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# World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights

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*The world's population is ageing rapidly. Living arrangements and family support for older persons have become increasingly important for policymakers, especially in countries at advanced stages of population ageing. Understanding the interconnections between the living arrangements of older persons and their health and well-being has particular relevance in light of the pledge made by Governments in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that no one will be left behind.*

*The following key messages are based on **World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights**, prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA).*

## Ten key messages

### 1. The global number of persons aged 65 years or over is projected to more than double by 2050

In 2020, there are an estimated 727 million persons aged 65 years or over worldwide. This number is projected to more than double by 2050, reaching over 1.5 billion persons. The share of older persons in the global population is expected to increase from 9.3 per cent in 2020 to 16.0 per cent in 2050. By mid-century, one in six people globally will be aged 65 years or older.

### 2. Women comprise a majority of older persons, especially at advanced ages

Almost universally throughout the world, women live longer than men on average. As a result, women in 2020 account for 55 per cent of the global population aged 65 years or over. The overrepresentation of women increases with age: currently, they constitute 62 per cent of those aged 80 years or over.

### 3. Living arrangements have important consequences for the well-being of older persons

The living arrangements of older persons are associated with their economic well-being, their physical and psycho-social health, and their life satisfaction. Understanding the role and impact of living arrangements on the lives of older persons is relevant for several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, (SDG 1), ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages (SDG 3), and achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls (SDG 5).

### 4. Living arrangements of older persons vary greatly across countries and regions

Living with at least one child or with extended family members is the most common living arrangement among older persons in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean. In Europe and Northern America and in Australia and New Zealand, living with a spouse only is the most common living arrangement, followed by living alone. Globally, the proportions of older persons living alone or with a spouse only is increasing, while living in extended-family households is becoming less common.

## 5. Living arrangements of older women differ from those of older men

In general, older women are more likely than older men to live alone, primarily due to higher levels of widowhood. Older women are also more likely to live in skip-generation households or in extended-family households, whereas older men are more likely to live with a spouse only. In general, older women living alone are more likely to live in poverty compared to older men who live alone.

## 6. Co-residence of older persons with their adult children can provide mutual support

Co-residence of older persons with their adult children may be triggered by a decline in their physical or mental health. Co-residence can also be a way for parents to support adult children who have returned home to cope with economic hardship or adverse life events. Older persons who move into the household of an adult child can also provide care for grandchildren.

## 7. Skip-generation households occur in response to a variety of factors

Skip-generation households are common when migrating parents leave children behind in the care of grandparents. Such households are common also in situations of high adult mortality, in particular during the HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa or in the aftermath of civil wars or other armed conflicts. Skip-generation households often suffer from socio-economic disadvantages and are more likely than the average household to fall below the poverty line. On the other hand, skip-generation households resulting from migration often benefit from remittances sent back home by migrant parents living abroad.

## 8. Risks of dying from COVID-19 are much higher at older ages, but differ greatly across countries

Although the risk of dying from COVID-19 increases rapidly as a function of age, the level of risk faced by older persons varies considerably from country to country. The main determinant of COVID-19 mortality among persons aged 60 years or older is the extent to which countries have been able to contain or mitigate the epidemic. Additional contributing factors are individual frailty related to pre-existing medical conditions, the level care received and the living arrangements of older persons.

## 9. Living arrangements are closely associated with COVID-19 mortality at older ages

The risk of infection with the novel coronavirus that causes COVID-19 depends on the frequency, duration and intensity of contact between individuals, which vary with a person's living arrangements. In congregate living facilities like nursing homes, the virus can easily be transmitted by both caregivers and residents. Among older persons, nursing home residents have a considerably higher risk of becoming infected with the virus and of dying from COVID-19.

## 10. Data collection on COVID-19 morbidity and mortality should be improved

The response to the COVID-19 pandemic should include the establishment of standardized systems to collect and share data on morbidity and mortality due to COVID-19. Such data should be disaggregated by age and sex as well as by residential status, including residence in nursing homes or other institutional settings. Improved information could facilitate the formulation of responses to minimize the spread of COVID-19 and to mitigate its devastating effects on the most vulnerable members of society.



Prepared by the Population Division of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. These key messages are based on *World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights*, which examines living arrangements of older persons and their interrelationship with socio-economic, cultural and health related aspects of their lives in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. More work of the Population Division is available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/>.