SILVER HUES: BUILDING AGE-READY CITIES
EAP REGIONAL PAPER
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## Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AI</td>
<td>Artificial Intelligence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of Southeast Asian Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COVID-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus Disease of 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSRRP</td>
<td>Central Sulawesi Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EAP</td>
<td>East Asia and Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPURL</td>
<td>World Bank's Urban Disaster Risk Management, Resilience and Land Global Practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>KPI</td>
<td>Key Performance Indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSUP</td>
<td>Indonesia National Slum Upgrading Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUUP</td>
<td>Vietnam Scaling up Urban Upgrading Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>UA</td>
<td>Universal Accessibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNDESA</td>
<td>United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>WHO</td>
<td>World Health Organization</td>
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</table>
Acknowledgments

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Introduction

Four major trends are shaping our world: demographic transition, urban expansion, technological advancement, and frequent shocks from health and climate emergencies. Among the demographic shifts, aging is particularly significant as life expectancy increases, and fertility rates decline. Additionally, the increasing urbanization of the world, with two-thirds of the population projected to live in cities by 2050, exacerbates the impact of aging on urban areas. Furthermore, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, characterized by widespread integration of information, communication, and technology into our daily lives, has a crucial role in the future of development. Lastly, the simultaneous occurrence of these trends, such as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic and growing natural disasters, is having a significant impact on cities, countries, and regions.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for the creation of inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable cities. The World Bank report, “Silver Hues: Building Age-Ready Cities,” maps global trends and their implications for urban areas and aligns with SDG Goal 11 “Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” and the “United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)”. It provides guidance for city governments on how to create age-ready cities, filling a gap in the policy research on aging in urban areas. This note has been curated from the Silver Hues report. It summarizes the report’s key analysis, insights and findings and is tailored for audiences interested in the East Asia Pacific (EAP) region.

Why focus on age-ready cities, and how is it relevant for the EAP region?

An age-ready city has intrinsic and instrumental values for all residents, regardless of their age. Investing in age-ready cities is essential because:

- Age-ready cities have universal benefits for a wide range of groups including persons with disabilities, travelers, manual workers, and more.

- There is a strong overlap between aging and disability, with older persons being significantly overrepresented among those with disabilities.

- The benefits of accessibility to society outweigh the costs, as demonstrated by the success of the Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S. Department of Justice 2010).

- The marginal costs of achieving age-readiness are limited and can have significant benefits, making it important for developing economies facing both urbanization and aging.

- Older persons constitute a growing market for goods and services, presenting a huge opportunity for entrepreneurship and innovation.

- Older persons can be productive and provide intergenerational transfers of resources to both younger and older generations.
FIGURE 1. WHY FOCUS ON AGE-READY CITIES?

1. The benefits of age-readiness are universal.

2. Overlap between disability and aging needs to be especially underscored.

3. There are economic and social benefits of “building better before” over retrofitting or adding accessibility features afterwards.

4. Older persons constitute a large and growing market for goods and services.

5. Intergenerational transfer of resources occurs in both directions—young to old and old to young.

6. Many cities pride themselves on their vision of being “cities for all.”

Source: World Bank
However, despite the advantages of being age-ready, it is not always possible for cities to invest in policies and programs due to limited resources and technical capabilities. This requires political determination, a long-term perspective, and a collective agreement. Encouraging non-government organizations, private entities, and senior citizen groups to become involved and invest in age-readiness initiatives can attract the necessary financial and technical support.

**Regional Trends in Aging**

This section sheds light on the diverse profile of older individuals in the EAP and underscores the significance of understanding their needs to achieve age-readiness for cities. The aging process in the region has been occurring rapidly, as illustrated in Figure 2. It has experienced a faster aging rate compared to other regions, with countries like China, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam projected to transition from aging to an aged society in a mere 25, 22, 22 and 19 years, respectively. In comparison, the transition in France and Sweden occurred in 115 and 85 years, respectively (UNESCAP n.d.). The trend of aging populations will only become more pronounced in the coming decades, with the elderly population in the region projected to double from 13 percent in 2022 to 26 percent in 2050.

**FIGURE 2. REGIONAL VARIATION IN AGING, 1969-2050**

![Figure 2](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO?view=chart)

Source: Based on World Bank 2021a, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO?view=chart](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.65UP.TO?view=chart)
As of 2022, Japan has the highest proportion of its population aged 65 and over, estimated at around 30 percent. However, it is predicted that by 2050, Hong Kong SAR, China will surpass Japan with 40.5 percent of its population above 65. Notably, Republic of Korea (South Korea) is projected to experience the most rapid aging between 2020 and 2050, with nearly 40 percent of its population projected to be aged 65 and over by that time. Additionally, Thailand, and China are also expected to have significant portions of their populations aged 65 and over will be considered “super-aged” (with persons over 65 years old surpassing 20 percent of the population) by 2050. Furthermore, aging is also impacting Pacific Island nations. As figure 3 illustrates, the proportion of the population aged 65 and over is expected to significantly increase in the region, more than doubling in places like Kiribati, Northern Mariana Islands and Papua New Guinea.

**FIGURE 3. AGING IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES, 2020 AND 2050**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Percentage of population aged 65 and over (2020)</th>
<th>Percentage of population aged 65 and over (2050)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>French Polynesia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Northern Mariana Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>New Caledonia</td>
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<td>Guam</td>
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<td>American Samoa</td>
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<td>Palau</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marshall Islands</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fiji</td>
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<tr>
<td>Micronesia (Fed. States of)</td>
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<td>Tonga</td>
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<td>Samoa</td>
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<td>Tuvalu</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
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<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timor-Leste</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nauru</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
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<td>Vanuatu</td>
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Source: UNDESA 2022
Aging and Urbanization

The relationship between urbanization and aging is demonstrated by the fact that a growing proportion of older people reside in cities. In 2015, globally 58 percent of people over the age of 60 lived in urban areas, an increase of seven percent from 2000. For those aged 80 and over, 63 percent lived in cities in 2015.

Figures 4 and 5 depict the relationship between aging and urbanization across the EAP region. Panel A shows the current (year 2020) correlation, while Panel B projects this relationship for 2050. The data for 2020 suggests that there is a correlation between the age of a population and the proportion residing in urban areas, but deviations were observed in some countries. However, as more countries experience urbanization and aging, this trend is expected to become more uniform, resulting in a stronger relationship between age and urbanization by 2050 across the EAP region.

FIGURE 4. THE CONFLUENCE OF AGING AND URBANIZATION

Source: UNDESA 2022
As demonstrated by figure 4, countries can be grouped across three categories. The first group, including Australia, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, Japan is highly urbanized and has a high proportion of their population aged 65 and over. The demographic shift towards an aging population is primarily a challenge faced in urban areas and has been a long standing one. They have developed innovative approaches to cater to their aging populations and maintain age-readiness. These countries serve as models for others facing similar challenges, offering valuable insight into the opportunities and challenges of aging in urban areas.

The second group of countries, located in the bottom left quadrant of Panel A in figure 4, including many in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and some Pacific Island states, have low levels of urbanization and aging today but are expected to experience both aging and urbanization concurrently. This presents an opportunity for these countries to invest early in age-ready urban infrastructure.

A third group, located in the top left quadrant of panel A in figures 4 and 5, are characterized by a combination of high urbanization and a relatively young population. This group includes countries from the ASEAN region, such as Indonesia and the Philippines, as well as a few Pacific Island states. In comparison to their level of urbanization, their median age is low. The priorities for this group will center around retrofitting, adapting, and redesigning their urban areas to better accommodate their aging population as it grows. These countries have the advantage of being able to plan for the challenges that will accompany their aging population in the future.
In conclusion, aging and urbanization are expected to escalate in most countries in the coming decades, posing significant challenges to the age-readiness of their urban environments. This trend is characterized by urbanization rates projected to surpass 20 percent and, in some cases, exceed 50 percent, and the proportion of the older population expected to surpass 10 percent in over half of all countries.

Source: UNDESA 2022
Aging across Income Levels

Figure 6 shows that high-income regions are at varying stages of aging, with some having a high proportion of people aged 65 and over and others, such as Pacific Island states, having a lower percentage. Japan is an outlier even among high-income countries, with almost 30 percent of its population aged 65 and over. As previously mentioned, places like Republic of Korea and Hong Kong SAR China are likely to catch up in the near future. This variation emphasizes the need for different aging interventions in these countries, including immediate, mid-term, and long-term measures. Upper-middle-income countries also vary in their aging population, with most having 4-14 percent of people aged 65 and over. The aging population in lower-middle income countries in the region is more uniform and similarly distributed, with all currently below 10 percent.

FIGURE 6. AGING POPULATIONS BY COUNTRY INCOME GROUP IN 2020

The impact of aging across income levels is a crucial factor to consider in policymaking. Historically, the conventional assumption was that high-income countries experienced aging as a result of improved living standards, leading to decreased fertility and increased life expectancy (Lee et al. 2010). However, this is no longer the case, as many countries are aging before they become wealthy, such as Vietnam and Indonesia. Figure 7 illustrates the projected population of individuals aged 65 and above, based on the income level of the country. It highlights that less developed countries will experience aging at a quicker pace than developed countries, but with less established infrastructure and weaker social protection systems, such as pension and social security benefits. Despite this challenge, these countries have the advantage of being able to learn from countries that have extensive experience with adapting to aging societies.
Who are Older Persons?

It is important to understand the diverse socio-economic characteristics of older persons. Characteristics such as demographic information, income sources, and mobility play a role in determining the design and demand for age-appropriate infrastructure and services. To illustrate, older women tend to live longer than men in most parts of the world, and consequently, countries are turning older, more urban, and more female. As figure 8 illustrates, with the exception for Australia, the top five aging countries in the region have more women than men among their older populations. This has implications for their safety, poverty rates, and property rights. For example, in countries where women do not have secure property rights, older women who outlive their husbands are at risk of losing their homes following the loss of their husbands. It is also important to highlight that the burden of caring for older adults often falls disproportionately on women and will continue to increase as the aging population grows, leading to negative consequences for their well-being and economic outcomes.
Additionally, older people in some countries may have access to pensions and financial means to support themselves and generate demand for products and services, while in others they may be at risk of poverty and lacking access to services. Furthermore, along with poverty and economic status, living arrangements also impact the needs of older adults for housing, transportation, and services. The contrast between low-income older persons living in inadequate housing in informal settlements, with limited access to services, and wealthy older adults residing is stark. Household composition also has significant impact on prospective policy. In some countries, older adults live with their children or extended families, while in others they live alone or with spouses. For instance, in the Republic of Korea, about 60 percent of individuals aged 65 and over live alone or with their spouse, while in Thailand, around 50 percent live with their extended families. In some Pacific Island states such as Samoa, Kiribati, and Tuvalu, between 73 percent to 80 percent of the population live with their extended families (UNDESA 2022).

**BOX 1. SOCIOECONOMIC CHALLENGES OF OLDER PERSONS IN SEOUL**

Seoul faces a significant challenge in addressing the needs of its aging population, particularly those living alone or in low-income families. In 2015, one in every five senior citizens lived alone, and a quarter of seniors were of low socioeconomic status. Although over a third of older Seoul residents had income-generating employment in 2018, many held low-income and unstable jobs, with an average monthly income of 1.5 million won. The majority of older workers had taken jobs that were extensions of their previous ones, and over 64 percent of older persons regarded their standard of living as low. The poverty rate among older Koreans is high compared to other age groups in OECD countries, and older single-person households are particularly vulnerable. These challenges are compounded by factors such as marginalization, lack of education, health care, and employment opportunities, which contribute to low-income people being concentrated in certain areas and separated from higher-income groups. Addressing these issues will be critical for making Seoul an age-ready city and improving the well-being of its older citizens (Kang 2022).
With the increasing aging population globally, the demand for care work will increase and, without proper policy and program intervention, women and immigrant workers will continue to bear the burden. This will have significant negative impacts on the well-being of caregivers and their ability to participate equally in paid work, resulting in unequal economic outcomes and perpetuating gender inequality (Razavi 2017). Overall, poverty, inequality, and aging are complex and interconnected issues that need to be addressed through active policy and programmatic interventions to ensure that older people can live with dignity and equality.

**BOX 2. GATHERING DATA TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY IN INDONESIAN CITIES (UN-HABITAT 2022)**

UNESCO has collaborated with local governments in Indonesia through the Network of Mayors for Inclusive Cities to enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities in urban areas. In partnership with Kota Kita, local civil society organization Kaki Kota Banjarmasin, and the municipal government, UNESCO conducted a pilot project to obtain a comprehensive profile of the city by surveying nearly 4,000 residents with disabilities. The study recommended several improvements in schools, public spaces, and other areas to guide the city in its efforts to improve accessibility. The initiative in Banjarmasin highlights the value of rigorous, participatory data collection as a tool for creating more disability-inclusive cities. The data collected helped the local government target assistance more effectively in response to COVID-19 and was also utilized in January 2021 to develop an emergency response for vulnerable residents affected by flooding.

**Building Age-Ready Cities**

To be considered age-ready, a city needs to be adaptive, productive, and inclusive.

**FIGURE 9. ATTRIBUTES OF AGE-READY CITIES**

Source: World Bank
An **adaptive** city repurposes existing infrastructure to meet demand from population aging and a new demographic structure. In Japan, for example, school buildings were converted into community centers as the number of school-age children decreased and the proportion of older persons increased (Yuen 2021a). This adaptability requires universal accessibility and flexible design approaches to the built environment, often through retrofitting, repurposing, and redesigning public infrastructure and housing. Urban infrastructure should ideally be built with inclusive design principles and to serve all residents, but when it is not feasible, cities can add universal design features through renovations and repairs and “build back better”, despite having budgetary implications.

A **productive** city fosters innovation and provides incentives for industry leaders and entrepreneurs to create goods and services for older people. They represent a growing market, and cities can tap into this “silver economy” (European Commission 2018) or “longevity economy” (AARP 2021; Coughlin 2017) creating a business-friendly environment that attracts investment and drives innovation in the silver economy.

**BOX 3. LEVERAGING TECHNOLOGY FOR AGE-READINESS IN SINGAPORE**

Singapore has become a living laboratory for AI and digital technologies, with the government spending S$3.8 billion on digital transformation. One of the key projects is the Smart Nation Sensor Platform, which tests and implements smart technology in public housing. Four areas have been identified for implementation: smart planning, smart environment, smart estate, and smart living. The goal is to create a continuum of community and social elder care, where the aging population can continue living independently at home with greater care and connection. However, concerns about data security and personal privacy have been raised, and some older Singaporeans may not be ready to accept and use these technologies (Yuen 2022a).

An **inclusive** city improves the ability, opportunity, and dignity of the elderly and disadvantaged groups to participate fully in society. This involves working toward inclusion within the spatial, social, and economic dimensions, requiring investments in data and analysis, consultation with a wide range of residents, and policy and program changes to address the needs of older persons.

**BOX 4. AGED CARE POLICIES IN MALAYSIA**

In Malaysia, the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the Ministry of Health have been formulating strategic aging frameworks and aged care policies since the mid-1990s. The government has made progress in establishing an inclusive aged care system through a range of policies, plans, and laws, including the Private Aged Healthcare Facilities and Services Act passed in 2018. The government has provided institutional care through care homes and nursing homes, as well as introduced home help services, activity centers, and transport services for older persons. However, the aged care system is still fragmented, with responsibilities for financing and providing care shared among the federal government, state governments, and local authorities (World Bank 2020).
These actions that make a city age-ready are overlapping and complementary. For example, universal design is adaptive as it creates spaces and environments that accommodate the needs and abilities of diverse users, enhances productivity by enabling more people to engage in education or employment, and is inclusive because it is usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible. Furthermore, drawing from the WHO Age-Friendly Cities framework, age-ready cities need to prioritize actions across six areas: universal design, housing solutions, multigenerational spaces, enhancing the physical mobility of older persons, use of technology, and advancing inclusion and partnerships (WHO 2007, 9). A table providing illustrative actions under each of these areas is provided in annex 1.

Source: World Bank
Universal Design toward Age-Readiness

Universal design promotes the creation of products and environments that are accessible and usable by everyone, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. It is a broader concept than universal accessibility, which focuses on complying with regulations or criteria to meet minimum design standards for only people with disabilities (Preiser and Ostroff 2001). In urban areas, this approach can help to address the challenges that people with mobility, cognitive, hearing, or vision impairments face when trying to access resources and services. These challenges may include poorly maintained sidewalks, lack of elevators in multi-story buildings, and signage that is difficult to read. To promote universal design, the United Nations has identified seven principles that designers and planners can use as a guide: equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive design, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use. By adhering to these principles, designers can create spaces that are more inclusive and provide equitable access to all individuals.

**BOX 5. CREATING AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES IN CHINA**

The National Health Commission (National Office on Aging) in China plans to create 5,000 age-friendly communities across the country by 2025, and achieve full coverage of such communities in both urban and rural areas by 2035. The objective is to improve community services and facilities to meet the needs of the elderly in terms of living environment, daily travel, health services, elderly care services, social participation, and spiritual and cultural life. The plan includes improving the living environment and safety of the elderly, facilitating their daily travel through barrier-free facilities and iconic design, improving the quality of services for the elderly, expanding their social participation, enriching their spiritual and cultural life, and improving the technological level of serving the elderly. The plan also includes regular visits to the elderly living alone, empty nesters, left behind, disabled (including dementia), severely disabled, and family planning special families (National Health Commission of the People’s Republic of China 2020).

Improving the accessibility of the built environment benefits all individuals, not just those with functional limitations. The experience of the user is central to good design, and small changes to the built environment can make a big difference in creating an inclusive society. For example, in addition to accommodating the accessibility needs of older persons, designers must also consider the mobility limitations related to hearing, sight, or cognitive ability, or a combination of these, of older persons. These needs may include factors such as good acoustics and noise control, which can be addressed through design elements such as those set out in Laszlo’s Principles of Design for Hard of Hearing Access proposed by the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association. The World Bank has also incorporated universal design principles into projects in the EAP region. For example, railway projects in China have implemented universal design principles to create accessible transportation for older persons and those with disabilities. Box 6 offers an overview into how universal design principles have been integrated into various World Bank projects in Indonesia and Vietnam.
BOX 6. WORLD BANK PROJECTS INCORPORATING UNIVERSAL DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The Vietnam Scaling up Urban Upgrading Project (SUUP) worked in seven cities in the Mekong Delta and was one of the first innovative urban development projects that supported the incorporation of universal accessibility (UA) principles in the design of infrastructure investments that the project financed. The process started with a baseline study to understand the conditions of the beneficiaries, including the disabled but also the elderly, then followed by a series of technical inputs to feasibility studies and detailed engineering designs to incorporate UA, development of a country-specific guideline for UA, followed by a training session for national and local governments for future scale-up as a national program.

The Central Sulawesi Rehabilitation and Reconstruction Project (CSRRP) in Indonesia incorporates universal accessibility principles starting from the project’s design, which introduces a specific key performance indicator (KPI) for ensuring the accessibility of public buildings, complemented by a series of accessibility checklists for monitoring purposes. Throughout the project’s implementation, the incorporation of accessibility features was maintained through a joint technical review process in the design phase of infrastructures and facilities. In addition, vulnerable groups are given first priority in selecting new house parcels. The process’ results are observable, for example, in application of tactile paving across the project’s reconstructed settlements, standards-compliant access ramps, and accessible fittings in the bathrooms and general areas of public buildings constructed by the project. Considering the high frequency of disasters in Indonesia, mainstreaming these principles in Central Sulawesi’s disaster-recovery effort could serve as a model case for other recovery efforts across the country – potentially contributing to the country’s larger goals of achieving a socially inclusive and more resilient urban environment.

The Indonesia National Slum Upgrading Project (NSUP, KOTAKU) provided direct and hands-on support to mainstream universal accessibility for 43 kelurahan (urban wards) with complex/challenging slum conditions located in 15 cities. Currently, national-level scale up is planned to have over 2,500 kelurahan participating in the project. The suite of offerings as a UA package includes: technical design guidelines on universal accessibility, guidance on disability inclusion at community-level planning and data collection, cost benefit analysis of universal accessibility, a series of hands-on training for community facilitators as well as national and subnational level officials coined as Coaching Clinics.

Encouragingly, the adoption of universal design principles in cities and countries worldwide has gained momentum in recent years. For instance, Singapore enacted the Code of Accessibility in the Built Environment in 2007, which expanded the mandate to newly built public spaces and raised minimum standards. However, to successfully implement these policies, it is crucial to train key stakeholders such as urban planners, architects, and construction engineers in the fundamentals of accessibility and updated designs.
BOX 7. UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN JAPAN

In 1995, the Japanese Ministry of Construction released the Design Guidelines for Dwellings for the Ageing Society, which recommended age-friendly, energy-efficient, and durable housing design principles. The guidelines included the removal of level differences within dwellings, installation of handrails, and widening of corridors and doorways to accommodate wheelchairs. While implementation was not mandatory, incentives were provided by public organizations such as the Housing Loan Corporation of Japan and the National Pension Fund to encourage adoption of these guidelines. By 1999, more than half of Housing Loan Corporation clients had incorporated age-friendly design concepts. However, in 2010, less than half of surveyed private housing was found to be appropriately equipped with age-friendly features for older occupants, and only a small portion of available rental housing was barrier-free. The promotion of barrier-free modifications to existing housing remains important but difficult, and local government grant programs have been supporting home modification. Financial assistance of up to 200,000 yen for home modifications has been available since 2000 to those eligible for long-term care assistance under the Long-Term Care Insurance System. However, self-supporting older persons who do not need or are ineligible for long-term care cannot receive financial assistance under this system (Yuen 2022b).

Cities must also consider the increasing risk of climate-related hazards like the urban heat island effect due to rising global temperatures, which poses a greater risk of morbidity and mortality to older persons. For instance, mapping heat islands and predicting hotspots can assist cities in designing both mitigation and adaptation strategies (Park et al. 2021). Lastly, building safe, age-ready neighborhoods requires inclusive emergency preparedness, response, and recovery efforts that involve older persons. Learning from aging cities that have successfully combated natural hazards can be valuable for other emergencies, such as pandemics. For example, community hubs in Japan have served as evacuation centers and training sites overseen by elderly individuals who impart their knowledge and insights from past disasters (Ibasho, n.d.).

BOX 8. URBAN ACCESSIBILITY IN BEIJING

Beijing made significant efforts to improve accessibility for vulnerable groups in preparation for the Winter Paralympic Games 2022. Over the course of a 3-year plan, the city has installed barrier-free facilities in 336,000 locations, created 100 wheelchair-accessible streets and blocks, and established 100 “convenient life circles” with essential services available within 15 minutes of residents’ homes. This initiative has focused on improving the accessibility of tactile paving, sidewalks, government service centers, residential areas, and other everyday necessities for vulnerable groups.

Additionally, the city has equipped subway stations with stair climbers and vertical platform lifts, and over 12,000 buses have been fitted with wheelchair-accessible facilities, including barrier-free ramps, call buttons, and seat belts. These efforts have enabled more elderly and disabled people to travel independently (Du 2022).
Housing Solutions for Age-Readiness

To enable older persons to lead independent, safe, and dignified lives, it is crucial to adapt homes and other living spaces they inhabit to suit their physical and cognitive needs, regardless of their living arrangements. In countries and cities where older persons co-reside with family members, they often have greater support. Although, even in these situations, older persons may face challenges due to lack of accessibility or living conditions that are not conducive to their well-being, especially if they belong to lower-income households. In societies where older persons live alone, such as in OECD countries, the decision often comes down to choosing between independent living, also known as “aging in place,” or moving to institutional settings. However, while retrofitting one’s home may require capital costs, institutional care typically proves to be more expensive for individuals, their families, and the state (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2013). However, due to limited housing alternatives, many older persons may move into nursing homes and other institutional care settings earlier than necessary, often against their wishes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a reassessment of the role of nursing homes and institutional care for the elderly. In developed countries, aging in place has emerged as the preferred approach for housing older adults, recognized for its social and economic advantages. However, for aging in place to be effective, urban areas must prioritize services, housing standards, and public space accessibility. Universal accessibility in housing must be prioritized, transportation needs to be accessible, and other essential services like health, personal care, and shopping should be both available and affordable.

In developed housing markets, financially capable older individuals are willing to pay extra for accessible housing over traditional housing. To illustrate, a study conducted in Korea revealed that more than half of the 700 respondents expressed a willingness to pay a premium, indicating a significant private market demand for accessible housing. However, while some older persons have the means to decide between aging in place and relocating to an institutional care setting, others may not have that luxury or may live in cities with limited options. As a result, many must face the challenge of securing affordable housing (Molinsky and Airgood-Obrycki 2018).

BOX 9. FACILITATING ACCESS TO AGE-FRIENDLY RENTAL HOUSING IN JAPAN

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 17 percent of poor households in Japan spend more than 40 percent of their income on housing costs, which is a significant financial burden, especially for older people. The Japanese government has enacted the Act on Securement of Stable Supply of Elderly Persons’ Housing to encourage private owners of rental housing to accept older tenants and to increase the availability of barrier-free rental housing for older people. The Act requires properties to have appropriate barrier-free features for older people with reduced capabilities and proposes Design Guidelines as a standard to judge the age-friendliness of housing units. The government also seeks to address landlord concerns by guaranteeing rents for older tenants. However, the success of this scheme has been limited due to unsuitable layouts and the costs of installing barrier-free features. The Act was revised in 2011 to increase the supply of affordable rental housing that is barrier-free and offers nursing and care services to older people (Yuen 2022b).
Governments at all levels in various parts of the world are taking measures to improve housing conditions for older individuals. For example, Japan’s local governments have implemented home modification support programs that offer grants to homeowners for universal accessibility, while grassroots organizations like Singapore’s PA Active Ageing Council (AA Council) promote community networks, offer advocacy and education, and foster employment opportunities for older adults.

**Mixing It Up: Creating Multigenerational “Spaces” toward Age-Readiness**

Older persons often experience isolation and exclusion from society due to lack of access to facilities and services, or because of the belief that they are safest when confined to their homes. While physical spaces like residential facilities or daycare centers are often designated for older persons, they can reinforce social exclusion and isolation. Multigenerational spaces are becoming increasingly popular, spanning from innovating housing solutions to recreational facilities, public amenities, and community groups. These spaces play a crucial role in fostering an adaptable, productive, and inclusive age-friendly urban environment. Cities like Seoul are incorporating policies that allow for intergenerational interaction in housing and public infrastructure facilities used by older persons, while China has used parks to promote active aging and foster intergenerational connections. The One-Roof Multigeneration Homes Program in Korea encourages older persons living near universities to lease out rooms to students at affordable prices, promoting mixed-generation living arrangements. Local communities, such as Vietnam’s Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs and Shanghai’s Old Partner Program, are also active in creating multigenerational spaces.

**BOX 10. SEOUL’S EFFORTS TOWARDS CREATING AN AGE FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT**

The Seoul metropolitan government is working on creating age-friendly communities by improving the physical environment, communication, and social awareness of older persons. They have made improvements such as increasing pedestrian safety, creating barrier-free environments, and providing street benches. Programs such as senior homes, aged classrooms, and aged welfare centers are available for older persons to participate in leisure and learning activities, and use of these facilities varies slightly by age group. The government is also supporting the development of age-friendly shops, such as the “Age-Friendly Street” project that provides variations of retail businesses to accommodate physical and emotional needs of older persons. This project has had a positive impact on the image of the community and the life satisfaction of local residents in their old age.

Seoul’s Aging Society Master Plan also aims to improve society’s perception of older persons and promote intergenerational exchange. The government has implemented various projects to support older individuals and groups, such as residence sharing, generation-linking activities, and one-roof multigeneration homes. Additionally, the government has established the Second-Round Job Support Center to prepare for the aging baby boomer generation and promote their professional involvement in social activities. Finally, the government is supporting club activities for older persons, including sports, arts, and music (Kang 2022).
Getting Around: Age-Readiness through Improved Transportation

Improving urban mobility and accessibility is crucial for the well-being of all residents, including older persons. The ability to get around their city is essential for meeting basic needs, working, engaging in recreation, socializing, and accessing services. Inaccessible environments can lead to exclusion from the labor market, education, and recreation, resulting in significant opportunity costs. To promote urban development priorities, such as reducing congestion and air and noise pollution, improving safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, and enhancing health, cities need to enhance mobility and the accessibility of public transportation for older persons. By doing so, they can also benefit all residents. For example, as people use public transportation more and depend on cars less, cities can experience reduced congestion and air and noise pollution. Additionally, reallocating road space for walking and cycling can lead to improved safety and health outcomes.

BOX 11. BUILDING CAPACITIES FOR TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES TO ENHANCE A UNIVERSALLY ACCESSIBLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK – VIETNAM

The Australian Government’s Aus4Transport initiative is partnering with the Vietnamese Ministry of Transport to introduce the concept of universal design in Vietnam’s transport infrastructure. The initiative aims to change attitudes and assist local transport agencies in planning and designing for accessible transport infrastructure through training, technical and financial assistance. The activity aims to improve knowledge, change attitudes, and encourage collaboration between transport agencies and civil society in regard to accessible transport, while supporting sustainable growth of Vietnam’s transport infrastructure sector, contributing to economic development and poverty alleviation. The initiative focuses on building capacity that assists transport agencies to effectively implement transport accessibility laws and regulations, recommend improvements, and ensure the application of best practices (Aus4Transport n.d.).

Travel patterns of older persons are often unique, and factors such as socioeconomic status and gender can influence these patterns. Women, in particular, are less likely to drive or own cars as they grow older, leading to different mobility patterns than men of the same age. Understanding these patterns and behaviors is crucial in forecasting transportation and public space usage, establishing fare structures, distributing transportation vouchers, and crafting other supportive initiatives. To ensure that cities are age-ready and promote independent living among their older residents and persons with disabilities, they need to adapt their public spaces and transportation options. Comprehending the obstacles associated with using urban infrastructure and services, including challenges related to accessing transit stations or boarding or disembarking from transportation, can aid in alleviating these barriers.
The City Health and Wellbeing Initiative, run by the Stockholm Environment Institute, aimed to improve the urban environment of Udon Thani, Thailand, by using innovative community-based data collection methods. The project employed participatory techniques, such as mental mapping and citizen-led photography, to encourage residents to examine issues related to access to green spaces, adequate pavements, and potential hazards like poorly managed traffic and low-hanging electric cables. Cars speeding on roads without pavements or low-hanging cables near the pavements pose significant risks to pedestrians, especially the elderly. The project’s research has highlighted numerous everyday issues like dust, the need for shaded walkways, and excessive smoke from food stalls that aren’t typically considered in top-down planning approaches. These findings are especially critical since Udon Thani’s public areas and parks are currently threatened by urbanization pressures and financial constraints. Fortunately, the municipality has shown a receptive attitude and is eager to incorporate these insights into its planning. If implemented successfully, this could result in a more accessible and livable urban environment that promotes healthy, physically active lifestyles and enhances overall well-being.

Vision and Action towards Age-Readiness

Drawing upon the experiences of cities that have made headway in addressing the challenges of urbanization and aging, The Silver Hues report outlines six key steps for cities to become age-ready:

1. Create a long-term vision that applies at national, subnational, and local levels, which recognizes the importance and centrality of age-readiness to future actions. Even cities that are not yet aging should start envisioning age-ready futures for themselves.

2. Investing in data and analysis is important to identify city-level demographic trends and understand the core needs of an age-ready city. Robust analyses are necessary for evidence-based policy actions, as data gathering alone is not sufficient.

3. Comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders, not just older persons, are essential to build a social contract and understand the needs of the community. This participatory process helps detect resistance and identify tradeoffs for investments in age-readiness, benefiting the design, sequencing, and implementation of reform actions.

4. Design actions towards age-readiness, which requires considering how aging issues will be mainstreamed into policy frameworks, whether special programs will be designed, how infrastructure will be adapted for universal accessibility, and the roles of various stakeholders in implementation.
5. Put into place effective implementation arrangements, and restructure municipal-level institutions. This involves providing services, managing resources, and enforcing quality control mechanisms, which may be challenging but can make institutions more responsive to changing populations.

6. Mainstream age-readiness into monitoring and evaluation systems, using statistical and community monitoring mechanisms. Impact evaluations should be put in place at the start of a program, and cities should be flexible enough to make adjustments in response to monitoring and feedback from citizens.

**FIGURE 11. SIX STEPS TOWARDS AGE-READINESS**

1. Build a long-term vision
2. Invest in data and analysis
3. Undertake comprehensive consultations, not just with older persons but with all city stakeholders
4. Design appropriate actions
5. Put into place implementation arrangements and revamp institutions as needed
6. Mainstream age-readiness in monitoring and evaluation systems

Source: World Bank
Conclusion

This note aims to provide an overview of the demographics of the EAP region and their implications for urban areas. Specifically, it highlights the fact that the region is aging rapidly, underscoring the need for age-readiness measures. To support age-readiness in cities, the note draws upon the Silver Hues report and presents recommendations in six key areas: universal design, housing solutions, multigenerational spaces, physical mobility, technology, and efficient spatial forms. However, it also acknowledges that different strategies are required to achieve age-readiness given the varying stages of aging across the EAP region.

The first group, consisting primarily of OECD countries, has a high proportion of their population aged 65 and over and has developed innovative approaches to cater to their aging populations in urban areas. The second group, including some Pacific Island states and ASEAN countries, currently have low levels of urbanization and aging, but are expected to experience both concurrently, presenting an opportunity to invest in age-ready urban infrastructure. Lastly, the third group includes some ASEAN countries and Pacific Island states with high urbanization but relatively young populations, who must retrofit, adapt, and redesign their urban areas to better accommodate their aging population as it grows.

While it is important to recognize that creating age-friendly cities requires context-specific approaches, countries in the region offer valuable examples and best practices that can inform government efforts. These frameworks provide a foundation for advancing age-friendly initiatives. As such, the EAP region presents a compelling case study for understanding the work that has been done, is currently underway, and needs to be done, particularly given the rapid aging of some countries and the relatively young populations of others.
### Annex 1

**ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIONS ACROSS SIX THEMATIC AREAS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THEMATIC AREAS</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIONS TO INFLUENCE POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONS</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIONS TO INFLUENCE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Universal design toward age-readiness</td>
<td>Prepare building codes and regulations and encourage their application not only to new buildings and public spaces but also to reconstruction and retrofitting of existing ones (e.g., accessible lifts for multistory buildings; accessible sidewalks to enhance safety and usability of streets; accessibility features, such as handrails in bathrooms).</td>
<td>Actively involve older persons as partners in the process of building resilience to disasters (e.g., community hubs doubling as evacuation centers; sites for preparation trainings; consultations led by older persons who share their experiences and lessons learned from previous disasters).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Housing solutions for age-readiness</td>
<td>Consider home modification support programs at local government levels that provide grants to homeowners for making housing spaces universally accessible.</td>
<td>Support aging in place where this choice is possible, paying adequate attention to services, housing quality, and access to public spaces (e.g., universally accessible homes; accessibility for older persons to meet needs regarding health, personal care, and shopping at affordable prices).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Creating multigenerational “spaces” toward age-readiness | Incorporate policies that allow for intergenerational interaction in housing and public infrastructure facilities.  
Put into place programs that create incentives for mixed-generation living arrangements, and consider tax incentives for multigenerational living.  
Encourage self-help groups of older people.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Avoid designating segregated physical spaces specifically for older persons (e.g., residential facilities; daycare centers), which can reinforce social exclusion and isolation. (Designated facilities are needed, however, for those physically unable to function without continuous medical and other care.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Utilize parks to encourage active aging across the life course, enhance social interactions, and foster intergenerational connections.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
### Age-readiness through improved transportation

Seek to understand mobility patterns and behaviors of older persons to predict usage of transportation and public spaces, as well as for creating policies, such as those for fare setting, provision of transportation vouchers, and creation of other facilitating programs.

Provide incentives to local public administrations to plan for sustainable mobility (e.g., replacement of old public transportation vehicles with more efficient and adapted buses, trolley buses, and trams; street refurbishment and modernization).

Identify barriers to utilizing city infrastructure and services and prioritize adaptation strategies (e.g., getting to and from transit stations; waiting for, boarding, and alighting from vehicles; access to and within buildings; narrow entryways; inaccessible toilets, especially in high traffic spaces or spaces frequented by older persons).

Adopt accessibility features for public transportation (e.g., level boarding and spaces for wheelchairs; wide entranceways without turnstiles; accessible toilets; wayfinding signage; provision of transportation information in various languages and formats).

### Making technology work for age-readiness

Introduce telemedicine that provides a variety of services (e.g., consultations with doctors and diagnosis; prescriptions; disease management and other follow-up services) and can partner with pharmacy chains, network infrastructure providers, and assistive smart home care companies to reduce the pressure on the nation’s overall health care system.

Encourage innovation and entrepreneurship for technology solutions targeted to older people.

Deploy cyber protection programs to enhance cyberliteracy and the ability of older persons to navigate technology.

Utilize digital technology for service delivery to older persons with mobility impairments.

Boost digital skills of older persons.

### Efficient spatial forms

Encourage transit-oriented development to create compact and mixed-use neighborhoods that are walkable and highly connected by public transportation, reducing dependency on cars and offering a potential solution to mobility challenges faced by many older adults. Ensure that older persons benefit from the compactness.

Connect residents to services and amenities through mass transit by locating housing near public transportation corridors.

Source: World Bank
Endnotes

1 A country or territory is defined as “aging” when the share of people aged 65+ is above 7 percent, “aged” when it is 14 percent or more, and “super-aged” when it exceeds 20 percent (IEG World Bank Group, 2019 - https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/sites/default/files/Data/reports/ap_agingcountries.pdf)

2 Since, DPR Korea is the only country or territory classified as a low-income, it has been removed from the visual representations related to income levels.
References


Golant, Stephen M. 2014. “Age-Friendly Communities: Are We Expecting Too Much?” IRRP Insight, no.5.


