

The logo for "Ageing Without Limits" features a stylized red figure of an elderly person with arms raised, positioned above the text "AGEING WITHOUT LIMITS" in bold, uppercase letters. Below this, the tagline "ENHANCING POLICIES. MAXIMIZING POTENTIALS." is written in a smaller font. The entire logo is enclosed in a thin blue border.  
2018

# Making Active Ageing a Reality

---





[srilanka.unfpa.org](http://srilanka.unfpa.org)

# CONTENTS

Ageing Without Limits. Enhancing Policies. Maximizing Potentials. / **01**

Discussion Points / **04**

01. Evidence-based approach / **05**

02. Rights-based approach / **06**

03. Lifecycle approach / **08**

Conclusion / **Inner Back Cover**

# Making Active Ageing a Reality

## Ageing Without Limits. Enhancing Policies. Maximizing Potentials.

By 2030, 1 in 5 people in Sri Lanka will be above the age of 60 years. This means that Sri Lanka is currently facing a demographic transition, with a rapidly ageing population. The speed of ageing in Sri Lanka is the highest in the South Asia region. Ageing is a triumph of development and should be seen as a success story for public health policies and socioeconomic development. A favorable combination of lower fertility, lower mortality and international migration trends lead towards a transition of the age structure in the country. Initially this has resulted in a large cohort of young people, creating the 'demographic dividend' phase, which is still continuing while at the same time leading to a significant increase in the proportion of the older population. Data shows that the oldest age category (75+ years) is increasing in comparison to the young-old age category (60-74 years). Further, evidence shows that women continue to outnumber men in the old ages due to higher life expectancy among females. This marks the feminization of ageing in Sri Lanka.

### Ageing is a triumph of development that indicates Sri Lanka's continuous investment in the well-being of its people. But is Sri Lanka ready to face this demographic transition?

To mark International Day of Older Persons 2018, which is commemorated on 1st October, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in partnership with the Ministry of Social Welfare and Primary Industries convened the first of a series of high-level policy dialogues, titled '*Ageing Without Limits: Enhancing Policies. Maximizing Potentials*', which aim to provide policy-level inputs to maximize the opportunity of population ageing. The dialogue was led by a panel of local and international experts and policy leaders.

The theme for the first dialogue was '*Making Active Ageing a Reality*'



“Sri Lanka will be the 3rd aged society in Asia by 2030. This demographic shift is an opportunity for the Government to create a conducive environment to utilize the wealth of knowledge that older persons can contribute to our society”

Hon. Daya Gamage - Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare and Primary Industries



“Preparing for an ageing population is vital for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure that no one is left behind. This is why it is important to maximize the potential of older persons, especially of older women”

**Ms. Ritsu Nacken, Representative, UNFPA Sri Lanka**



“One-third of older women in Sri Lanka are widowed. In countries where societal expectations are more rigid, older women may face challenges as they may have weak social support systems”

**Hon. Dr. Sudharshini Fernandopulle, Member of Parliament, Sri Lanka**



“Japan is the front runner of an ageing society. We have established and are considering various policies to prepare for 100 years of life, including re-education systems and plans to abolish the retirement age and introduce a re-employment system”

**Hon. Dr. Karen Makishima, Member, House of Representatives in Japan**



“Between 2020 and 2046, Malaysia’s 65+ years population will double from 7% to 14%. Financing the older population must be considered by countries. In Malaysia, we have multisectoral support for the aged, from the Government, Private Sector, and Civil Society”

**Prof. Rahimah Ibrahim, Head of Department of Human Development and Family Studies, Universiti Putra, Malaysia**



“To improve active ageing, we must raise the retirement age and take advantage of the silver economy”

**Dr. Ganesan Wignaraja, Executive Director, Lakshman Kadiragamar Institute , Sri Lanka**



“Are we prepared for this new demography of death as young persons, older persons, families, communities, and societies? Adapting lessons learned from other countries and using innovative technologies to address this issue can be one possible solution”

**Prof. Lakshman Dissanayake, Vice Chancellor, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka**

## Discussion Points



The high-level policy dialogue brought together various perspectives about the opportunities and challenges of making active ageing a reality in Sri Lanka.

The ideas discussed can be clustered into three inter-linked discussion points as below:

1. **Evidence-based approach:** The importance of formulating policies and making informed decisions based on evidence, accurate data, and lessons learned from other countries about the demographic transition.
2. **Rights-based approach:** The need to ensure mental and physical health, and socio-economic rights of older persons and to address feminization of ageing by achieving gender equality for older women and caregivers
3. **Lifecycle approach:** The importance of investing in youth to maximize their financial stability and to prepare them for old age while also extending the healthy period of their lives

## 01. Evidence-based approach

---

### Issues Highlighted

- 12.4% of the population (2.6 million) Sri Lankans are above the age of 60 years. Population ageing in Sri Lanka is accelerating at a faster rate than any other country in South Asia
- When formulating policies for older persons, Sri Lanka needs to consider demographic trends such as the new demography of old death, morbidity expansion, mortality compression, and declining population size

### Lessons learned from Japan & Malaysia

- Japan actively utilizes the power of innovative smart technology to address health, employment and gender inequality of older persons.
- Malaysia prioritized 'active ageing' in the national development policies as early as in 1996 which ensures smooth coordination for multi-sectoral support for older persons.

### Possible solutions for Sri Lanka

- Evidence-based information and adaptation of lessons learned from other countries to formulate policies for active ageing.
- The prioritization of 'active ageing' in national policies to ensure better coordination among multiple sectors related to older persons.
- The use of innovative technologies as well as innovative Public-Private-Partnership models.



To make active ageing a reality in Sri Lanka, we must develop the right set of evidence-based policies to ensure that older persons issues are addressed and their contributions to society are recognized.

**Ms. Ritsu Nacken, Representative, UNFPA Sri Lanka**

## 02. Rights-based approach

---

### Issues Highlighted

#### Gender

- In Sri Lanka, according to the Census of Population and Housing (2012), life expectancy at birth for male and female is 72 and 79 years respectively, which means women can expect to live 19 more years at age 60 compared to 12 more years for males, which marks the feminization of ageing.
- The increasing number of widows aged 60 years and above brings a sequence of implications as most older women have low levels of literacy and are less aware of their basic rights.
- Women only constitute 35% of the workforce in Sri Lanka which undermines their financial independence and makes older women more vulnerable as they are likely to live without a pension or savings.
- There is a lack of data about the prevalence rate of violence against older women in Sri Lanka.

#### Socio-economic rights

- Policies for caregivers and comprehensive health for older persons is lacking in Sri Lanka.
- A mechanism or policy to secure a sustainable income after retirement is needed as most of the older population is engaged in the informal sector and are not covered by pension or insurance schemes.

### Lessons learned from Japan & Malaysia

#### Gender

- To address feminization of ageing, Japan ensures that older women can become economically independent by introducing a community-based model, applying smart technology, and strengthening the inheritance rights of older women.
- In Malaysia, the Institute of Gerontology provides financial empowerment for older women

#### Socio-economic rights

- In Japan, as the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is increasing, addressing health problems of older persons is important. An example of using innovative technology to address this issue is the “Smile Care Food’ programme which caters to different chewing and digestion abilities of older persons and solves problems of under-nutrition.
- To prepare for ‘100 years of life’, Japan implements a recurrent vocational training program and aims to abolish the retirement system and introduce the re-employment system, actively utilizing the power of smart technologies.
- Japan’s sharing economy model connects older people to communities. For example, land plots of unknown owners are developed to parks and other public spaces
- In Malaysia, the National Transfer Account model was introduced to address income insecurity of the elderly working in the informal sector and/or financially supported by their families.

## Possible solutions for Sri Lanka

### Gender

- Sri Lanka needs to transform the family-based care system into a hybrid model of community-based and institutionalized elderly care system with multi-sectoral support. This approach will help alleviate the burden of traditional women care givers on the state, and also cater to the diverse needs of older persons.
- Health care providers must recognize the specific needs of older women and reorient existing programs to address them.
- Social research and data collection on older women's physical, mental and financial conditions must be conducted to disclose hidden problems.
- Women empowerment schemes must be strengthened and female entrepreneurship should be encouraged.

### Socio-economic rights

- In order for Sri Lanka to reap the demographic dividend of ageing, the current labor force should improve to provide decent employment, decent work and a mechanism to increase savings for active ageing.
- A regulation for the elderly care systems and services need to be developed.
- Recurrent education and vocational training opportunities need to be provided for older persons so they can get a job in the fast-changing society.
- The re-employment, social security and pension systems need to be strengthened to make them more elder-friendly and ensure the elderly can age without financial concerns.
- Introduce appropriate insurance schemes to take care of the disadvantaged and low-income groups.



The traditional expectation that women are responsible for elderly care further deters women's involvement in the economy and society.

Hon. Dr. Karen Makishima, Member, House of Representatives, Japan



How to finance older persons after retirement is a key issue to be addressed as societies age rapidly .

Prof. Rahimah Ibrahim, Universiti Putra, Malaysia

## 03. Lifecycle approach

---

### Issues Highlighted

- Lack of education for young people about active ageing.
- Negative perceptions about older persons, regarding them as a burden and not as an asset to society.

### Lessons learned from Japan & Malaysia

- The Intergenerational learning programme in Malaysia allows older persons to engage with high school students and to be their mentors. This helps shift negative perceptions of older persons and improves intergenerational understanding, ultimately leading to intergenerational solidarity.
- Malaysia uses the power of music to energize older persons by introducing music therapies and senior choir groups.
- Japan deploys experienced older persons abroad for their expertise and experiences especially in the medical sector. This measure ensures older persons contributions are valued thus increasing their sense of responsibility and belongingness in society.
- The average age of caregivers are high in Japan. Older persons can actively provide health care services to the fellow elderly.

### Possible solutions for Sri Lanka

- Active ageing should be prioritized in the national strategy to enhance a systematic approach that is in accordance with local practice thus creating larger impact.
- The concept of silver economy should be promoted from a policy perspective, where private sector engagement is encouraged.
- Lifelong education should be promoted at community and family level.
- Adopt intergenerational programmes and senior mentor programmes.
- A sustainable system whereby older care givers can be supported by the community or the public sector.
- Provide healthcare trainings to older persons.



“Since older persons require different sets of needs, the silver economy can open up plenty of new economic and innovative opportunities. We need to approach the concept of a silver economy from a policy perspective”

Dr. Ganeshan Wignaraja, Executive Director (Actg.), Lakshman Kadiragamar Institute



“To develop intergenerational solidarity we want different generations to work together. It provides solutions to address the challenges of population ageing in a more sustainable way “

Prof. Rahimah Ibrahim, Universiti Putra, Malaysia

## Conclusion

As Sri Lanka faces a demographic transition towards an ageing population, re-examining current policies in the country is crucial. Older persons are often vulnerable as they may have weak social support systems, lack income or be subject to discrimination and abuse, especially older women who are vulnerable to social exclusion and are denied their basic rights. While older people may eventually require care and are perceived as vulnerable, there exists a clear need to shift this perception and recognize the contributions that older persons can make to society and all aspects of life.

While an ageing population poses economic and social challenges, the right set of policies can equip individuals with skills and resources which will enable families and societies to address the challenges and reap the benefits of population ageing.

Firstly, an evidence based approach that takes into consideration population trends and population data are critical to identifying the needs of older persons. Accurate data provides a solid base for policies and planning and enables policymakers to be prepared to address emerging trends such as population ageing.

Secondly, a rights-based approach should be adopted where every person ages with security, dignity and their full rights. Older persons deserve equal treatment and recognition of their full potential to participate and contribute effectively in all aspects of life and to enjoy their right to live independently and remain active members of society.

Lastly, as ageing is accompanied by biological changes that increase the risk of disability, a life-cycle approach to health care – one that starts early and continues through the reproductive years and lasts into old age - is essential for the physical and emotional well-being of older persons. Hence, moving towards Universal Health Coverage deems to be the most cost benefit method of service delivery in relation to older persons health care.

To make active ageing a reality, policies and support for older persons must be focused on optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age.

The 'Ageing Without Limits' policy dialogue brought together over 50 government officials, policymakers, academia and other stakeholders including International experts to discuss the challenges and opportunities of population ageing. Sri Lanka has much to learn from countries like Japan and Malaysia that have utilized innovative technology, ensured successful coordination of multi-sectoral support and national policies to preserve the health, safety and independence of older persons. While doing so, it is crucial however to understand the uniqueness within each culture, the context of the country and its population and their lifestyles.

UNFPA will continue this series of dialogues to provide inputs to strengthen policies and support the development and implementation of a holistic system to ensure Sri Lanka is prepared to maximize the opportunity of population ageing.



**For more information:**

United Nations Population Fund,  
202, Bauddhaloka Mawatha,  
Colombo 07,  
Sri Lanka

☎ +94 11 2580840

🌐 [srilanka.unfpa.org](http://srilanka.unfpa.org)

**Follow us on:**

📘 [www.facebook.com/UNFPASriLanka](https://www.facebook.com/UNFPASriLanka)

🐦 [www.twitter.com/UNFPASriLanka](https://www.twitter.com/UNFPASriLanka)

📱 [@unfpasilanka](https://www.instagram.com/unfpasilanka)