

First ever global 'index' to measure wellbeing of older people

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A professor at the University of Southampton working with HelpAge International and an international expert group has developed the Global AgeWatch Index to help highlight the varying quality of life and wellbeing that older people experience in countries around the world.

With the support of the United Nations Fund for Population, Global AgeWatch Index 2013 is the first quantitative measure of its kind to focus on the wellbeing of [older people](#) on a worldwide scale. The Index compares the experiences of older people from 91 [countries](#) around the world and ranks them in order of quality of experience.

Professor Asghar Zaidi, from the Centre for Research on Ageing at Southampton, was consultant of the project commissioned by HelpAge International. He says: "The Global AgeWatch Index is the beginning of a process in which we are gathering all the available evidence of the lives of older people around the world.

"It follows the footsteps of the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and presents, in an accessible and engaging way, a 'dashboard'¹ of indicators that measure the multidimensional quality of life and wellbeing of older people in a range of different socio-economic contexts."

The Index recognises that income, health, personal capabilities and an enabling social environment are all important aspects of the wellbeing of older citizens. By analysing national policies and strategies, it finds that:

- Sweden is the best place for older people.
- It is closely followed by Norway, with Japan the only non-European and non-North American country in the top 10.
- Mauritius is the top African country.
- Chile leads a cluster of Latin American countries that includes Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Panama – which do well in the Index.
- The worst place for an older person is Afghanistan. Just above it come Pakistan, Tanzania and Jordan.
- The UK is ranked at 13, next to Ireland (12) and Australia (14) but five positions higher than France (18).

The Index focuses on older people's income security, health status, employment and education capabilities and the enabling environment of societies in which they live. It builds a strong case for better policies and services to improve their lives in many countries – especially in developing countries.

By 2050 the number of older people in the world will have risen to more than two billion and the Index, and the two reports based on it (co-authored by Prof Asghar Zaidi with HelpAge International staff), emphasise that such 'stock taking' work is absolutely essential in developing new ways to tackle the global challenge of population ageing and to empower older people to hold their leaders to account.

Silvia Stefanoni, Interim Chief Executive of HelpAge International, says: "The world is rapidly ageing: people over 60 years of age already exceed children under 5, and by 2050 they will outnumber children

under 15. However, the continual exclusion of ageing from national and global agendas is one of the biggest obstacles to meeting the needs of the world's ageing population.

"By giving us a better understanding of the quality of life of women and men as they age, this new Index can help us focus our attention on where things are going well and where we have to make improvements."

Professor Zaidi from the University of Southampton adds: "We expect the Index to become an important research and analysis framework for practitioners and policy-makers alike, as it will facilitate cross-national comparative research on the quality of life and wellbeing of older people, and help identify data and knowledge gaps on issues of ageing. We need to give more and more importance to such data gathering work – in fact, since the lives of older people are at stake, we can't afford not to."

The Index does not simply demonstrate the best and worst places for people to grow old, but is also a tool to encourage countries to recognise the challenges of their ageing populations. It reveals some surprising global and regional comparisons and indicates Gross Domestic Product per capita, a proxy for country's wealth and standard of living, does not necessarily lead to better welfare outcomes for older people:

- The G20 economies are spread right across the full range of the Index.
- The fastest ageing G20 countries – India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia and Turkey, where older populations are set to more than double over the next 40 years - are in the bottom half of the Index.
- The tremendous economic growth of the BRICS2 countries has not necessarily resulted in higher benefits for older people: Brazil and China rank relatively high in the Index, while India and Russia fare less well.

- Sri Lanka at 36 ranks much higher than its South Asian neighbour Pakistan, at 89, despite having similar levels of GDP - Sri Lanka scoring significantly higher on age-friendly environment.

Professor Zaidi and HelpAge International developed the Index in close consultation with an international, multidisciplinary advisory group that provided overall guidance on the concept, methodology and use of the Index. These experts represented United Nations agencies (such as UNFPA, UNDP, WHO, ILO3), as well as academic, civil society and other sectors with specialised knowledge on issues linked with ageing and wellbeing of older people.

The data used to construct the Index comes from the World Bank, World Health Organization, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, International Labour Organization, and Gallup World Poll database.

Future work of the Global AgeWatch programme will include yearly updating of all the relevant data and also coverage of additional countries. A breakdown of data by gender is high on the agenda for future development of the Global AgeWatch Index, and there is also an aspiration that the Index will be extended to include a domain on political and civil rights of older people.

For an in-depth analysis of the Index results, including a table of overall country rankings (page 17), see the Insight Report, downloadable from: www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/ (a summary is available at: bit.ly/17Wt5ia)

For a detailed description of the methods, and the indicators used, see the Methodology Report, downloadable from: www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/

More information: 1 To interact with the Index 'dashboard', please

visit: www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/

2 BRICS are five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa

3 United Nations Population Fund, United Nations Development Programme, World Health Organisation, International Labour Organization

Provided by University of Southampton

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