
Webinar: Older persons, communities and COVID-19 (DRAFT: 26 May 2020)

Co-organizers: HelpAge International, UNESCAP, UNFPA, AGAC (ASEM Global Ageing Center), JAGES

Date: 4 June 2020, 15:00-16.30 Indochina Time

Venue: Virtual Zoom meeting [Link](#)

I. Background

As COVID-19 continues to cause untold damage across the world, it is increasingly apparent that older persons are severely affected.¹ Those aged 60 years and above infected with Covid-19 have a substantially greater risk of dying of the disease, and those over 80 are dying at five times the average rate.² In addition, approximately 66 per cent of individuals aged 70 years and over suffer from at least one underlying condition, which raises their overall risk of developing severe symptoms.

In Asia and the Pacific, the number of those aged 60 years and over is projected to grow at an unprecedented rate, from 630 million in 2020 to almost 1.3 billion by 2050.³ By that time, one in four people in the region will be over 60 years old; the number of older women is growing even more rapidly.

In addition to the known health risks associated with the virus, older persons, in particular, have been severely affected by the related economic turmoil and lockdowns. Only a small portion of older people in Asia and the Pacific have a pension or social allowance. With 4 out of 5 workers globally impacted by lockdown measures, their income and that of family members who support them financially, have been affected. Social distancing disrupts social connections. Those with care support needs are more vulnerable to isolation, abuse and neglect. With health systems focused on COVID-19, those with chronic conditions may not receive regular health care. Those with care needs, likewise may have reduced services and support available. Residential homes with high numbers of at-risk older people have seen high mortality once COVID-19 spreads within them. Older women will be particularly affected because they generally outlive men and often require long-term care.

Many of these challenges first surface in households and communities, where neighbours, families, community leaders and older persons associations address the immediate needs of a sick or isolated older person. In this context, it is important to identify the vulnerable persons, assess their needs, and find innovative, cost-effective short- and long-term solutions. Communities across Asia-Pacific face similar challenges. They have shown creativity and resilience and offer hope to older persons and societies in general during these unprecedented times.

¹ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/05/COVID-Older-persons.pdf>

² COVID-19 Strategy Update, 14 April 2020. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/publications-detail/covid-19-strategy-update---14-april-2020>

³ <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/ageing/about>

This webinar will explore the situation of older persons at the community level in Asia-Pacific during the Covid-19 crisis and show examples of how communities are addressing the needs of older persons during these extraordinarily difficult times.

II. Objectives and themes

In this context, HelpAge International, ESCAP, UNFPA, the ASEM Global Ageing Center (AGAC), and the Japan Gerontological Evaluation Study (JAGES) are organizing a webinar which will bring together different stakeholders to:

- A. Identify the challenges faced by older persons at the community level in Asia-Pacific
- B. Share examples and good practice of how communities are coming together to support each other and respond to the needs of older persons
- C. Discuss how the impacts of COVID-19 on older persons can be addressed in the short- and long run

III. Target audience

The webinar aims to involve participants from the following groups:

- ESCAP members and associate members, including representatives from ministries responsible for social affairs/welfare, health, education, labour/human resources development, local government, home affairs, as well as other concerned ministries;
- Organizations representing older persons;
- Other civil society organizations, as well as private sector entities with experience in working with older persons and insights regarding creative options for the economic and social empowerment of older persons in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- United Nations Country Teams and other entities with a responsibility to support, uphold and promote the rights and fair treatment of older persons.

IV. Format and modalities

The webinar will be hosted over Zoom, with a link provided through invitation and promotional materials. For last-minute changes to the webinar, please see:

The structure of the webinar is as follows:

- Introduction and opening remarks given by:

Mr. Björn Andersson, UNFPA Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific

Dr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, ESCAP

- Video presentations:

Two short videos and one short video presentation have been prepared. The first and second videos consist of interviews with older persons from Myanmar, Pakistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Republic of Korea, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The first video provides an overview of the situation of older persons and their families and communities during the COVID-19 crisis and the second video discusses responses in communities to needs arising from COVID-19. After each of these videos, there will be a moderated discussion. The third video is a presentation of

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JAGES findings on social connection and health and wellbeing. This video will be shown third followed by a short discussion tying in the findings to the previous discussion.

- Moderated discussion:

Moderator: Dr. John Beard, Professor, University of New South Wales and Former Director of WHO Ageing and Life Course

Discussants (in alphabetical order):

Dr. Naoki Kondo will give a presentation entitled ‘Importance of social connection for health and wellbeing of older people – lessons from JAGES’

Dr. Kitti Larpsombatsiri, Director of Bureau of Elderly Health, Department of Health, MOPH, Thailand

Mr. Arun Maira, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, HelpAge International, and former Member, Planning Commission of India

Dr. Quynh Ngoc Nguyen, Program Officer on Social Protection and Inclusive Growth, UNFPA Viet Nam

Dr. Hiromasu Okayasu, Coordinator, Healthy Ageing, WHO Western Pacific Regional Office

Dr. Srinivas Tata, Director, Social Development Division, ESCAP

Dr. Mary Ann Tsao, Chairwoman, Tsao Foundation Singapore

- Q & A session
- Reflections and the way forward

Closing remarks given by Eduardo Klien, Regional Director, Asia Pacific Region, HelpAge International

V. Contact for further information

Email inquiries to caitlin@helpageasia.org