy at birth.

These transitions also resulted in a shift in population age structures toward a greater number and share of older persons, while the number of children, youth and working-age persons remains high in some countries or is stagnant or declining in others. The median age of the population in all regional commissions increased over time, as older persons make up an increasing share of the total population (table 1). However, there are some differences across regions, with Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean and the UNECE region displaying values above the global average, while Africa and Arab States are showing much lower values, indicating much younger populations.

**Table 1**  
Median age (years) of the population, by region, 1950, 1990, 2024, 2050 and 2100

	1950	1990	2024	2050	2100
Africa	18.1	16.5	19.2	24.4	35.1
Asia and the Pacific	20.9	22.3	32.7	40.5	47.6
Latin America and the Caribbean	18.3	20.7	31.3	40.5	49.1
UNECE region	27.4	31.7	39.4	43.0	46.6
Arab States	18.7	17.3	24.0	29.6	38.8
World	22.2	22.9	30.6	36.1	42.1

**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

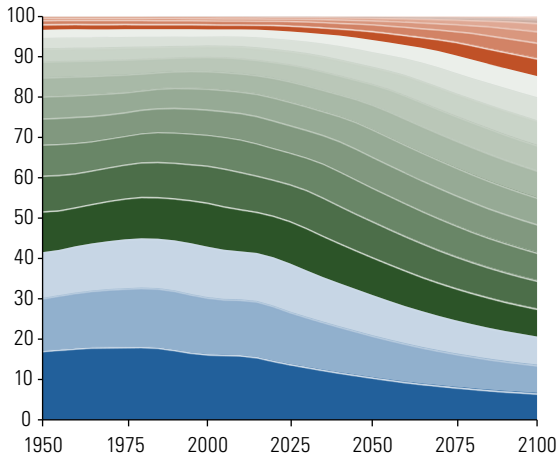
Moreover, in all regions, the number of age cohorts living together for longer periods is increasing, making strong intergenerational relations crucial to achieving an inclusive and sustainable future (figure 3).

**Figure 3**

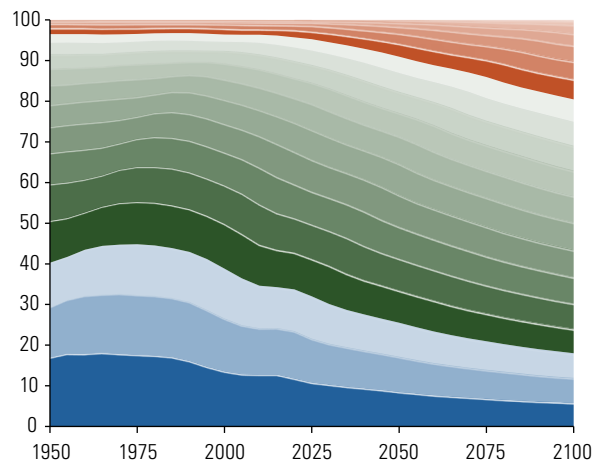
**Population age structures, by region (five-year age groups), 1950–2100**

(Percentage of total population)

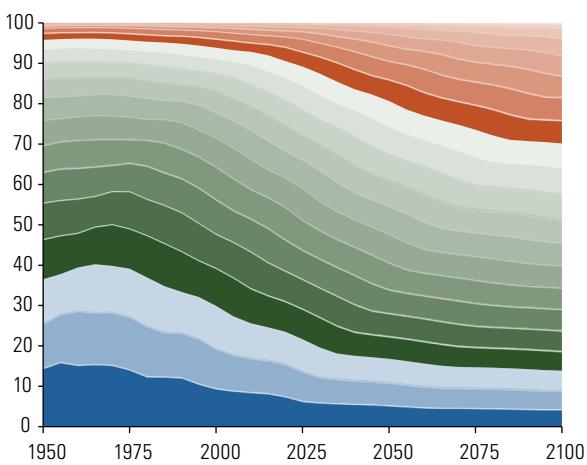
**A. Africa**



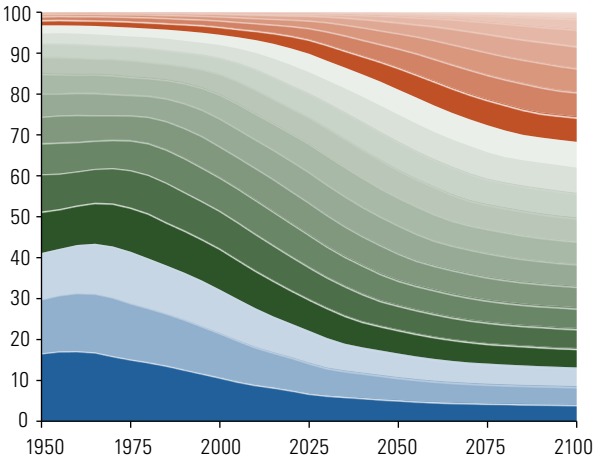
**B. Arab States**



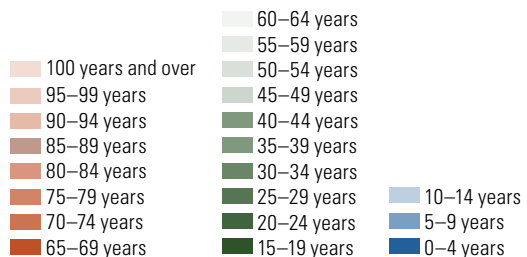
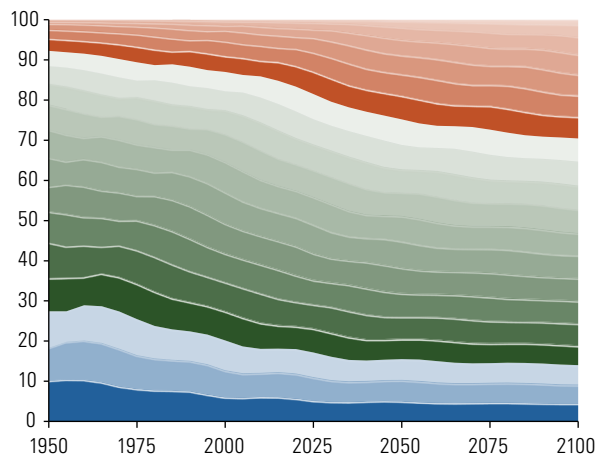
**C. Asia and the Pacific**



**D. Latin America and the Caribbean**



**E. UNECE region**



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

## Africa

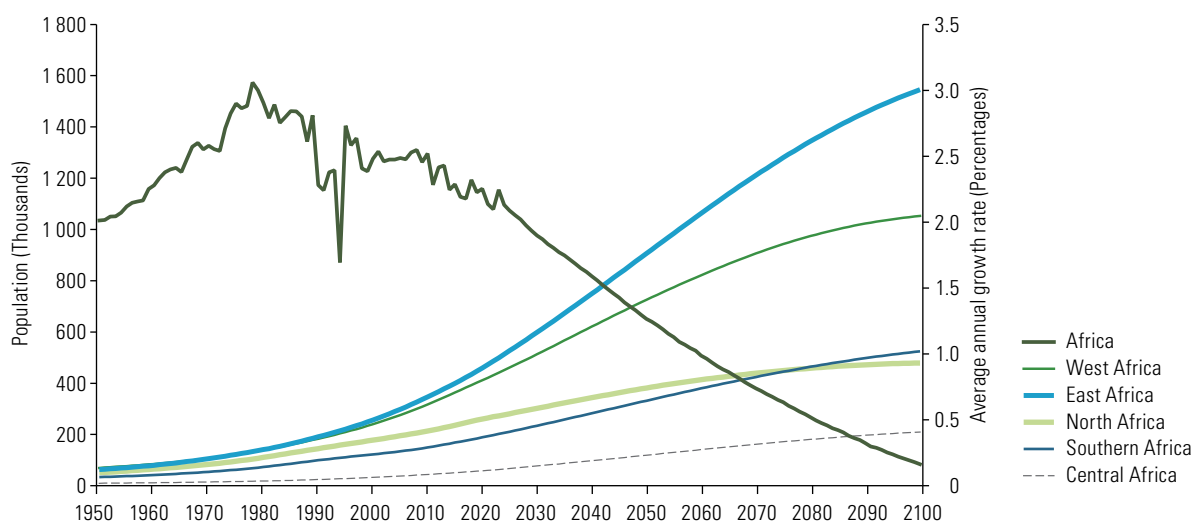
Africa's population has increased from 227.5 million in 1950 to more than 1.5 billion in 2024—an almost seven-fold increase—making it the second most populous region in the world after Asia and the Pacific, and it is projected to increase to 2.5 billion by 2050.

Although annual population growth rates are declining in all regions, Africa's growth rate remains above 2 per cent with the expectation that it will fall below that number by mid-2030 (figure 4). Until 2100, the population growth rate is projected to remain positive. Africa has considerable population momentum compared to other regions and so despite the recent decline in fertility, its population will continue to grow while the other regions are experiencing population decline.

**Figure 4**

**Population growth (total and annual growth rate), by Africa sub-regions, 1950–2100**

*(Thousands of people and percentages)*



**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

More than half of the global population growth between now and 2050 will be in just eight countries, five of which are in Africa: Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and the United Republic of Tanzania. Africa's share of the world's population has grown from less than 10 per cent in 1960 to about 18 per cent in 2020 and is projected to reach 28 per cent by 2050. Globally, more than 1 in 4 people will be African in 2050, from 1 in 11 in 1960.

Overall, and compared to other regions, Africa is experiencing an extremely slow decline in fertility. In 1950, on average, a woman had 6.5 births over her reproductive life. Currently, total fertility rate stands at 4.0 live births per woman. These averages mask considerable heterogeneity, while women in East and West Africa have 4.0 children on average, in Central Africa the fertility rate is 4.5 children per woman. In 2024, in Southern and North Africa, the total fertility rate in 2024 is 3.2 and 2.9 live births per woman respectively. Given this trend in fertility, Africa has considerable population momentum compared to other regions and so despite the decline in fertility, its population will continue to grow when the other regions are experiencing decline in their populations. By 2050, the total fertility rate is projected to reach 2.8 live births per woman.

People are living longer in Africa. Average life expectancy has increased from 37.2 years in 1950 to 64.0 years in 2024, and it is projected to increase to 68.4 years by 2050. On average, Africans add 1 year to their lives every three years. In 2024, five countries—Algeria, Cabo Verde, Mauritius, Morocco and Tunisia—have life expectancy levels higher than the world average of 73.3 years. On the other hand, twenty-two countries still have life expectancy levels below 64 years, which is the final year at which people are typically assumed to still be of working age. Nigeria has the lowest life expectancy in Africa (55 years) which is 18 years less than the world average and 11 years less than the African average.

For Africa, the distribution of populations across age groups matters more than just the size. The continent's median age of 19.2 years in 2024 makes it the most youthful region. Though the proportion of youth population (15–24 years) will decline from 19.6 per cent in 2024 to 18.4 per cent in 2050, the median age will still only be 24.4 years. In absolute terms, Africa will add 138 million to its youth population (15–24 years) in the next quarter century so that by 2050 one in every three young people globally will be African.

Due to reductions in fertility rates, the share of the working-age population (15–64 years) has also increased in recent years from 125 million in 1950 to 336 million in 1990 and 866 million in 2024. By 2050, it is projected that there will be 1.6 billion people of working age, which is more than the continent's total population in 2024, and it will constitute about 25 per cent of the global working-age population. As a result, there is a definite cause for optimism about Africa's potential to reap a significant demographic dividend, provided the right policies are in place. The population of older persons (65+ years) is projected to nearly triple from 55 million in 2024, or 3.6 per cent of the total population, to 144 million, or 5.8 per cent in 2050. Population ageing is an indicator of Africa's success in health care and human development. However, it has implications for planning for specific health, social protection and old-age pension needs of this cohort.

Social, economic, political, and technological changes, climate change, natural disasters, conflicts, and pandemics, have influenced migration in Africa. COVID-19 severely disrupted mobility, but by 2022, most African countries had restored patterns in movement of persons. Natural disasters, including prolonged droughts and severe storms, contribute to increased migration, with an average of 2.5 million Africans temporarily displaced annually over the past decade. In 2021, over 32 million Africans were internally displaced, refugees, or asylum seekers due to political instability and conflicts.

## Asia and the Pacific

The population in Asia and the Pacific has increased from 1.5 billion in 1950 to more than 4.8 billion in 2024 —more than a three-fold increase, and it is projected to increase to 5.1 billion by 2050. However, population growth has slowed and has turned into population decline in several countries already.

The total fertility rate fell from its high of almost 6.0 live births per woman in the mid-1960s to 1.8 live births today. This rapid decline is mainly attributable to increased access to health care, including sexual and reproductive health services, better birth and health outcomes, greater access to quality education and increased participation of women in the labour force. It is projected to remain at about 1.8 births per woman for all of Asia and the Pacific for the near future. The number of countries at or above replacement level (2.1 births per woman) fell from 57 in the mid-1960s to 50 in 1990 and 28 in 2024. Over the same interval, the number of countries at below-replacement level fertility increased from one in the mid-1960s to eight in 1990 and 30 today. By 2050, it is projected that 40 countries will have fertility rates at or below replacement level. A closer look at total fertility rates reveals that the region is home to countries with some of the lowest rates in the world. By mid-2050, the number of deaths will exceed the number of births in the region for the first time.

Over the same period, life expectancy at birth increased from 51.5 years in the mid-1960s to 74.7 years today. Over the next 26 years, life expectancy at birth is projected to increase by another 4.6 years. More people are surviving to old age, and those who do are living longer. In almost all age groups, reductions in mortality have been substantially higher among women than men.

In 2020, there were almost 67 million international migrants in the Asia-Pacific region or 24 per cent of all migrants in the world. Almost 109 million migrants from countries in Asia and the Pacific were living outside their countries of birth, nearly 40 per cent of the global migrant stock. Most migration is intraregional in Asia and the Pacific, and in 2020, about 47 million migrants from countries in the region moved to other countries within the region; thus, 71 per cent of the foreign-born stock in Asia and the Pacific came from within the region.

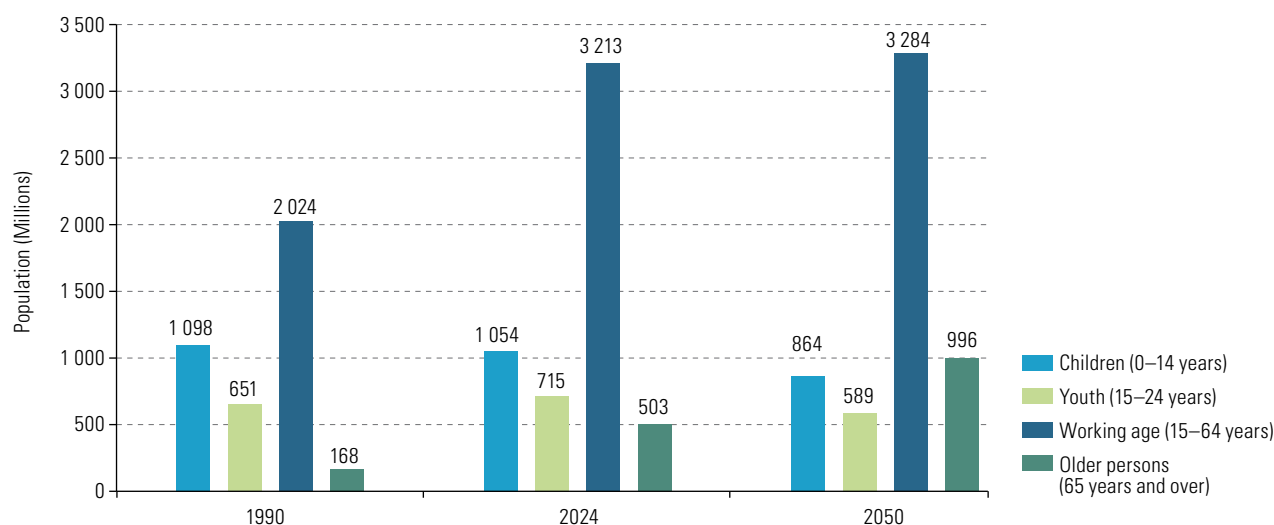
As a consequence of these demographic changes, the population is shifting towards a growing number and share of older persons. The number of children (aged 0–14) and working-age people (15–64) in the region began to increase in the 1950s. The number of children peaked in the mid-1990s and has been more or less declining since then, and the number of working-age people will peak in the mid-2030s. The number

of youth increased from 277 million in 1950 to 651 million in 1990 and 715 million in 2024. It is projected to decline to 441 million by 2100. In contrast, the number of older persons (aged 65 or above) has been growing continuously since the 1950s and is projected to almost double from 503 million in 2024, or 10.5 per cent of the total population, to 996 million, or 19.4 per cent, in 2050, or about four times the number of children under age 5 (figure 5). Population ageing in Asia and the Pacific is particularly rapid, given the significant decline in fertility and mortality in many countries of the region in recent decades.<sup>9</sup>

**Figure 5**

**Child, youth, working-age and older populations, Asia and the Pacific, 1990, 2024 and 2050**

(Millions of people)



**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

## Latin America and the Caribbean

The population in Latin America and the Caribbean quadrupled from 167.8 million in 1950 to about 663.5 million in 2024, and it is projected to increase to 730.1 million by 2050. Soon afterwards, it is expected to decline. Latin America and the Caribbean has shown a slowdown in annual population growth, from 2.6 per cent in the mid-twentieth century to just 0.7 per cent in 2024.

Latin America and the Caribbean is undergoing a swift demographic transition, whereby the region's total fertility rate of 5.9 live births per woman at its peak in 1960 declined to 1.8 in 2024. It is projected to reach 1.7 live births per woman in 2050. Mortality has also declined significantly in the region: life expectancy at birth for both sexes rose from 48.7 years in 1950 to 75.9 years in 2024. By 2050, life expectancy at birth is projected to reach 80.1 years. Similar to other regions, the increase in life expectancy is connected to socioeconomic development, which brought improvements in nutrition, sanitation and urban infrastructure, and enabled the import of medical and health technologies and progress in health care, such as the use of antibiotics and vaccines.

With respect to international migration, in 2020, the migrant population of Latin America and the Caribbean totalled about 43 million, representing approximately 15 per cent of the 281 million migrants worldwide. Most of these migrants —25.5 million (59.5 per cent of the regional total)— were in North America (Canada and the United States), while outside the region, a large number were in the UNECE region (almost 5.4 million, or 13 per cent of the total). At the intraregional level, there are an estimated 11.3 million migrants, mainly in South America, representing 26.3 per cent of the total.

<sup>9</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (2022). Asia-Pacific Report on Population Ageing 2022: Trends, policies and good practices regarding older persons and population ageing (ST/ESCAP/3041).

Furthermore, population growth varies significantly among age groups. In under 40 years, the population aged 15–64 has doubled in size, from 225 million in 1984 to 449 million in 2024. It is projected to continue to grow until it reaches its peak in 2043, while the population aged 0–14 peaked in 2000. Meanwhile, the population aged 65 and over is projected to double from 65 million in 2024, or 9.9 per cent of the total population, to 138 in 2050, or 18.9 per cent of the total population. It will reach its peak in 2081, at 199 million, or 31.7 per cent of the total population.<sup>10</sup>

## UNECE region

The population in the UNECE region has almost doubled from 764.2 million in 1950 to 1.3 billion in 2024, and it is projected to increase to 1.4 billion by 2050, after which it is projected to decline. Beginning in the 1990s, several countries in Eastern and South-Eastern Europe began to experience population decline as a result of rapidly decreasing fertility and negative net migration. Between 1990 and 2024, the total population decreased in 18 of 56 countries in the region and increased in the other 38 countries with immigration compensating for low fertility. Between 2024 and 2030, 29 UNECE countries are projected to increase in total population size, while 27 are projected to decline.

The total fertility rate has been below replacement level since the early 1980s and reached 1.6 live births per woman in 2024. In 2024, the total fertility rate ranged from 1.2 live births per woman or below in Andorra, Italy, Malta, San Marino, and Ukraine to 3 live births per woman or higher in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. In 31 countries in the region, the total fertility rate is 1.5 live births per woman or lower. The five Central Asian countries, Israel, and Monaco are the only countries in the UNECE region with a total fertility rate at or above replacement level.

People in the UNECE region are living longer, healthier lives. Life expectancy at birth has increased steadily from 62.2 years in 1950 to 79.0 years in 2024. It is projected to reach 82.8 years by 2050. Some disparities between subregions persist. Moreover, there are significant differences in life expectancy for men and women, in particular in countries in Eastern Europe and North and Central Asia.

At the regional level, net migration is positive. Since the peak of the Syrian refugee crisis in 2015 when more than 5 million people entered the region, the total number of migrants fell to approximately 1.7 million in 2022 before increasing to an estimated 2.9 million in 2024. Since 2015, several countries in Central Asia and Eastern and South-Eastern Europe have experienced negative net migration. Net migration has been positive in most countries in the region, with the largest inflows to the United States of America, the Russian Federation and Germany.

Gains in life expectancy coupled with low fertility levels have resulted in the growth of the population aged 65 and older in the region. The percentage of people aged 65 years and older in the total population of the region has increased steadily, from 7.7 per cent in 1950 to 11.7 per cent in 1990 to 18.1 per cent in 2024 (figure 6). The share of people aged 65 and older is projected to surpass 20 per cent for the region by 2030 and has already reached or surpassed 20 per cent in 27 countries.

In absolute numbers, there were about 240 million older persons (65 or older) residing in the UNECE region in 2024. By 2050, that number is projected to increase to 338 million. By 2050, children under the age of 15 will make up 15.5 per cent of the population of the region, while people aged 65 and older will make up 24.8 per cent of the population. The share of the population that is of working age (15 to 64 years) is projected to decrease from 64.5 per cent in 2024 to 59.7 per cent by 2050.

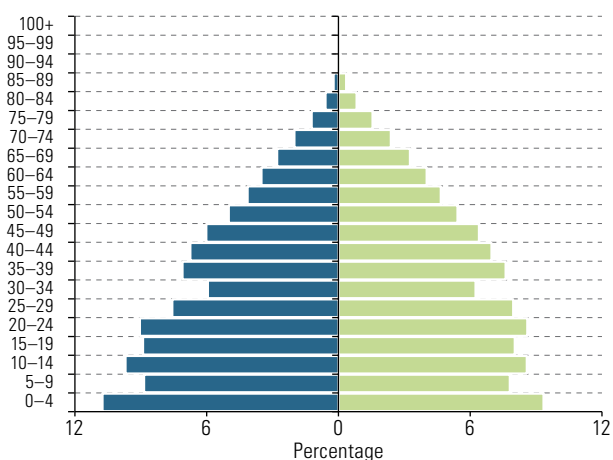
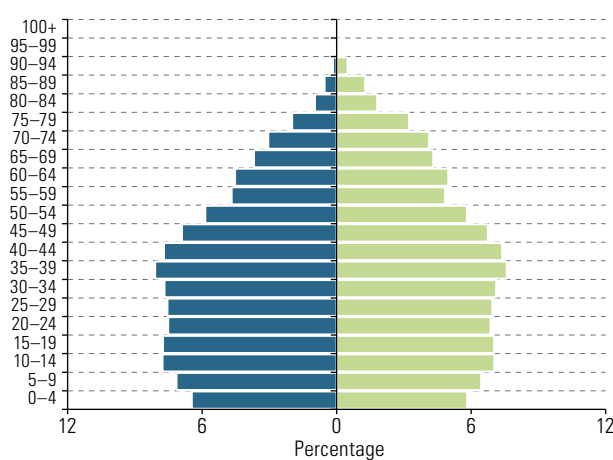
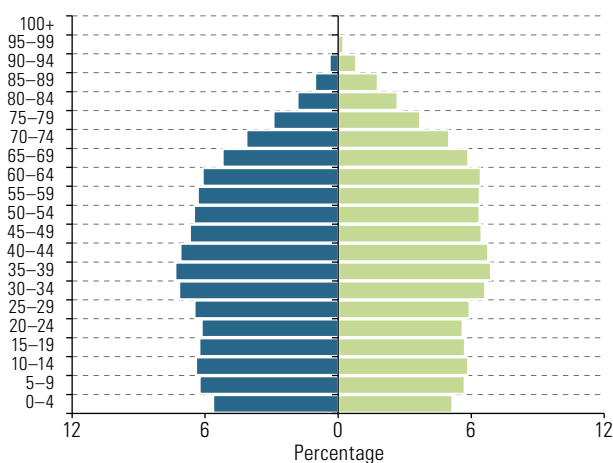
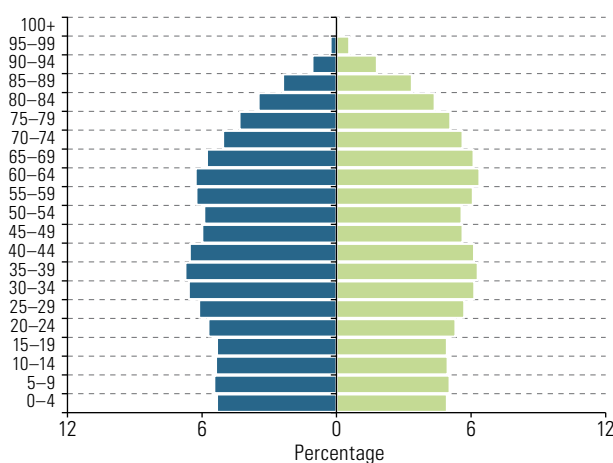
Population ageing is unfolding more slowly in Central Asia where countries are still experiencing the demographic window of opportunity. The share of children under the age of 15 (31.5 per cent) is more than five times higher than the share of people aged 65 and older (5.8 per cent). By 2050, the share of children under the age of 15 will still be twice as large as the share of the population aged 65 and older.

<sup>10</sup> ECLAC (2024). Population, Development and Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: draft second regional report on the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, Santiago, July [online] <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5ffa4eec-f5cf-499c-9f78-558edacc72cd/content>.

**Figure 6**

Population pyramids, UNECE region, 1950, 2000, 2024 and 2050

(Percentages)

**A. 1950****B. 2000****C. 2024****D. 2050**

■ Females ■ Males

**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

## Arab States

The population of Arab States<sup>11</sup> quadrupled from 72.3 million in 1950 to 491.8 million in 2024, and it is projected to reach 717.8 million in 2050. Over the same period, population growth declined from 2.3 per cent in 1950 to 1.9 per cent in 2024, and it is projected to fall to 1.1 per cent by 2050. For the region as a whole, population growth will remain positive.

Similar to other regions, total fertility rates have fallen markedly in Arab States, declining from 6.9 live births per woman in 1950 to 3.1 in 2024, although significant variations exist between countries. The total fertility rate in the region is projected to decline to 2.4 by 2050, bringing it closer to the global average of 2.1 live births per woman. Most Arab States are expected to reach replacement levels around 2070.

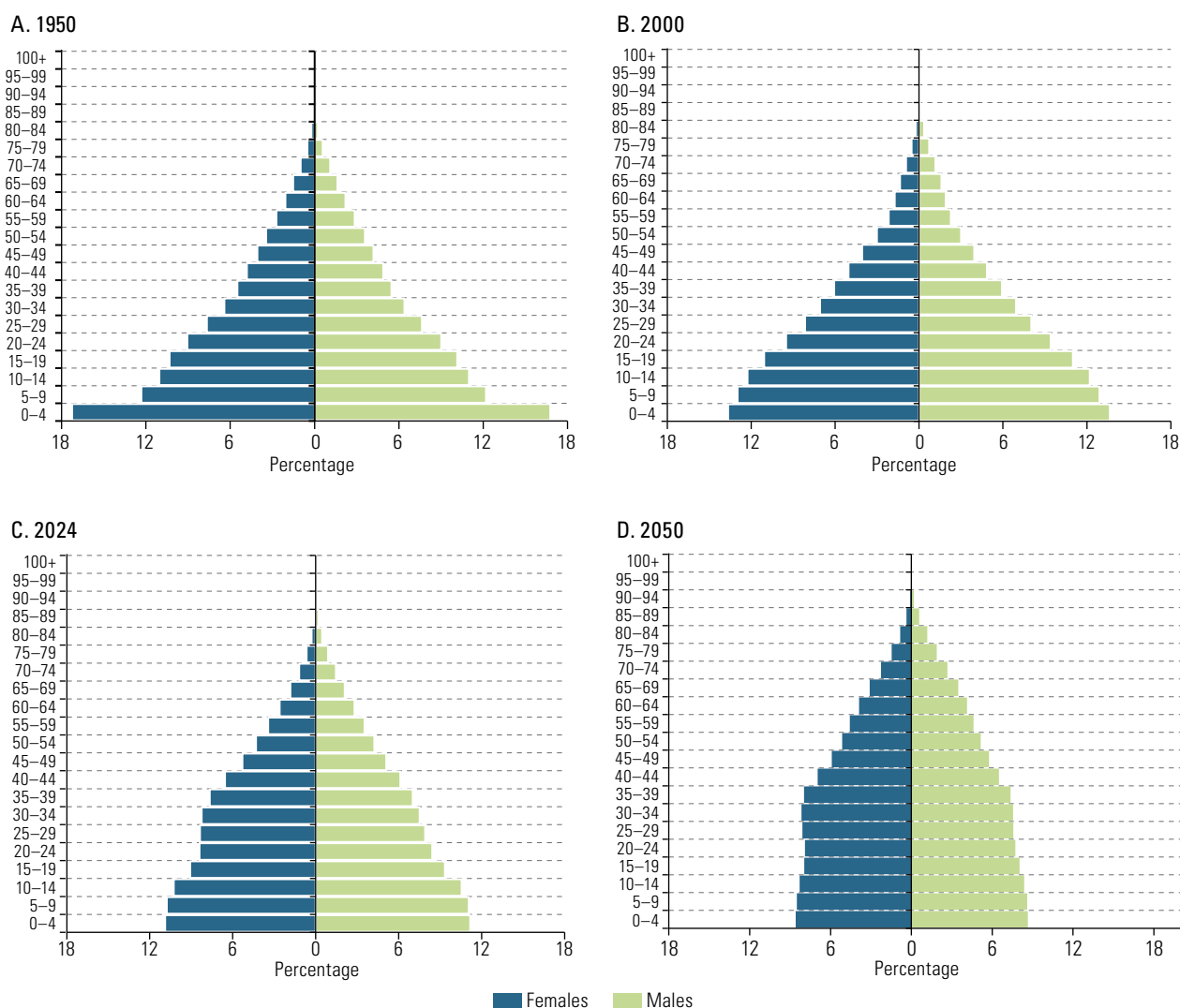
<sup>11</sup> For the demographic analysis, the region consists of the Arab countries in the ESWA region + Comoros.

In Arab States, life expectancy at birth doubled from 37.8 years in 1950 to 72.1 years in 2024. Upward trajectories in life expectancy are foreseen in the future, with an average of 76.2 years for both sexes by 2050.

Migration has become a key factor in population change in Arab States, serving as a catalyst for development in both sending and receiving countries. Arab States have consistently hosted a growing number of international migrants and refugees, with figures rising from 14.2 million in 1990 to 41.4 million in 2020, accounting for 15 per cent of all international migrants worldwide. Additionally, 32.8 million people—up from 11.7 million in 1990—have migrated or been displaced from Arab States, with 44 per cent of them remaining within the region.

Currently, 58 per cent of the population of Arab States is under the age of 30, and with the right policies, the region has an opportunity to harvest the demographic dividend. The proportion of youth (15–24 years) will decline from 17.6 per cent in 2024 to 15.8 per cent by mid-century, and further to 12.3 per cent by 2100. Declining fertility rates, lower mortality, and increased longevity in the region have led to a surge in both the numbers and proportions of older persons (65+). The number and percentage of older persons increased from 7.3 million or 3.2 per cent in 1990 to 22.8 million or 4.6 per cent of the total population in 2024, and it is projected to increase to 64.9 million or 9.0 per cent in 2050 (figure 7).

**Figure 7**  
Population pyramids, Arab States, 1950, 2000, 2024 and 2050  
(Percentages)



**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects 2024, Online Edition.

## Summary

The world's population is projected to continue growing, at a declining rate, reaching a peak of around 10.3 billion people in the mid-2080s, up from 8.2 billion in 2024. After peaking, it is projected to start declining, gradually falling to 10.2 billion people by the end of the century. The transition towards lower fertility and mortality, often referred to as demographic transition, is driving overall population change, resulting also in changes in population age structures. These general trends differ between countries and regions in terms of onset and timing of the demographic transition with implications on population age structures. However, all countries are affected by it, influencing economic growth, social and political development, as well as changes to the environment, and overall relations between generations. It is in this context that demographic foresight and the analysis of the effects of demographic change on people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships are important as countries and stakeholders, representing the people of the world, discuss how to protect the needs and interests of present and future generations.

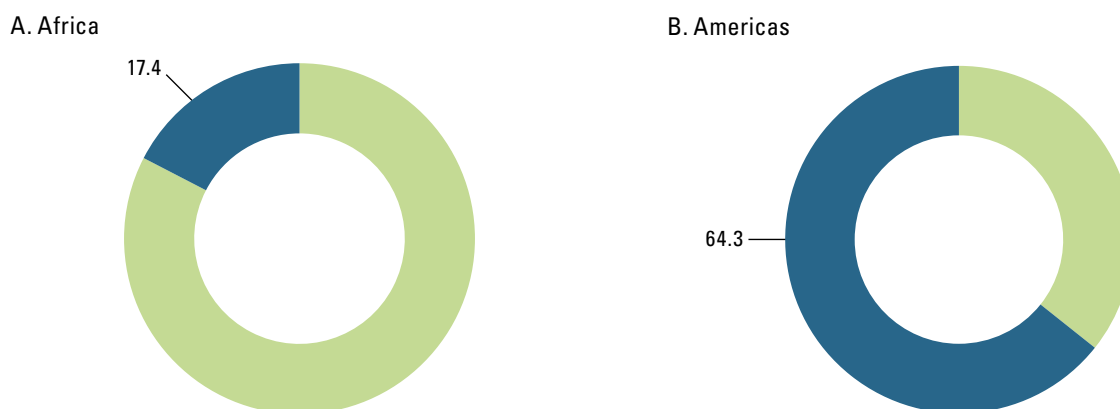
## Labour markets, social protection and care needs

Economic activity, social protection and care needs are affecting the functioning of societies across regions. Slower population growth and a shift toward ageing populations are significantly affecting labour markets, social protection and care needs.

Despite the recent economic slowdown, job growth has proven resilient across most regions, and the unemployment rate has continued to fall. However, labour market imbalances are growing, and productivity growth has been weak.<sup>12</sup> Unpaid care and domestic work remain a barrier for women's labour force participation. Multiple and interacting global crises are eroding prospects for inclusive and sustainable societies of all ages. Population ageing could result in a smaller pool of workers and talent which might hamper human capital accumulation, economic growth and productivity. Yet, investments in health and human capital over the life course, and greater solidarity between generations can counter some of these trends resulting in a healthier, more inclusive and productive workforce.

As of 2020, only 46.9 per cent of the global population was effectively covered by at least one social protection benefit, while the remaining 53.1 per cent—as many as 4.1 billion people—was left unprotected. There are significant inequalities across and within regions, with coverage rates in Europe and Central Asia (83.9 per cent) and the Americas (64.3 per cent) above the global average, while Asia and the Pacific (44.0 per cent), Arab States (40.0 per cent) and Africa (17.4 per cent) have greater coverage gaps (figure 8).<sup>13</sup>

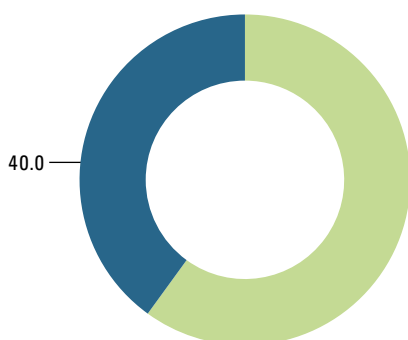
**Figure 8**  
Populations receiving at least one social protection benefit (SDG 1.3), by ILO region, latest available data  
(Percentages)



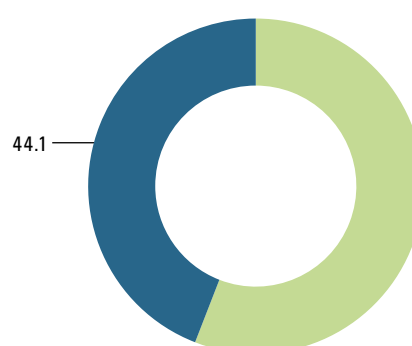
<sup>12</sup> ILO (2024). World Employment and Social Outlook. Trends 2024.

<sup>13</sup> For a definition of the regions, see ILOSTAT.

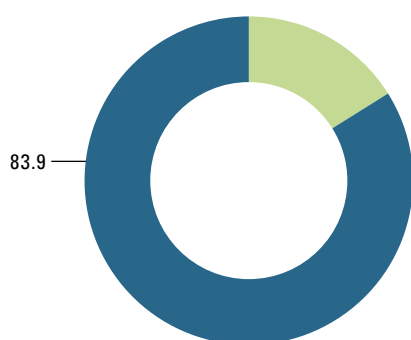
### C. Arab States



### D. Asia and the Pacific



### E. Europe and Central Asia



**Source:** ILO (2021). World Social Protection Report 2020–22.

**Note:** Definition of regions in accordance with ILOSTAT and source listed below.

Given the demographic and epidemiological trends described earlier, combined with shifts in traditional care structures, urbanization, migration and change in values and customs, care needs are shifting and if unaddressed, they could deepen existing gender inequalities. For the majority of older persons worldwide, care remains inaccessible and inadequate. Globally, only 89 of 179 countries (representing half of older persons worldwide) have established statutory national long-term care services for older persons. Even within countries that offer these services, coverage, continuation and quality of care vary significantly.<sup>14</sup>

## Africa

Africa's population is growing faster than the continent's capacity to create decent jobs. Despite being the second-fastest growing region in the world after Asia in 2023–24, Africa accounts for 62 per cent of the world's working poor.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the labour markets in many African countries still face structural issues, including human capital deficits (low labor productivity, lack of skilled workers, and skill mismatch), high levels of informal employment, unequal access to the labor markets, and the lowest social protection and care coverage in the world.

<sup>14</sup> ILO (2024). Social Protection Spotlight - Securing access to long-term care without hardship as an integral part of universal social protection systems.

<sup>15</sup> Africa's Transformation: The Reform of the Global Financial Architecture. <https://www.afdb.org/en/knowledge/publications/african-economic-outlook>.

The human capital deficit, particularly low labour productivity, lack of skilled workers, and skill mismatch in Africa, is one factor contributing to labour market shortcomings. Analysis of labour force statistics reveals that, on average, the three sectors with the highest labour productivity (mining, finance and business services, and utilities) account for less than 5 per cent of employment, while the sector with the lowest labour productivity (agriculture) employs around 52 per cent of the workforce. Moreover, 68 per cent of informal workers have received only primary education or less, compared to 26 per cent of formal workers in 2019. The percentage of women with no education was 14.3 per cent points higher than for men in informal employment. Many persons in formal employment are overqualified, and there is a mismatch between qualifications and job requirements. Thus, human capital is lost.<sup>16</sup> Soft skills<sup>17</sup> are more frequently lacking than technical skills.

Participation in African labour markets during the last decade occurred in sectors marked by high informality and vulnerability. Statistics show that on average, about seven in ten adult men are engaged in the labour force, while five adult women out of ten actively participated in 2022. However, fewer than five out of ten young people of both sexes participated in labour markets in the same year. Moreover, many workers are engaged in the informal economy. On average between 2014–2022, 84 per cent of people were in informal jobs; 43 per cent of women and 57 per cent of men. Furthermore, over four in ten young women aged 15–19 in Africa were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) from 2014 to 2022, compared to two in ten young men aged 15–19 during the same period.

Unequal access to the labour market affects women more than men in Africa. Indeed, available data on the time spent on paid and unpaid care work reveal that on average, women spend 249 minutes per day (4 hours and 15 minutes) on unpaid care work and 184 minutes per day (3 hours and 6 minutes) on paid care work, while men spend 87 minutes per day (1 hour and 45 minutes) on unpaid care work and 275 minutes per day (4 hours and 58 minutes) on paid care work.

Despite the importance attached to social protection at the regional and national levels, Africa still has low social protection and care coverage. Based on the latest available data, on average, the shares of the population covered by some type of social protection are less than 25 per cent for eight out of nine types of social protection schemes. Forty-one per cent of retirees receive a pension but encounter difficulties accessing health and care. Only 57 per cent of countries in the region have a national strategy for healthy ageing, and 11 per cent have started developing age-friendly environments.<sup>18</sup>

## Asia and the Pacific

More than half of the world's labour force resides in Asia and the Pacific. However, the region's labour force participation rate fell from 67.0 per cent in 1991 to 60.9 per cent in 2023 and is projected to decline further over coming years. Improvements in educational attainment and ageing populations are among the main drivers. In absolute terms, however, employment levels have been steadily growing, reaching 2 billion in 2023. A further increase of around 15 million per year is projected until 2026 due to the growing working-age population.<sup>19</sup> By mid-2030s, the working-age population is projected to decline.

There are substantial variations in the labour force participation rate by sex, with the regional average for women at 47.0 per cent in 2023 and the corresponding value for men at 75.0 per cent. Moreover, labour force participation among young persons was significantly lower than among older persons. For example, persons aged 15 to 24 years had a labour force participation of 38.8 per cent in 2023, compared to 77.7 per cent for persons aged 25 to 54 years or 60.8 per cent for those aged 55 to 64 years. Older persons, 65 years or older, had on average a labour force participation rate of 24.3 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> ILO (2023a), *Improving skills and lifelong learning for workers in the informal economy to promote decent work and enhance transitions to formality*. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/improving-skills-and-lifelong-learning-workers-informal-economy-promote>.

ILO (2023b), *Women and men in the informal economy: A statistical update*, ILO Publications, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/women-and-men-informal-economy-statistical-update>.

<sup>17</sup> Soft skills are collaboration, creativity and flexible thinking.

<sup>18</sup> WHO (2021) WHO AFRO and HelpAge International partnering to combat ageism in the African Region. <https://www.afro.who.int/news/who-afro-and-helpage-international-partnering-combat-ageism-african-region>.

<sup>19</sup> ILO (2024), *Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2024 Promoting decent work and social justice to manage ageing societies*.

<sup>20</sup> ILO (2024), *Asia-Pacific Employment and Social Outlook 2024 Promoting decent work and social justice to manage ageing societies*.

Asia and the Pacific lacks decent jobs. Although incomes have been increasing, other job indicators show less progress. For example, the proportion of informal employment in the region fell from 72.7 per cent in 2005 to 66.0 per cent in 2023, or 1.3 billion persons; yet, progress in reducing informal work has been very slow. There are also variations in informality by geographic area, with lower numbers for the Pacific (34.7 per cent) compared to South Asia (87.2 per cent). Women's informality stood at 62.5 per cent, as opposed to 68.1 per cent for men. Often, countries with larger gender gaps in employment tend to have higher rates of informality.

In Asia and the Pacific, only 44.1 per cent of the population are effectively covered by at least one social protection cash benefit, although significant progress has been made in strengthening social protection systems and building social protection floors. The regional aggregate, moreover, hides important disparities both across and within countries. Older people enjoy the highest coverage rate in the region, at 73.5 per cent.<sup>21</sup>

National transfer accounts analysis is available for several countries of the region. Research shows that when older persons live with their adult children, financial transfers between the generations can be substantial and can flow in both directions. While family support for older persons by children remains important, its significance has diminished in recent years. In several countries of the region (e.g. Cambodia, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand), older persons rely heavily on asset income. With the exception of countries like China, Japan and the Republic of Korea, public transfers appear to be less important to older persons in the majority of countries in the region.

National time transfer accounts extend the national transfer account methodology. They focus on household economic flows of unpaid care work by age, using time use surveys. For example, research in Azerbaijan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran and Viet Nam shows that girls spend more time than boys on housework and childcare, reducing the time girls have for school and studying. These obligations restrict girls' and women's opportunities for education and for decent work in the formal labour market. An ESCAP analysis that focused on older persons in Bangladesh, India, Mongolia, Thailand, Türkiye and Viet Nam in 2020 found several common trends across countries: (a) older persons are net producers of care, meaning that they produce more unpaid care work than they consume, (b) older women provide much of the care consumed by older persons, and (c) women of all ages produce the majority of unpaid care work.<sup>22</sup>

Demand for care in old age rises and evolves as populations age. In the region, life expectancy at age 60 is projected to increase from 21.0 years in 2024 to 23.6 years in 2050, a rise of about 12 per cent. However, longer lives are not necessarily healthier lives. With the demographic and epidemiological transition underway, people with disabling illnesses and/or injuries are also living longer. This is particularly true for women, who tend to outlive men. Moreover, climate change contributes to the increased care needs of older persons, who are often the most affected by changing disease patterns, extreme weather events, as well as worsening air quality.

Across the region, filial piety has shaped intergenerational relations, motivating family caregiving and old age income support, and influencing living arrangements, and other aspects of individual, family, social, political, and legal relations for centuries. Yet, fertility decline, shrinking family sizes, and young people leaving their homes have diminished the hold of these obligations.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, people from many countries in the region work as health care and long-term care providers in other parts of the world, and the region suffers from a "brain drain" of such workers. Similar patterns are found in other parts of the world, often referred to as global care chains. Although there is no universally accepted definition or estimate of unmet needs for care of older persons, it is clear from available evidence that care needs are not being adequately met in Asia and the Pacific, contributing to rising health and overall inequalities in the region. In addition, discussions about caregiving and intergenerational relations often focus on the role of women as caregivers or older persons as net receivers of care provided by younger persons. Thus, older persons are generally perceived as net receivers of care, and younger people as net producers. Available data for selected countries in Asia and the Pacific show that women aged 65 years or over, spend more than 10 per cent of their day on unpaid domestic chores and care work. In general, it can be concluded that older women spend more time on unpaid care and domestic work throughout the region than men.

<sup>21</sup> ILO (2021). World Social Protection Report 2022–23.

<sup>22</sup> ESCAP (2020). Older women and men as providers and recipients of unpaid care work in the Asia-Pacific region.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) (2023). Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023 (ST/ESCAP/3112).

## Latin America and the Caribbean

One of the challenges posed by population ageing concerns the implementation of social protection measures to guarantee a minimum level of income for sustaining life, which would require substantial investment. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) estimated that, in 16 Latin American and Caribbean countries, spending on pensions, health care (public and private) and long-term care absorbed an average of 11.7 per cent of GDP in 2020. Owing to population ageing, this expenditure is expected to grow to 18.9 per cent of GDP in 2050. Roughly 48 per cent of this growth would be driven by pensions, which are projected to increase from 3.9 per cent of GDP in 2020 to 7.4 per cent in 2050. Health-care spending is set to rise from 7.4 per cent to 10.2 per cent of GDP over the same period, accounting for 37 per cent of the total increase. Most of this increase would be driven by health-care spending on persons aged 65 years or over, which is projected to grow from 2.2 per cent of GDP in 2020 to 4.8 per cent in 2050. Meanwhile, health-care spending on persons under 65 years of age is expected to remain relatively constant at approximately 5 per cent of GDP. Developing care systems covering 50 per cent of dependent persons would cost almost 1.4 per cent of GDP in 2050.

Owing to the high degree of informality prevailing in the region's labour market, the proportion of employed people paying into a social security system remains woefully low in many countries. Between 2018 and 2022, in six of 10 countries analyzed, fewer than 40 per cent of employed persons paid into such a system. Low levels of contribution during a person's working years translate into insufficient income in old age. In 2022, 44 per cent of women and 39 per cent of men over the age of 65 in Latin America received either no pension or one below the poverty line, driven mainly by the high share of unpaid care work of women.<sup>24 25</sup> Some countries, such as Brazil, Chile and Uruguay, have achieved adequate pensions and broad coverage, ensuring a sufficient income for more than 80 per cent of older persons.

The inadequacy of pensions and the lack of other sources of income means that many older persons remain in the labour market beyond retirement age. The employment rate of persons aged 65 years and over remained around 20 per cent in 2019–2022, albeit with a large gender gap, as the male rate was more than double that of women (figure 9). Data for the first and second quarters of 2020 indicate that, owing to the effect of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the employment rate of the population aged 65 years or over declined sharply among both men (–9 per cent) and women (–4.5 per cent). Older persons also face a persistent challenge in terms of labour inclusion, since they are more likely to move into unemployment or informal and very precarious jobs as they grow older, compounded further by ageism. In the last quarter of 2022, the informality rate among employed persons over 65 years of age was 53.2 per cent, for both men and women, compared to 46.5 per cent among the entire employed population aged 15 years and over.<sup>26</sup>

The combination of changes in employment, population movement, increased life expectancy, incidence of chronic diseases, and population ageing is generating an increase in the demand for care and a reduction in the time and number of people available to provide unpaid care. This complex situation leads to what has been called the “care crisis” or “social reproduction crisis”.<sup>27 28 29 30</sup> Unlike other sectors where productivity improvements can reduce the need for labour, the care sector is expected to see an increase in total employment demand, even with the incorporation of new technologies.<sup>31 32</sup> While traditionally associated with countries with ageing populations, the current labour market model, organized around a full-time working day and ignoring the pressure on the overall demand for care and double workloads, predominantly borne by women, makes the crisis a global phenomenon. In this context, the reorganization of care is essential to stimulate economies through an expansion of the sector.

<sup>24</sup> ECLAC (2022a). The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago.

<sup>25</sup> ECLAC (2023a), Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean 2023: labour inclusion as a key axis of inclusive social development (LC/PUB.2023/18-P/Rev.1), Santiago.

<sup>26</sup> ELAC (2024). Population, Development and Rights in Latin America and the Caribbean: draft second regional report on the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, Santiago, July [online]. <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/5ffa4eec-f5cf-499c-9f78-558edacc72cd/content>.

<sup>27</sup> Ezquerro, S. (2011), “Crisis de los cuidados y crisis sistémica: la reproducción como pilar de la economía llamada real”, Investigaciones Feministas, vol. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Fraser, N. (2016), “Contradictions of capital and care”, New Left Review, No. 100.

<sup>29</sup> ECLAC (2022). Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: inclusion and rights of older persons, Santiago, December [online] <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/703b8179-ba9d-4838-8ec1-61405dbcbd18/content>.

<sup>30</sup> ECLAC (2022a). The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago.

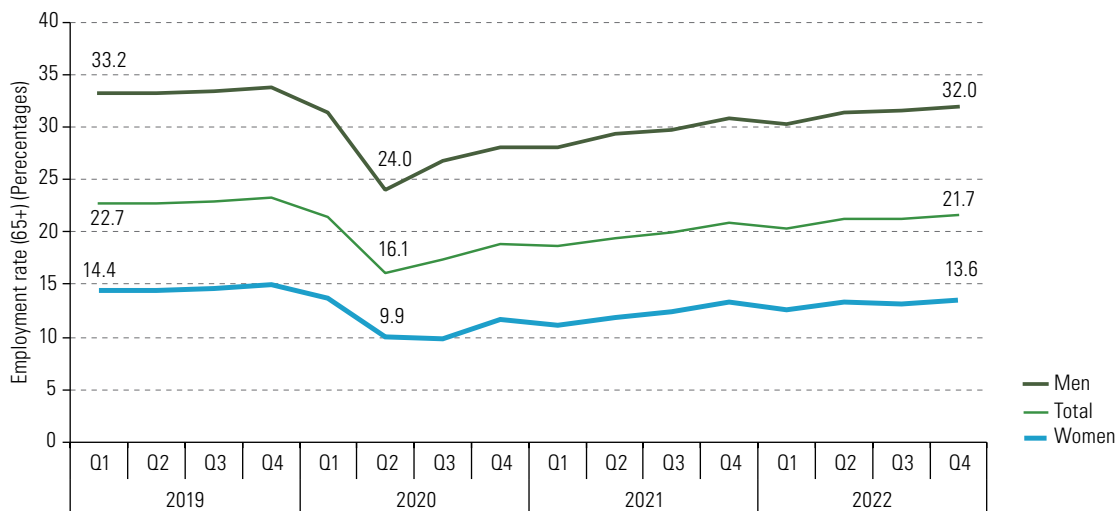
<sup>31</sup> ECLAC (2022b). Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean 2022: Transforming education as a basis for sustainable development (LC/PUB.2022/15-P), Santiago.

<sup>32</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO), (2018) Care work and care jobs for the future of decent work, Geneva.

**Figure 9**

Employment rates of the population aged 65 years and over, Latin America and the Caribbean (12 countries), by sex and quarter, 2019–2022

(Percentages)



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023 (LC/PUB.2023/18-P), Santiago, 2023.

**Note:** The following 12 countries are included in the analysis: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Paraguay, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay; the 2020 and 2021 data may not be strictly comparable with those of 2019, because adjustments were made to the statistical processes applied by the statistical and census institutes owing to the situation arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Latin America and the Caribbean is undergoing a demographic transition characterized by a rapid expansion of the working-age population, falling fertility rates, and increasing life expectancy. While the 15–64 age group will remain predominant until at least the 2030s, societies are ageing across the region.<sup>33</sup> This shift will change the distribution of care, transitioning from a focus mainly on childcare to one where elder care becomes much more prevalent at a very rapid pace.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, domestic and care work is invisible, devalued and feminized, both in the labour market, where work is paid, and in the private sphere of the home, where work is unpaid. Half of women are outside the labour market, in contrast to men’s participation rate of nearly 75 per cent,<sup>34</sup> largely due to the sexual division of labour and the disproportionate burden of care work on women. While men allocate more than half of their working time to the labour market, women devote approximately a third. In the case of unpaid work, the proportion is reversed: women allocate more than half of their working time to unpaid work, and three times more than men.<sup>35</sup> Women in the region devote up to a quarter of their time (25 per cent) to such work each day or week, while men spend no more than 12.5 per cent of their time on it (SDG indicator 5.4.1).

Women’s heavier unpaid domestic and care workload limits their ability to participate equally in the labour market, to earn money, and to be independent. Women who work for pay often work a double shift, since increased labour market participation does not mean that unpaid domestic and care work is redistributed.

Additionally, it is important to highlight that poverty disproportionately affects women, with three out of ten women living in poverty and one out of ten in extreme poverty. One in four women has no income of her own, almost three times more than men, and among women in the lowest income quintile, nearly 40 per

<sup>33</sup> ECLAC (2022). Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: inclusion and rights of older persons, Santiago, December [online] <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/703b8179-ba9d-4838-8ec1-61405dbcdbd18/content>.

<sup>34</sup> ECLAC (2023). Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean 2023: labour inclusion as a key axis of inclusive social development (LC/PUB.2023/18-P/Rev.1), Santiago.

<sup>35</sup> ECLAC and UN Women (2024). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean: gender indicators up to 2023 (LC/TS.2024/19), Santiago.

<sup>36</sup> ECLAC (2022a). The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago.

cent do not receive any type of monetary income.<sup>37</sup> This situation is exacerbated when it intersects with other dimensions such as age, adolescent pregnancy or forced child marriage, ethnicity or race and discrimination against Afro-descendant individuals and Indigenous Peoples, migration status, or income level. Lack of income is intertwined with and reinforced by lack of time, because, without their own income, women cannot hire services in the market to alleviate the burden of unpaid work. Moreover, this excess burden obstructs their participation in activities that would enable them to generate their own income. Many of the women who succeed in participating in the labour market do so in informal jobs, and they are overrepresented among persons with lower incomes.

Exclusion from education, employment or training in Latin America and the Caribbean is slightly lower in the region than the global average. However, it remains high and increased sharply during the pandemic. This exclusion varies greatly by gender, and by the presence of children in the household, which intensifies the care burden for young women. As a result, they are often driven to engage in unpaid work, even when they are adolescents and likely have not completed their studies, while men in these households focus on paid work.<sup>38</sup> These differences are especially relevant, as they can have impacts on women's future career trajectories, and young women already face higher unemployment rates and job precarity than young men.<sup>39</sup> Achieving social inclusion and gender equality among young people therefore remains a challenge, which requires the adoption of lifelong education- and employment-related measures, as well as measures that link curricula and relevant job skills, provide alternative training programmes for the transition from school to work or for periods when young people are not in employment or education, and advocate for health, sexual and reproductive rights and gender equality.

According to ECLAC estimates, closing gender gaps in labour force participation in Latin America and the Caribbean could increase GDP by 6.9 percentage points between 2016 and 2030. Additionally, the contribution of unpaid domestic and care work to the economy of the region ranges between 15.9 per cent and 27.6 per cent of GDP, with women accounting for 74.5 per cent of this contribution.<sup>40</sup>

## UNECE region

Across UNECE countries, the age and gender composition of the labour force is changing. In recent decades, labour force participation among young people aged 15 to 24 years has decreased, and it has increased among those aged 55 to 64 years. The share of women participating in the labour market has also increased. The largest increase has been among women aged 55 to 64 years, whose median participation rate doubled from 28 per cent in 2000 to 56 per cent in 2022.<sup>41</sup> Despite increases for people aged 55 to 64, the median labour force participation rate is 25 per cent lower among people in this age group compared with people aged 25 to 54. Women are less likely than men to be in the labour force at all ages in all countries in the region. The share of men participating in the labour force is on average 17 per cent higher than the share of women across the region.<sup>42</sup> Gender gaps are largest among those aged 55 to 64. In the last 20 years, the average effective labour market exit age has increased, rising from 60.2 years to 63.7 years for men and from 58.5 years to 62.5 years for women between 2000 and 2022.<sup>43</sup> While men continue to work longer on average across countries, the gender gap is narrowing, and the average effective labour market exit age is increasing faster among women than among men.

<sup>37</sup> ECLAC and UN Women (2024). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean: gender indicators up to 2023 (LC/TS.2024/19), Santiago.

<sup>38</sup> ECLAC and ILO (2023). Labour market inclusion of young people and redistribution of care work: challenges and opportunities, Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, No. 29 (LC/TS.2023/197), Santiago.

<sup>39</sup> ECLAC and ILO (2023). Labour market inclusion of young people and redistribution of care work: challenges and opportunities, Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, No. 29 (LC/TS.2023/197), Santiago.

<sup>40</sup> ECLAC (2022). The care society: a horizon for sustainable recovery with gender equality (LC/CRM.15/3), Santiago.

<sup>41</sup> ILO, ILOSTAT. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> (Accessed 13 August 2024). Data reflect median value for 52 countries with data. Data unavailable for Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and San Marino.

<sup>42</sup> ILO, ILOSTAT. Available at <https://ilostat.ilo.org/> (Accessed 13 August 2024). The data reflect the average percentage difference in the labour force participation rate between women and men aged 15 to 64 in 2022 across 52 countries with data. Data unavailable for Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, and San Marino. Data for Ukraine are from 2021.

<sup>43</sup> OECD. Data reflect median values for 36 countries with data: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, United Kingdom, United States.

Based on data from 2020–2023, 70 per cent or more of the population is covered by at least one social protection scheme in 38 countries in the region with data.<sup>44</sup> Coverage is highest when it comes to pensions, social protections for low-income persons and persons with disabilities, and child and family cash benefits. Gaps in social protection persist. Only about half of unemployed persons receive unemployment benefits in Europe and Central Asia, and only two-thirds of vulnerable persons are covered by social assistance.<sup>45</sup> The gender pension gap remains significant: in one-third of countries with data, fewer women than men above retirement age receive pensions.<sup>46</sup>

In parts of the UNECE region, informal employment represents a significant share of total employment: 45 per cent in Central Asia, 30 per cent in Western Asia, and 19 per cent in Eastern Europe.<sup>47</sup> Informal employment is most common in the agricultural sector in these subregions. The region benefits from a skilled labour force,<sup>48</sup> with nearly 90 per cent of employed persons working in medium- or high-skilled occupations across countries in the region.<sup>49</sup>

The share of heterosexual couples with young children where both the man and the woman are working (full-time or part-time) has grown across the region from a median value of 54 per cent in 2000 to 63 per cent in 2020 Figure 46.<sup>50</sup> However, the gap in female employment between couples with and without children remains large in some countries, pointing to ongoing challenges for families in balancing work and family life, especially for parents of young children. Moreover, couples with young children are less likely to both work full-time than those with older children or those without children. In Austria, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the) and Switzerland, the share of heterosexual couples where both partners are working full-time is more than twice as high for couples without children as for couples with children under age 6.

Despite increased participation in the labour market, women continue to spend more time than their male counterparts on unpaid care and domestic work, and they often spend more total time working (paid and/or unpaid work) than men.<sup>51</sup> The ILO estimates that women in Central and Western Asia spend on average three times as much time as men on unpaid care work,<sup>52</sup> and about twice as much time in Europe.<sup>53</sup> In North America, women spend 40 per cent more time on average than men on unpaid care work.<sup>54</sup> In countries in the UNECE region where female labour force participation is high, women still spend 30 to 40 per cent more of their time on care and domestic work than men.

Across countries in the region, around one in 10 youth aged 15–24 years are not in education, employment or training (NEET).<sup>55</sup> In general, gender gaps in NEET rates are quite small, and youth aged 20–24 are more likely to be not in education, employment or training than younger youth. NEET rates in nearly every country in the UNECE region are below the global average of 22 per cent.<sup>56</sup> Nonetheless, upward trends in some countries are a reason for concern.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, NEET rates among youth remain above 20 per cent in Albania, Armenia, Georgia, Montenegro and Türkiye.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>44</sup> ILOSTAT (accessed on 10 July 2024).

<sup>45</sup> International Labour Office. *World Social Protection Report 2020–22: Social Protection at the Crossroads – in Pursuit of a Better Future*. Geneva: ILO, 2021.

<sup>46</sup> ILOSTAT (accessed on 10 July 2024).

<sup>47</sup> ILOSTAT (accessed on 10 July 2024). Values for 2024. Western Asia includes Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, Israel, and Türkiye.

<sup>48</sup> ILOSTAT.

<sup>49</sup> ILOSTAT (accessed on 10 July 2024). Data reflects median value (88 per cent) for 2023 or most recent year available for 48 countries with data. Data unavailable for Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Tajikistan, Türkiye, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

<sup>50</sup> UNECE Statistical Database. Data reflect median value for 26 countries with data: Austria, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands (Kingdom of), Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States. Time-weighted linear regression based on available empirical data used to estimate underlying country-level values for years shown when missing.

<sup>51</sup> Jacques Charmes, *The Unpaid Care Work and the Labour Market: An Analysis of Time Use Data Based on the Latest World Compilation of Time-Use Surveys* (Geneva, International Labour Organization, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> ILOSTAT. Data reflect median value for 2023 or most recent year for 45 countries with data. Data unavailable for Andorra, Azerbaijan, Israel, Kazakhstan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

<sup>56</sup> ILOSTAT. Global average for 2024.

<sup>57</sup> ILOSTAT. The share of NEET youth increased between 2015 and 2023, or in the most recent year for which data are available, in Austria, Germany, Iceland, Israel, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, Switzerland and Türkiye.

<sup>58</sup> ILOSTAT. The most recent data for Albania, Armenia, Montenegro and Türkiye are from 2022; for Georgia, from 2020.

In 2019, one in 10 persons aged 65 years and older in European Union countries reported use of formal home care services.<sup>59</sup> Evidence on informal caregiving is limited, but available data suggest that older persons aged 65 and older are both recipients and providers of care. Across region countries in the region with data, one in four persons aged 65 and older report receiving personal care, practical household help, or help with paperwork from family, friends, or neighbours outside their household.<sup>60</sup> Among those with difficulties with activities of daily living and/or instrumental activities of daily living, 28 per cent report receiving personal care from someone in their household.<sup>61</sup> Nearly 30 per cent of persons aged 65 and older report regularly or occasionally caring for grandchildren without the presence of the parents.<sup>62</sup>

## Arab States

In 2023, the labour force participation rate (LFPR) in Arab States was 49.4 per cent. There were substantial variations by age: among adults, LFPR was 57.5 per cent and among youth it was 26.5 per cent. There are striking disparities in LFPR between men and women in Arab States. The female LFPR stood at 19.9 per cent, which is far below the global average of 47.2 per cent. On the other hand, the male LFPR was 70.4 per cent, which is close to the global average of 72.4 per cent. Among youth, young women have a LFPR of just 10.9 per cent compared to 39.0 per cent for Arab males of the same age. Finally, the Gulf Cooperation Council subregion<sup>63</sup> exhibits significantly higher LFPR than the rest of the region, with a LFPR of 68.2 per cent.<sup>64</sup>

Just over one in three people in Arab States received at least one social protection cash benefit, which is well below the global average of 46.9 per cent.<sup>65</sup> Coverage in the region is often substantially below the global average (table 2). Indeed, the regional average is above the global average only when it comes to the proportion of workers covered in case of employment injury. Meanwhile, the regional average is close to the global average with regards to proportion of children receiving child and family cash benefits. The exclusion of large groups of the population from social protection platforms leaves them more vulnerable to income insecurity and poverty. Furthermore, social protection benefits are not considered adequate in light of devaluation and inflation.

**Table 2**

Share of the population in Arab States with social protection, latest available year

Indicator	Value (Percentage)	Number of Arab States with data	Global average (Percentage)
Proportion of the population receiving at least one social protection cash benefit	33.7	21	46.9
Proportion of children receiving child and family cash benefits	25.1	19	26.4
Proportion of persons with severe disabilities receiving disability cash benefits	16.8	17	33.5
Proportion of women giving birth covered by maternity benefits	8.0	17	44.9
Proportion of unemployed receiving unemployment cash benefits	3.2	20	18.6
Proportion of workers covered in case of employment injury	37.1	20	35.4
Proportion of persons above statutory retirement age receiving an old-age pension	46.1	20	77.5
Proportion of labour force aged covered by a pension scheme	31.3	18	53.7

**Source:** ESCWA calculations from ILO STAT.

<sup>59</sup> Eurostat (accessed 11 July 2024).

<sup>60</sup> SHARE-ERIC (2024). Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe (SHARE) Wave 9. Release version: 9.0.0. SHARE-ERIC. Data set. DOI: 10.6103/SHARE.w9.900. Data reflect median value for 2021/2022 for 28 countries with data: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands (Kingdom of), Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> GCC: Gulf Cooperation Council.

<sup>64</sup> ILO modelled estimates, 2023 taken from ESCWA 2023 and ILO 2024.

<sup>65</sup> The regional coverage rates presented in figure 7 above were calculated based on the data presented in the World Social Protection Report 2020–22, published by ILO (2021) which includes 12 Arab States. The data presented here, which show that the coverage rate is 33.7 per cent, is calculated by ESCWA based on the latest data derived from ILOSTAT and covers 22 Arab States.

In 2023, the region's informal employment rate was 50.7 per cent. There was a gender variation with a higher incidence among males of 53.0 per cent and a lower rate for females of 39.0 per cent. While most informal employment in the region (78.7 per cent) is found in the informal sector, 12.5 per cent of informal workers were employed by formal enterprises in 2019 and 8.7 per cent were in the household sector.<sup>66</sup>

When considering labour underutilization, which covers time-related underemployment and the potential labour force, the composite measure of labour underutilization among women in the region is significantly higher (36.4 per cent) than men (16.2 per cent), with the gender gap amounting to 20.2 percentage points.<sup>67</sup>

Only Mauritania from the region has NTA data. The data are for 2014 and show that the Lifecycle Deficit<sup>68</sup> ranges from 23.48 billion for Age 0 to 0.31 billion for Age 90. The high point is Age 10 at 26.26 billion and the low point is Age 45 at -8.43 billion.<sup>69</sup>

Across Arab States, women spend 366 minutes in paid and unpaid work compared to 292 minutes for men. There are major gender discrepancies in the balance between these types of work. Women in the region average 329 minutes on unpaid work compared to only 70 minutes for men. At the same time, women average 36 minutes per day on paid work compared to 222 minutes for men.<sup>70</sup>

Looking at data from 2023, people from Arab States have among the highest proportions of time spent in unpaid domestic and care work. It is also home to among the highest gender discrepancies, with 21.1 per cent (equivalent to just over 5 hours) for females compared to 4.5 per cent (equivalent to just over 1 hour) for males.<sup>71</sup> The heavy burden of care work on women in the region is one of the factors contributing to their extremely low rate of labour force participation.

Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET) constitute 30.7 per cent of the youth population in the region, equivalent to 24.5 million individuals. This alarming figure highlights a critical challenge for the region's socio-economic development, as a significant portion of its young population is not engaged in productive activities.<sup>72</sup>

The care economy in the region, despite intra-regional variations, is largely underdeveloped, and the family continues to be the primary care provider. Care work is largely informal, and the public and private care infrastructure, including services, is weak compared to other regions. Labour-related care policies, such as those related to leave and flexible working arrangements, need to be further developed. Care provided to older persons falls mostly on female family members, who carry out 80 to 90 per cent of all unpaid care tasks and spend on average 4.7 times more time than men on unpaid care tasks.<sup>73</sup> Older persons, especially older women also provide care to their children by raising the grandchildren and contributing to the housework. They are also often responsible for providing care to other older persons in the household.

## Summary

The combination of demographic trends, multiple intersecting political, economic and environmental crises, and persistent challenges related to inequalities and lack of social protection are leaving millions of people at risk of being left behind. Women are often at a particular high risk of being excluded. For example, at the global level, the labour force participation rate of women aged 25–54 stands at 51.6 per cent compared to 94.6 per cent for men. Women with children or older women are even less likely to work in the formal labour market. This experience affects the overall social and economic situation of women over the lifecycle. Moreover, women often have to balance work and unpaid care work which also affects their overall labour force participation. Given rapid ageing in many parts of the world, it is crucial to strengthen the care sector

<sup>66</sup> ILO 2024.

<sup>67</sup> ILO 2024.

<sup>68</sup> The lifecycle deficit (LCD) is defined as Consumption (C) less Labour Income (YL). The lifecycle deficit is positive during the dependent years and negative during the working years.

<sup>69</sup> Data available at <https://www.ntaccounts.org/web/nta/show>.

<sup>70</sup> ILO 2018.

<sup>71</sup> UN Women 2023.

<sup>72</sup> ESCWA calculation based on ILOSTAT.

<sup>73</sup> ESCWA 2022a.

by recognizing, redistributing, and reducing unpaid work, and creating quality jobs to achieve gender equality, improve social well-being, and foster economic growth. Investing in the care economy with a gender perspective is essential not only for reasons of justice and inclusion but also as a strategic investment to stimulate the overall economy. Overall, foresight, forward-looking and gender-sensitive and family-friendly policies and solidarity between current and future generations of all age groups are needed to create a more inclusive, prosperous and safer future.

## Living arrangements

Living arrangements significantly influence the functioning of societies. Living arrangements of older persons do not only impact their economic well-being and physical and mental health, but also strongly determine the care services they receive. Ageing-in-place is a desire of many older persons across the globe.

In more developed countries, the majority of older men and women aged 65 or older live alone or with their spouse. In developing countries, however, most older men and women typically live with their children or in extended family households. At the global level, women aged 65 years or older are twice as likely as older men to live alone. In contrast, older men are 1.7 times more likely to live with their partners.<sup>74</sup>

Co-residence of older persons with adult children and their families provides a common support mechanism. Patterns of co-residence with older and younger children vary by gender. Older men are more likely than older women to live with children younger than 20 years, while older women are slightly more likely than older men to live with children over that age. In countries with available data, the proportion of older persons living in skip-generation households is higher among older women than among older men.

In many countries globally, however, rapid urbanization, economic development, demographic shifts, changing social norms, individual preferences and constraints, as well as the availability, accessibility and adequacy of social protection systems are transforming traditional extended family households, many rooted in cultural norms of filial piety, into new patterns of living arrangements with older persons often living alone. In response to these developments, governments in several countries across the globe recognize the potential benefits of intergenerational living arrangements and with a view to cultural nuances, support them in different ways, aiming to create inclusive societies of all ages.

## Africa

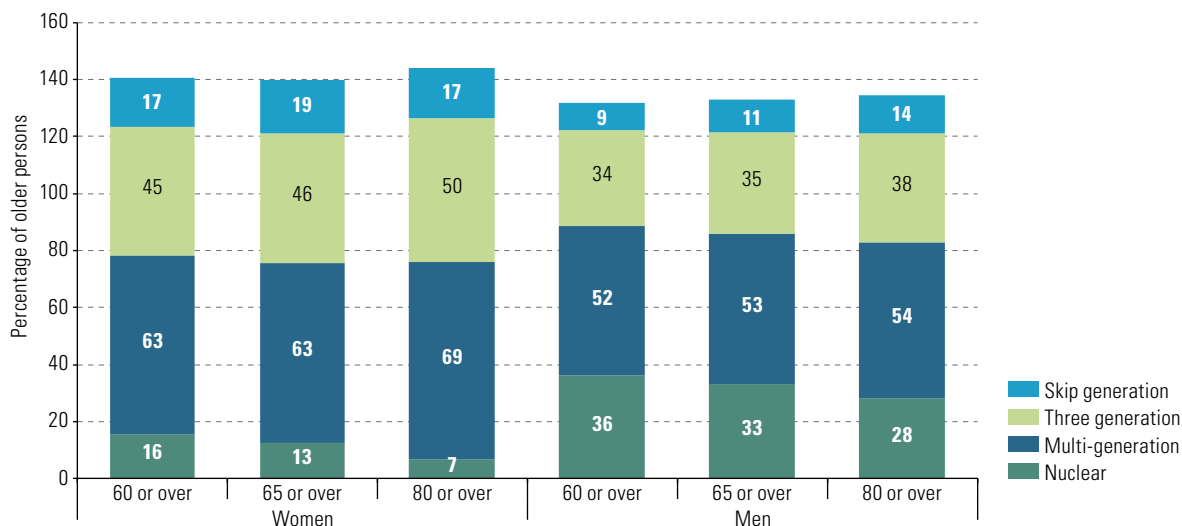
There are considerable differences in living arrangements of older persons in countries in Africa, depending on the level of development, urbanization and mobility, and other factors. In most countries, a majority of older persons live in private households with relatives, most commonly with their own children. About 48 per cent of women and 53 per cent of men aged 65 years or over reside with their children, age 20 years or above.

Multigenerational households have traditionally provided the main social context for the sharing of family resources and the provision of mutual support in Africa (figure 10). The HIV/AIDS epidemic and associated mortality was the main driver behind the growing numbers of skip-generation households<sup>75</sup> in past decades. In countries such as Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, and Uganda nearly one in three older persons lived in a skip-generation household. Older women are more likely than older men to live in such households due to caring responsibilities. Further, African societies are transforming from tradition-bound multi-generational families to more modern nuclear families and the proportion of older persons, particularly men, living alone, is rising.

<sup>74</sup> Living Arrangement | Gender Data Hub ([arcgis.com](http://arcgis.com)).

<sup>75</sup> Skip-generation households refer to households that consist of grandparents and their grandchildren, but none of the parents of the grandchildren.

**Figure 10**  
**Intergenerational household types, Africa, latest available data**  
*(Percentages)*



**Source:** United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). Database on the Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2022.

**Note:** Data are derived from different sources. Percentages exceed 100% because respondents can select more than one option within various intergenerational household types.

## Asia and the Pacific

Average household size in countries in Asia and the Pacific currently ranges from about 3 persons per household to over 9 persons. There are significant variations by country and sub-region. While emphasis on family cohesion and the traditional role of extended families in caring for older family members, linked to filial piety, prevails in many countries, low fertility, urbanization and migration to other countries are changing household and living arrangements.

In South and South-West Asia, large household sizes, with more than 4 persons per household, persist due to cultural norms, economic necessity and higher fertility rates. Multiple generations often live under one roof, providing integral support and care for older persons as well as children and grandchildren. Conversely, in East and North-East Asia, countries are trending toward smaller households with less than 3 persons. In North and Central Asia, people live in households with 3 to 4 persons, with some countries observing significantly lower and some much higher household sizes. In South-East Asia, despite a general trend towards smaller households, intergenerational co-residence remains common, and households count three to four people on average. In the Pacific, household sizes are generally large with 5 or more persons per household, reflecting strong extended family traditions.

On average, an older person will live with other household members in about 50 to 60 per cent of households, and in some countries, 70 to 80 per cent of older persons will be members of extended households. Where data are available, older persons' living arrangements differ by gender in almost all countries with more older women are living alone compared to older men.<sup>76</sup>

## Latin America and the Caribbean

The most frequent living arrangements in urban areas in Chile, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru are those in which older persons live with individuals of other age groups without children. In countries such as Guatemala and Peru, where population ageing is incipient and fertility rates are still high, the second most frequent living arrangement consists of older persons living with children. In Colombia and Chile, where the population ageing process is further advanced, the second most frequent arrangement consists of households in which older persons live with other older persons.

<sup>76</sup> UN DESA Database on Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2019, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

Living arrangements in rural areas are quite different from those in urban areas. In Guatemala, for example, the existence of households with both older persons and children reflects the higher fertility rate prevailing in rural areas, and the migration of the working-age population. In rural Peru, the most frequent arrangements are those in which older persons live with other older persons; however, women aged 80 or over mostly live alone. Lastly, the most frequent living arrangements of older persons in rural areas in both Colombia and Chile are those in which older adults live with people of other ages without children.

While the number of single-person households consisting of older adults is increasing in the region, multigenerational living arrangements are still very common, especially in rural areas and among Indigenous Peoples. In many countries, large households, including many older persons, remain the predominant household form. Older women are generally more likely to live alone than older men.<sup>77</sup> There is also the emergence of skip generational households with is often linked to labour migration of younger people who leave their children in the care of their parents and grandparents.

## UNECE region

Living arrangements among older persons vary considerably across subregions and countries. In Western and Northern Europe and North America, older persons most commonly live with a spouse or partner or alone. In Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Norway, Switzerland, and United Kingdom, more than 85 per cent of persons aged 65 or older live alone or as a couple.<sup>78</sup> In Central Asia and the South Caucasus countries, the majority of older persons live with other family members and/or in multigenerational households.<sup>79 80</sup>

Reflective of their longer lifespans, older women are more likely to live alone or in multigenerational households than older men in all countries in the region. In many countries of the region, the share of women aged 65 or older who live alone is two to three times higher than the share of men in the same age group who live alone.<sup>81</sup>

## Arab States

Data available for selected Arab States reveal that extended family households of 6 or more persons remains the predominant living arrangement in several countries mostly in the LDCs.<sup>82</sup> However, the percentage of older persons living in nuclear family households has been increasing in almost all countries, exceeding 60 per cent in several countries, a shift probably led by increasing urbanization and migration trends. Available data indicate a very low rate of institutionalization among older persons, less than 1 per cent in many countries.<sup>83</sup> Noteworthy are data from some countries showing 45 per cent of older persons living in households with non-relatives, which could be explained by the reliance on paid care providers.

## Summary

Demographic shifts, urbanization and migration, accessibility and affordability of social protection, as well as traditions and norms are shaping living arrangements. In some regions more than in others, living in extended families and households is shifting towards living in more nuclear families. Living arrangements affect relations between generations in terms of financial, economic, social and mental support. Living arrangements also strongly determine the care services that people receive, old and young. In many countries, co-residence with adult children is a common support mechanism. Adult children may be expected to remain with and support their ageing parents as part of concepts like “filial piety.” Co-residence between generations might also occur during challenging times, such as economic and health crisis (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic) or life events, such as when young adults start

<sup>77</sup> ELAC (2022). Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: inclusion and rights of older persons, Santiago, December [online] <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/703b8179-ba9d-4838-8ec1-61405dbcbd18/content>.

<sup>78</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). Database on the Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2022. Based on most recent year with data, which varies by country. Percentage refers to non-institutionalized population.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> The South Caucasus refers to Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

<sup>81</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). Database on the Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2022. Based on most recent year with data, which varies by country.

<sup>82</sup> UN DESA Database on Households and Living Arrangements of Older Persons 2019, United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

<sup>83</sup> UNDESA Database on Older Persons in Collective Living Quarters 2022.

their own families and ask parents to live with them to help support young children. Such living arrangements vary considerably by region, and according to the most recent global estimates, older persons live in households that range in size from 2 to 12 persons, on average.<sup>84</sup> Given the diverse nature of these arrangements across the globe, policies must be adaptable to address the broad scope and evolving dynamics of intergenerational living. Policies must also be culturally sensitive and inclusive, acknowledging the deep-rooted traditions and values that shape family structures while addressing modern challenges and opportunities to these arrangements.

## Digitalization

Technological advancements are radically changing our world. Information and communications technologies (ICTs), if accessible and affordable to all people, regardless of age, gender or disability status, can make a fundamental difference in creating inclusive, age-friendly environments and communities. ICT can also contribute to fostering intergenerational relations if coupled with lifelong learning. Such mutual, shared learning can cultivate respect, understanding and collaboration across age groups.

Digital inclusion goes beyond affordable access to broadband infrastructure, mobile device ownership,<sup>85</sup> and power that fuels digital connectivity, to include issues of digital, and general literacy; access to online information from digital services using a language of choice; more intentional optimization of user satisfaction of digital services delivery, as well as availability of public free Internet connectivity at key hotspots, while building public confidence on uptake and usage of digital services. This also requires addressing rights to digital privacy and protection against fraud, abuse, and exploitation for all ages.

Of all world regions, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) achieve the highest 2024 ICT Development Index scores for both the universal connectivity and meaningful connectivity pillars. They are followed by the Asia-Pacific region, the Americas, Arab States, and Africa.<sup>86</sup>

However, the digital divide by age, gender and disability status persists. According to the most recent data on access to the Internet by age (figure 11), used as a proxy to measure the “grey digital divide,” one can see that across all regions, older persons are significantly less likely to have such access. Only in more developed countries do 50 per cent or more of people 75 years or over have Internet access. In most countries of the global South, very few older persons have access.

## Africa

Access, affordability and ability are major barriers to digital inclusion in Africa.<sup>87</sup> Despite progress in reducing the cost of fixed broadband connectivity in Africa since early 2000s, the cost as a share of GNI per capita in Africa was as high as 17.7 per cent in 2021, well above the world average (2.98 per cent) and ITU/UNESCO Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development’s targets. Consequently, the percentage of individuals using the Internet in Africa was the lowest in the world at 37.1 per cent, with a digital divide by age, gender and rural/urban location. Identifying digital skills needed for future jobs and developing strategies for their adoption will also be essential for bridging the digital divide.

Despite an improvement in ICT development in most African countries, Africa ranks well below the world average and its peers on overall ICT development. Divergence in digital development is noted across levels of development. While more advanced countries in Africa are at the stage of development and implementation of digital inclusion strategies, developing countries are struggling to meet the investment needed to lay the foundational digital infrastructure needed.

<sup>84</sup> UNDESA (2023). Leaving no one behind in an ageing world - World Social Report 2023.

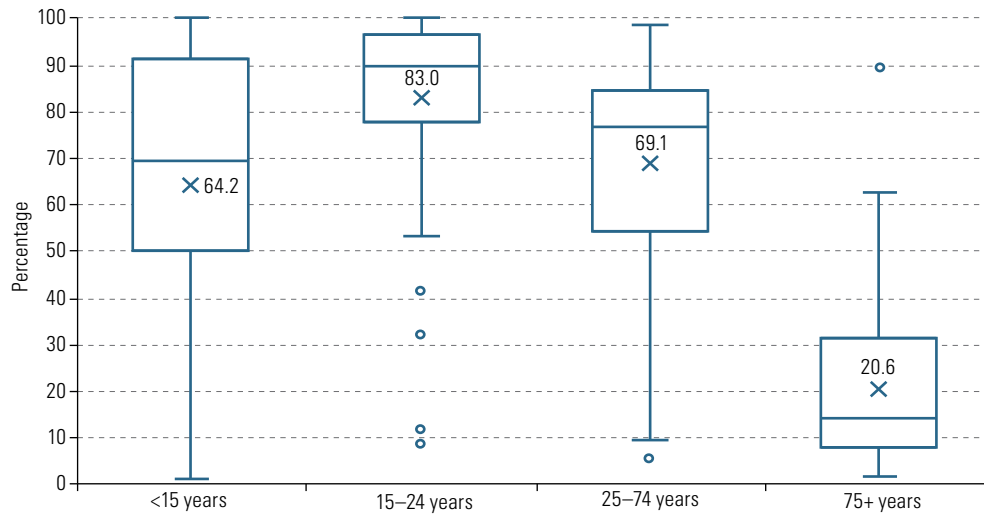
<sup>85</sup> According to *Smart Africa Alliance*, the average cost of smart phones in Africa is Euros 225 (\$248), though the cheapest across all regions is not affordable. Thus, affordable devices for citizens of Africa remains a challenge. *Smart Africa Alliance* (2022), [BLUEPRINT Inclusive adoption of smart devices in Africa](#).

<sup>86</sup> [The ICT Development Index 2024 \(itu.int\)](#).

<sup>87</sup> UNDESA, UN E-Government Survey 2022. <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/Reports/UN-E-Government-Survey-2022>.

**Figure 11**

Access to the Internet by age, selected countries, latest available data  
(Percentages)



**Source:** <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Dashboards/Pages/Digital-Development.aspx> (accessed 14 July 2024).

**Note:** The following countries were included in the analysis: Algeria, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Hong Kong, China, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Republic of Korea, Macao, China, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Mozambique, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Singapore, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

## Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2019, 66.7 per cent of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean had an Internet connection. Of that connected population, 67 per cent were in urban households and 23 per cent in rural households. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, El Salvador, Paraguay and Peru, more than 90 per cent of rural households had no Internet connection. Furthermore, large differences in access to and use of the Internet exist by age. Around 2018, 42 per cent of people under 25 and 54 per cent of people aged 65 and over had no Internet connection (figure 12).

Even when older persons live in households with Internet access or devices such as computers, a large percentage do not use these technologies, because access does not guarantee use. The use of social networks is very low for older persons compared to younger generations.

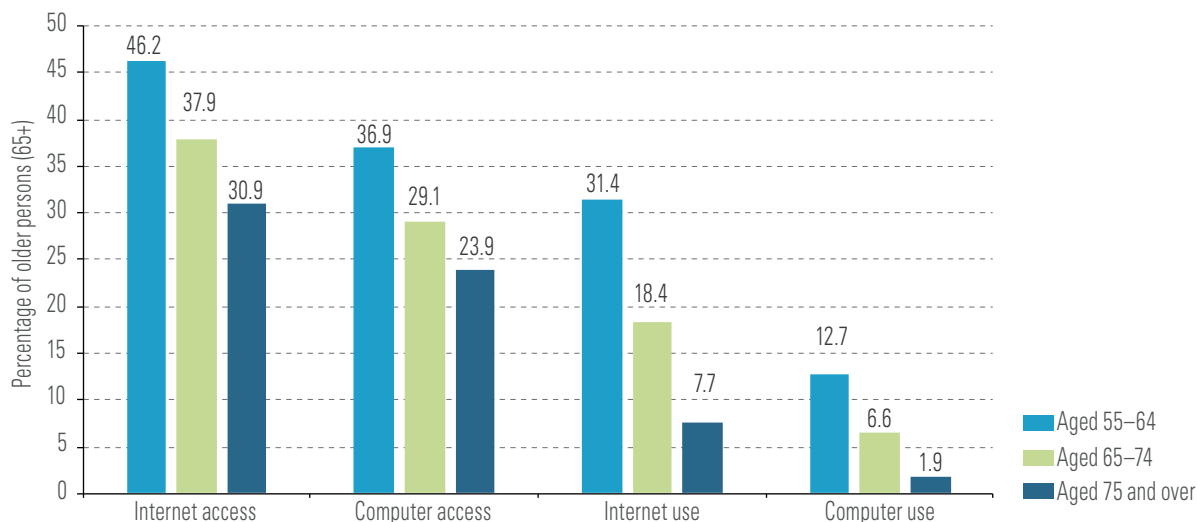
The most frequently used social networks in the region are WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube. At the same time, there are also large divides in the use of web and mobile applications. The applications most used by older persons are those for shopping, followed by video calls, taxi services and home food delivery. This situation shows that when older persons have access to the Internet or technological devices, the likelihood of applications being used to solve everyday problems through technology is still very low.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>88</sup> ELAC (2022). Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: inclusion and rights of older persons, Santiago, December [online] <https://repositorio.cepal.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/703b8179-ba9d-4838-8ec1-61405dbcbd18/content>.

**Figure 12**

Persons 65 years or over who have access to and use the Internet and computers, Latin America (10 countries), by age group, around 2018

(Percentages)



**Source:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and others, Latin American Economic Outlook 2020: Digital Transformation for Building Back Better, Paris, OECD Publishing.

**Note:** Data from household surveys for 2018 (Argentina, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia), 2017 (Chile, Colombia and El Salvador) and 2014 (Honduras); the access variables cover people living in a household with an Internet connection and in a household that owns a computer. Data for Internet access include Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Data for computer access include Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Inclusion of fixed and mobile connections in household surveys varies. Internet use refers to the percentage of people who report using the Internet at least once a week. To quantify Internet use, Argentina asked people whether they had used the Internet in the last few months. Because definitions of use vary, averages may differ from the other figures. Data for Internet use include Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. Data for computer use include Colombia and the Plurinational State of Bolivia and refer to the percentage of individuals who report using a computer at least once a week.

## Asia and the Pacific

The percentage of individuals using the Internet in Asia and the Pacific increased from 38.6 per cent in 2017 to 44.5 per cent by the end of 2019, with households that have Internet access at home increasing from 47.9 per cent in 2017 to 53.4 per cent by the end of 2019. Both fixed and mobile broadband markets have shown growth over the last four years, with active mobile broadband subscriptions outpacing fixed broadband subscriptions.<sup>89</sup>

However, significant gender and age gaps and a rural/urban divide persist. In 2019, only 41.3 per cent of women used the Internet, compared with 48.3 per cent of men. Moreover, only 37 per cent of rural households had access to the Internet in 2019, compared with almost twice the share of urban households (70.4 per cent) of urban households. In the 15 to 24-year-old age group, 70.3 per cent used the Internet in 2019, similar to the world average of 69 per cent.<sup>90</sup> However, older persons, compared to the working-age population or children and youth, have consistently less access to the Internet, even in more developed countries of the region.

Older women are the most likely to be left behind, but data are hardly available. For example, for countries with available and recent data, less than 15 per cent of people aged 75 years or older have access to the Internet in Azerbaijan; Bangladesh; Cambodia; Indonesia; Iran (Islamic Republic of); Pakistan; Tonga, whereas older persons in countries like Japan; Hong Kong, China; Kazakhstan; and the Maldives have much higher Internet access.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>89</sup> ITU (2021). Digital trends in Asia and the Pacific 2021. Information and communication technology trends and developments in the Asia-Pacific region, 2017–2020.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> ITU (2022). Digital development dashboard (accessed June 2024).

In addition to lack of access, older persons often do not have the digital skills to engage in the digital world, and if they do engage, they are at an increased risk of scams and fraud. A forthcoming study on digital literacy skills of older persons in Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam, has found that older persons often have basic skills to operate mobile phones or access the Internet. They can use social media and devices to communicate with family and friends. In fact, during COVID-19 mobile phones were often a lifeline for older persons. However, older persons often lack the skills to conduct financial transactions, access government websites, and they are in great need of training in cybersecurity.<sup>92</sup>

## UNECE region

In the UNECE region, Internet use is widespread. Ninety per cent of individuals aged 16 to 74 use the Internet weekly.<sup>93</sup> Of all world regions, Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) achieve the highest 2024 ICT Development Index scores for both the universal connectivity and meaningful connectivity pillars.<sup>94</sup> While these numbers suggest a digitally connected population, they mask disparities by age and gender. Older persons—and particularly older women—risk being left behind in the region’s digital transformation. Despite large increases in Internet use in the region in recent years, only 71 per cent of individuals aged 55 to 74 in the region use the Internet weekly, compared to more than 96 per cent of those aged 16 to 54 years.<sup>95</sup> There is gender parity in Internet use among younger people, but a digital gender divide exists for those aged 55 to 74, with fewer women than men in this age group logging on. Regional disparities also exist, particularly among older persons. In European Union countries, 71 per cent of the population aged 55 to 74 uses the Internet weekly. In countries in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia, only 45 per cent of individuals in this age group use the Internet weekly.<sup>96</sup>

When it comes to digital skills relevant for decent work and social inclusion, older women and men are further behind. For example, 68 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 regularly find, download, install and configure software, compared with only 43 per cent of adults aged 25 to 75.<sup>97</sup> Evidence for people aged 75 and older is limited, but across countries with data less than five per cent of this population regularly find, download, install and configure software. People living in rural areas are less likely to have relevant ICT skills, and a large divide exists between the wealthiest and middle-income countries in the region.

Digital divides by age, gender and place of residence threaten to exacerbate existing inequalities and generate new ones. For older persons, technology can enable a longer working life, support active ageing, mitigate social exclusion, and reduce isolation and loneliness. The [2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration](#) calls on UNECE member States to work towards age-friendly digitalization, enhance digital skills and literacy among older persons, and ensure rights to access information and services through digital devices.

## Arab States

Despite much progress in increasing availability and access to the Internet in the region, there remain strong intra-regional variations with the percentage of the population using the Internet reaching 100 per cent in some of the high-income Gulf states, to less than 20 per cent in some of the LDCs. The data disaggregated

<sup>92</sup> ESCAP (2024). Digital literacy of older persons in Asia and the Pacific: experiences from Cambodia, India, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR and Viet Nam (forthcoming).

<sup>93</sup> UNECE Statistical Database. Data reflect median value for 2021 for 46 countries with data. Data unavailable for Andorra, Armenia, Canada, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Republic of Moldova, San Marino, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. Time-weighted linear regression based on available empirical data used to estimate underlying country-level values for 2021 when missing.

<sup>94</sup> ITU 2024, [Measuring digital development: The ICT Development Index 2024](#).

<sup>95</sup> UNECE Statistical Database. Data reflect median value for 2021 for 46 countries with data. Data unavailable for Andorra, Armenia, Canada, Kyrgyzstan, Liechtenstein, Monaco, Republic of Moldova, San Marino, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan. Time-weighted linear regression based on available empirical data used to estimate underlying country-level values for 2021 when missing.

<sup>96</sup> UNECE Statistical Database. Data for the EECCA region reflect the median value for Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Uzbekistan. Data for the EU region reflect the median value for the 27 EU member States as of 2020. Time-weighted linear regression based on available empirical data used to estimate underlying country-level values for 2021 when missing.

<sup>97</sup> [United Nations Global SDG Database](#). Data reflect median values for 2021 or most recent year available for 39 countries with data: Albania, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Switzerland, Cyprus (2019), Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Estonia (2017), Finland (2016), France, United Kingdom (2017), Georgia (2020), Greece (2017), Croatia, Hungary, Italy (2016), Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Latvia (2018), North Macedonia (2016), Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands (2016), Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, Ukraine, Uzbekistan.

by age are available for a handful of countries only, and they show low rates of Internet usage among persons 75 years or older, ranging between a high of 69 per cent in Oman, to a low of 4 per cent in Algeria.<sup>98</sup>

Given complex economic and political drivers, the region is at a critical turning point that requires a shift towards economic diversification. However, the region shows a large gap in technological adoption. This is reflected in high demand for traditional skills in 1.7 million jobs across the region. Furthermore, unemployment across Arab States is increasing, the labour force participation is the lowest worldwide for women and young people, and the skills mismatch between demanded skills and attained education is considerably high. If business continues as usual, the region risks missing out on the opportunities brought forward by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.<sup>99</sup>

## Summary

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognized that “the spread of information and communications technology and global interconnectedness has great potential to accelerate human progress, to bridge the digital divide and to develop knowledge societies”. Under SDG 9, Member States called to significantly increase access to information and communications technology and to provide universal and affordable access to the Internet in least developed countries by 2030. Our Common Agenda then called for digital inclusion and digital cooperation. Increased access to technology affects all aspects of life, such as work, education and learning, health and social interactions. For example, technology supports different population groups and age brackets whether through offering new employment opportunities or providing services. Technology is shaping the job market allowing for more remote working possibilities, which can boost female employment given that it allows women to better balance their work with caregiving. As another example, technology-based services such as telehealth, are critical for the wellbeing of older persons and can reduce their dependency. Technology helps people connect, especially when more people are on the move and the number of nuclear families is rising. Clearly, in times of rapid digitalization and ageing, it is imperative to ensure that older persons are not left behind in the digital realm. Coupled with lifelong learning, increasing access to and affordability of digital devices and strengthening the digital skills of older persons provides opportunities for cross-generational learning that will benefit all of society.

## Recommendations

To realize a society for all ages, States should address the various inequalities that accumulate over the life course and design and implement strategies that foster intergenerational solidarity.

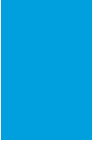
As countries continue to transition towards lower fertility and mortality, their population age structures are shifting and more people of different age groups are co-existing, there is potential to reap the rewards of the demographic transition, and create a world for all ages, if appropriate policies are put in place. Some of these and strategies are as follows:

- **Promote intergenerational solidarity.** In the context of more people of different generations co-existing, it is important to promote intergenerational solidarity as well as intergenerational dialogue and social cohesion. These are the foundations for prosperity of current and future generations. The evolving role of families and intergenerational households as contributors to inclusive and sustainable development, now and in the future, must be recognized.
- **Combat ageism and eradicate age discrimination** in all its forms. Ageism affects people of all ages. It can have devastating effects on the physical and mental health, well-being and human rights of people. Strengthening intergenerational relations and promoting intergenerational solidarity will counter any form of ageism at home, in the workplace and in society in general.

<sup>98</sup> Data available from: <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Dashboards/Pages/Digital-Development.aspx>.

<sup>99</sup> ESCWA 2022b.

- **Create decent and inclusive work for all.** It is important to create decent and inclusive work for all, for as long as people desire and can participate in quality, paid work. This will benefit all of society. This includes full and productive employment and decent work for men and women under healthy, flexible and age-friendly conditions, ensuring life-long learning through training, retraining and skills development, and to combat abuse, neglect, all forms of discrimination, inequalities and ageism directed at people in the workforce.
- **Create multigenerational workforces.** In particular in view of shrinking workforces and population ageing in many regions, knowledge sharing and skills transfers among different age cohorts at work can increase productivity. Importantly, given their different skills and experiences, young and old workers tend to complement one another, rather than substitute for one another in the labour market.
- **Enhance women's participation in the labour force.** Women's economic participation in the labour market must be enhanced through strategies and policies that address social and cultural norms, recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work, provide educational and reskilling opportunities to meet the needs of new jobs, and support their entrepreneurial activities.
- **Promote equity in care provided and care received.** The care needs of individuals and families must be met while not overburdening unpaid caregivers. Thus, countries must consider developing care leave policies and services that allow a more equal sharing of care responsibilities and support people with high care or support needs.
- **Promote decent work in the care economy.** Recognize, reduce and redistribute unpaid care work. Reward paid care work with fair and adequate wages, including equal pay for work of equal value, and effective labour and social protection. Representation and social dialogue, including collective bargaining, are critical.
- **Develop long-term care systems.** These systems must be people-centered and community-based and ensure healthy and active ageing for the increasing number of older persons living alone, in particular women, fostering co-responsibility between genders and between households, the State, the market, families and the community.
- **Increase the inclusivity and sustainability of social protection systems.** It is important to strengthen social protection systems covering the life course. These contribute to the wellbeing and protection of all in society including women, persons with disabilities, youth, migrant workers, workers in the informal sector and older persons. Younger people of today will become older persons of tomorrow. Countries with youthful populations need to ensure that health and social protection is accessible to all to achieve healthy and active older populations in the future.
- **Prioritize continuing education and training over the life course.** Education is a human right and should be directed towards the full development of the human person and the person's dignity. In this regard, it is important to provide universal access to continuing education and training over the life course. Intergenerational education and learning allow for people of different generations to share talents and resources and learn from each other, benefiting both the individual and society.
- **Ensure digital inclusion of all groups.** The digital divide is real and has been increasing in many parts of the world, despite rapid digitalization. Digital inclusion can be achieved through enhancing digital skills, making digital technology more affordable and accessible and encouraging intergenerational and lifelong learning in the digital realm.
- **Support varied living arrangements, respecting cultural nuances and norms.** Given demographic, economic and social trends, living arrangements have evolved. Living arrangements strongly determine the care needs, including those of older persons. In this regard, it is important to support varied living arrangements, including intergenerational arrangements, community-based and ageing-in-place initiatives, and respect cultural nuances on how people arrange their lives in families and households.

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- **Invest in the collection, analysis and dissemination of age- and sex-disaggregated data.** The data must be timely, disaggregated and relevant, coupled with capacity-building on data collection and analysis to ensure that the invisible is made visible, and that data inform evidence-based policymaking.
  - **Change the narrative on ageing and future generations.** Older persons must be recognized as active, productive and valued members of society. Alarmist language regarding ageing and low fertility must end; instead, the focus must be on each individual, the human rights of people, and their choices and responsibility toward current and future generations. Just like present generations, future generations will include people of all ages from children and youth through older persons, and hence it is important to consider people's needs and rights across the life course and communicate this clearly and forcefully to the public.
  - **Strengthen collaboration and partnerships.** Stronger, more systematic, meaningful and inclusive engagement and partnership between governments, the private sector, relevant stakeholders, academia and the international community is fundamental to addressing challenges and capitalize on the opportunities associated with demographic change. Equal partnership between institutions and the people they serve and among and within communities, using the bottom-up approach to development is important for strengthening solidarity between generations and for creating social cohesion. Given rapid ageing in many parts of the world, in particular in developing countries, sharing of experiences and South-South cooperation are important, so that countries can be pro-active and forward-looking in developing and implementing plans to address population ageing in a comprehensive, sustainable, people-centered and inclusive manner.

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)