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ASIA EDITION

"G20 countries in APAC are not prepared for the needs of aging populations" reports The EIU

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The pre-pandemic data identifies the priorities of longevity and healthy agingÃ?Â through healthcare systems index and serve as a wakeup call for governments across the globe for providing adaptable, accessible, and inclusive environments in which populations can age.



More people are living into old age than ever before. In 2018 The World Health Organization predicted that by 2020 there would be more people aged over 60 years than there are children under 5 years. This prediction is on track to be correct,and numbers in the older cohort continue to rise. This has created challenges in providing health and social services for burgeoning older populations and governments across the globe have been slow to react. Priorities are now shifting from solely addressing health of older people, to how societies can maximize this opportunity and provide effective, inclusive environments in which to age.

This report from The Economist Intelligence Unit describes findings from the "*Scaling Healthy aging, Inclusive environments and Financial security Today" (SHIFT) Index*", a benchmarking analysis around aging societies. The *SHIFT Index* benchmarks against a set of national-level leading practices in creating an enabling environment supportive of longevity and healthy aging for societies in the 19 countries comprising the Group of Twenty (G20). The *SHIFT Index* captures the multifactorial variables that impact ageing across three domains: adaptive health and social care systems; accessible economic opportunity; and inclusive social structures and institutions.

The research found that no G20 country is fully prepared to support healthy, financially secure, socially-connected older people. Some of the findings are;

- Australia leads the Asia Pacific region in creating an enabling environment supportive of longevity and healthy ageing with an overall score of 75.2 out of a possible 100, ranking second globally behind the US
- South Korea (4th) and Japan (8th) perform well with scores above the global average of 59.4
- South Korea leads the G20 in areas of 'accessible economic opportunity' and 'inclusive social structures and institutions'

- Countries with the oldest populations are broadly better positioned to address the needs of older people across the globe
- High-income countries are more prepared, but middle-income countries are making progress
- Poverty levels among older populations is a concern. The poverty rate for people aged above 66 in South Korea and Australia is over 10 percentage points higher than for total populations

As a whole, the G20 countries perform best in providing adaptive healthcare systems and worst in providing inclusive social structures and institutions, indicating that countries still have work to do to shift the focus towards building more welcoming societies for older adults as they age.

Despite clear progress made, governments have more work to do to make sure their health systems are adaptive to the needs of older adults as they age, while also fostering inclusion and ensuring individual economic security.A key barrier to addressing this is lack of robust age-disaggregated data collection by governments in areas such as dedicated health professionals, the extent of isolation and loneliness as well as mental health.

The SHIFT Index reveals several priority areas that may form the basis of policy responses to develop more accessible and inclusive societies for older people:

1. Collect better data: Countries should collect and publish detailed, age-disaggregated health and economic data annually so policymakers can develop evidence-based programs and policies.
2. Address poverty among older people: Some older adults choose to work longer, others must. Governments can ensure the financial health and security of older adults by creating more inclusive work environments. This starts with removing barriers to working longer that exist in some markets.
3. Prevent a care crisis among the elderly: The provision of care for older adults—both formal and informal—and the accessibility of, or access to, long-term care is ill-defined and is an area for further research.
4. Enable older people’s voices to be heard: The views and needs of older people are not routinely collected and they are not represented well in policy consultation.
5. Address age-related discrimination: Few countries categorise age-discrimination as a crime outside of employment practices. Fighting discrimination as well as physical, emotional and financial abuse of older adults, will encourage greater social cohesion across generations.
6. Support training and upskilling of older people: Supporting older people with the skills and help needed to navigate increasingly complex and digitised health and social care systems should be an area of focus.

With older people particularly vulnerable to the health and societal impact of the covid-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for older people to lead healthy, independent lives for as long as possible and avoid the need for institutional care.