

36th United Nations International Day of Older Persons

The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives

Thursday, 8 October 2026 | 10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

ECOSOC Chamber (tbc), United Nations Headquarters, New York

Organized by: UN DESA and the NGO Committee on Ageing in New York

Sponsor: Permanent Mission of Argentina to the UN

Co-Sponsors: Group of Friends of Older Persons (tbc) | Group of Friends on Ageing and Sustainable Development (tbc)

Mission Statement

The 2026 United Nations International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP) will explore one of the defining transformations of our time: humanity is living longer than ever before. Global life expectancy has increased steadily over more than seven decades and is projected to continue rising through mid-century. Yet in 2019, the gap between global life expectancy and healthy life expectancy stood at 9.6 years, a gap that has widened since 2000, reflecting the growing burden of noncommunicable diseases.¹ Longer lives are bringing greater attention to how health, social and economic conditions, and human rights are experienced across the life course.

Longevity intersects with health systems, labour markets, social protection frameworks, education systems, housing and infrastructure planning, and fiscal sustainability in ways that are deeply interconnected and cannot be addressed in isolation. Where years of life are lived in good health and supported by inclusive labour markets and effective social protection systems, longer lives can generate what has been described as a longevity dividend, reflecting the gains that arise when sustained health, productivity and participation accompany extended life spans. Conversely, where gains in life expectancy are not accompanied by improvements in healthy life expectancy, older persons may spend more years in poorer health, limiting their functional ability, well-being, autonomy and participation. This underscores the need for responsive health systems, care provision and public financing arrangements that support well-being across longer lives.

Outcomes vary significantly across and within countries, reflecting deep inequalities in social, economic and environmental conditions that accumulate across the life course. Persistent misconceptions about ageing, including assumptions that chronological age determines ability or that population ageing inevitably constrains economic growth, can distort policy design and reinforce the very outcomes they purport to describe. Older persons should be recognized as active contributors to society rather than passive recipients of care, and policies should reflect the diversity of ageing trajectories and the capacities and contributions in later life.

Addressing these realities requires policy approaches that recognize the linkages between well-being, productivity and financial resilience across the life course. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted in 2002, remains the cornerstone of international efforts in this regard, alongside a growing international momentum to strengthen the human rights framework for older persons. This year's commemoration, *The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives*, invites Governments, civil society, the private sector, researchers and older persons

¹ WHO, Global Health Estimates 2024: *Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy* (2024).

themselves to examine how societies can ensure that the additional years gained translate into healthy, productive, dignified and equitable lives for all.

Background

A World Growing Older and Living Longer

Population ageing is no longer a distant projection; it is an unfolding global reality. The global population aged 60 or over is projected to rise from approximately 1.22 billion in 2025 to more than 2.1 billion by 2050, a transformation that is without historical precedent, most pronounced in developing regions.² Growth is fastest at the oldest ages: populations aged 80 or over are expected to more than double, and the number of centenarians to increase more than fourfold by mid-century. In 2025, remaining life expectancy at age 60 varies substantially across regions, from 17.4 years in Africa to 24.9 years in Oceania, reflecting deep inequalities in access to health, social protection and economic opportunity.³

Despite significant overall gains, healthy life expectancy has not kept pace with longevity in many settings. Low-income regions have achieved substantial gains in healthy life expectancy, while high-income countries have seen a marked slowdown in improvement after 2010, demonstrating that wealth alone does not guarantee healthy longevity, and that sustained policy investment remains essential regardless of income level.⁴

Longevity as a Cross-Cutting Policy Imperative

While life expectancy has increased substantially, improvements in healthspan, the years of life lived in good health, have not always kept pace. Extending healthspan, not just lifespan, is increasingly recognized as the defining objective of health policy in an ageing world. Social determinants account for 80 to 90 per cent of health outcomes⁵, and evidence from communities around the world where people live measurably longer and healthier lives consistently points to the power of place, purpose and social connection.⁶ Advances in geroscience and artificial intelligence are creating new opportunities to extend life expectancy further, yet without equitable access and sustained investment in prevention, these gains risk widening existing disparities.

Longer lives also have profound implications for economic security and social protection. Globally, 3.8 billion people remain without any social protection coverage⁷, and more than 57.8 per cent of the world's workers are in informal employment⁸. Women are disproportionately affected by longevity-related financial risk due to lower lifetime earnings, caregiving interruptions and longer average life expectancy. Adapting labour markets, expanding lifelong learning opportunities and extending social protection coverage to informal workers are among the key policy responses needed to ensure that longer lives translate into sustained participation, security and dignity, grounded in the full enjoyment of human rights by all. At the same time, policy design should draw on the knowledge, lived

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2024). World Population Prospects: The 2024 Revision.

³ Ibid.

⁴ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, *Global Roadmap for Healthy Longevity* (2022).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Dan Buettner and Sam Skemp, "Blue Zones", *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine* vol.10 (2016).

⁷ ILO, *World Social Protection Report 2024–26: Universal Social Protection for Climate Action and a Just Transition* (2024).

⁸ Ibid.

experiences and diverse perspectives of older persons themselves, whose participation is essential to developing responses that reflect the diversity of ageing trajectories. In line with MIPAA, this means enabling older persons not only to take the lead in their own betterment, but also to participate actively in the betterment of society as a whole.

The macroeconomic stakes are significant. In the absence of reform, average Government deficits could rise from 2.4 per cent of GDP in 2025 to around 9.1 per cent by 2060.⁹ Yet when longer lives are accompanied by sustained health, productivity and participation, a longevity dividend becomes possible and the policy challenge shifts from managing the costs of ageing to investing in the conditions under which longer lives generate shared gains for all generations.

Realizing this potential requires moving beyond fragmented, sector-by-sector responses. Pension reforms too often proceed independently of health strategies; social protection systems were largely designed for shorter lives and formal employment; and preventive investments are rarely linked to fiscal objectives. Strengthening whole-of-government approaches involves clarifying mandates and ensuring longevity considerations are reflected across health, labour, fiscal and social protection systems, in line with the implementation of MIPAA. It also requires coordinated action beyond Government alone, engaging civil society, older persons and their representative organizations, the private sector, academia and researchers, each with a distinct role in translating policy into outcomes that ensure the age of longevity becomes an opportunity for all.

Objectives

The 2026 #OlderPersonsDay commemoration in New York aims to:

- Examine how longer lives are reshaping health, social and economic realities over time, including the need for health systems, labour markets, social protection frameworks and public financing arrangements that are better aligned with the realities of longer lives, as well as the opportunities that healthy longevity can generate for individuals, communities and economies.
- Highlight evidence on the factors that influence well-being in later life, with a focus on the social, economic and environmental determinants of health across the life course, the importance of prevention, and the cumulative effects of inequality on ageing trajectories.
- Explore how policies and systems can better respond to longer lives, including through age-inclusive labour markets, lifelong learning, expanded social protection coverage for informal workers, integrated care models, and whole-of-government approaches that reflect the interconnected nature of longevity across sectors.
- Share perspectives from different regions on the experience of ageing, recognizing the significant diversity in how population ageing is unfolding across income levels and geographies, and the importance of solutions that reflect local realities and lived experience.
- Encourage dialogue between research, policy and practice, drawing on insights from demography, geroscience, economics, public health and human rights to support evidence-based responses to the opportunities and policy implications of an ageing world.

⁹ World Economic Forum, *Longevity Economy Principles: The Foundation for a Financially Resilient Future* (2024).

New York Event Format

The 2026 #OlderPersonsDay event in New York is sponsored by The Permanent Mission of Argentina (TBC) to the United Nations. Organized by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Programme on Ageing in partnership with the NGO Committee on Ageing in New York¹⁰. The event will include a keynote address followed by a moderated, interactive panel discussion. Time will be reserved for interactive dialogue with participants.

For further information, please contact: ageing@un.org | #OlderPersonsDay

¹⁰ More information is available at <https://www.ngocoa-ny.org>