

Healthy Ageing and Healthy Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives

WHO webinar marking the UN International Day of Older Persons 2026

1 October 2026, 14:00–15:00 Geneva time | Virtual (Zoom) | [Register here](#)

Background

Humanity is living longer than ever before, but longer lives are a gain only when they are also healthy. The United Nations marks the 36th International Day of Older Persons under the theme “*The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives*.” This webinar, convened by WHO for staff and partners, falls at the midpoint of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), days after the Secretary-General’s mid-term progress report was submitted to the UN General Assembly. WHO coordinated the report’s preparation with the UN Inter-Agency Group on Ageing and Civil Society Organizations.

Objectives

- Hear Member State perspectives and the lived experience of older persons on what needs to change.
- Share headline findings of the mid-term report and what they mean for the second half of the Decade (2026–2030).
- Showcase how WHO, at country, regional and global levels, is innovating to rethink systems and align efforts to meet the needs and rights of older persons, enabling healthy ageing across the life course.

What the UNGA mid-term report tells us

- **Progress in countries:** legislation against age-based discrimination is reported by 58.3% of countries (45.4% in 2018); national long-term care policies by 57.3% (49% in 2023); national age-friendly environment programmes and comprehensive assessments for older people by 55.2% each. Collaboration across UN agencies is a model for the second half of the Decade to support scale in countries.
- **Persistent gaps:** only 22.9% report longitudinal, nationally representative data on older persons, the most critical gap; among countries reporting resource data, 43.4% report no or very limited resources for combating ageism and 33.8% for long-term care.
- **A step back on within country collaboration:** national multi-stakeholder forums on ageing are reported by 43.8% of countries, down from 53.1% in 2020 and below the 2018 level (45.4%).
- **The call:** accelerated, better-resourced implementation within each country at scale, with priority to strengthening long-term care in low- and middle-income countries, connecting integrated care with age friendly environments and financing.

Why engaging older people matters

Systems designed without the people they serve tend to miss them. Older persons are not only recipients of care but experts in their own lives and contributors to health, communities and economies. The decline in multi-stakeholder forums is a warning: where standing spaces for government, civil society, the private sector and older people to plan and hold each other to account are shrinking, progress on ageism, integrated care and age-friendly environments is harder to sustain and to make reach the people left furthest behind. IFA’s 2025–2026 survey of over 1,000 participants in 58 countries found high awareness of the Decade but a clear call for support to implement. Older people’s voices, are therefore central to rethinking systems, not an add-on.

Aim of the panel: rethinking systems, and aligning them

Seven WHO colleagues from country, regional and headquarters levels will each share one success and one priority next step, followed by a short discussion. The panel aims to: (1) show what “rethinking systems” means in practice, from integrated care and long-term care to age-friendly environments and life course approaches; (2) illustrate how WHO is innovating across its three levels, combining global norms and common goods with country-tailored support; and (3) show how this work is better aligning health and other sectors, so that added years of life become added years of health, dignity and contribution for older persons in all their diversity, and their rights are upheld.

Programme Overview (60 minutes)

- **High-level opening:** WHO leadership and Member States (Egypt, Ethiopia).
- **The evidence:** UNGA mid term progress report (WHO, UNDESA).
- **Panel:** WHO country, regional and headquarters colleagues.
- **Reflections:** MSF and the Association of Former WHO Staff.
- **Closing:** WHO Life Course Department.

Programme, as of 29 September 2026

Registration here: [WHO webinar on the UN International Day of Older Persons 2026: The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives](#)

Healthy Ageing and Healthy Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives

A WHO dialogue marking the UN International Day of Older Persons 2026

1 October 2026 - Time 2-3pm Geneva - Virtual

Humanity is living longer than ever before — but longer lives are only a gain when they are also healthy ones. As the United Nations marks the 36th International Day of Older Persons around the theme “*The Age of Longevity: Rethinking Systems for Longer Lives*,” WHO convenes this dialogue for staff and partners, at the midpoint of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), following the mid-term progress report presented to the UN General Assembly in September 2026.

WHO is committed to strengthening health systems to meet the needs and rights of older persons, and working with partners where WHO can add value in addressing the broader determinants of healthy ageing. The discussion asks what “rethinking systems” means in practice for the direct and cumulative benefit of older people, so that added years of life become added years of health, dignity and contribution, for older persons in all of their diversity. The session will include an overview of the UN Decade progress report, success and priorities reflecting country, regional and global perspectives, including government and civil society.

1- High-level opening — Member States and WHO leadership. 12 mins

Welcome remarks from WHO leadership and introductory remarks from Member States

- **Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General, WHO** - Video recording – 2 mins
- **Prof Mohamed Hassany**, Assistant Minister of Health and Population for Projects and Public Health Initiatives, Ministry of Health and Population, Egypt – 4 mins
- **Dr Abiy Dawit**, Head, Hospital and Diagnostic Desk, Medical Services Lead Executive offices, Federal Ministry of Health, Ethiopia – 4 mins

2- The evidence — the UN General Assembly mid-term Decade progress report. 8 mins

Highlights on progress reported by Member States and collaborations across UN organizations and other partners

- **Dr Ritu Sadana**, Head of the WHO Secretariat for the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing; Lead, Older People and Healthy Ageing Across the Life Course, WHO – 5 mins
- **Amal Abou Rafeh**, Chief of the Programme on Ageing, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs – 3 mins

3- Panel — voices from WHO's three levels. 30 mins

The discussion will address what does “rethinking systems” mean in practice for the direct and cumulative benefit of older people, so that added years of life become added years of health, dignity and contribution, for older persons in all of their diversity.

The panelists, from across the WHO Secretariat, will briefly share one success and one priority/next step reflecting the diversity of experience towards improving and aligning systems, across regions and countries, and implementing normative standards and common goods supporting the needs and rights of older people - 3 mins each, 1 follow up comment

- **Dr Rajesh Sambhajirao Pandav**, WHO Representative, Sri Lanka

- **Dr Rabindra Romauld Abeyasinghe**, WHO Representative, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei Darussalam
- **Dr Yuka Sumi**, Medical Officer, WHO Lead on Decade Action area, Integrated Care for Older People
- **Dr Hyobum Jang**, Medical Officer, WHO Lead on Decade Action area, Long-Term Care
- **Dr Ayanna Alexander**, Technical Officer, Health Promotion, Life Course, and Determinants, PAHO/WHO Country Office for Trinidad and Tobago and the Dutch Caribbean
- **Dr Thiago Herick de Sa**, Technical Officer, WHO Lead on Decade Action area, Age Friendly Environments
- **Dr Yongjie Yon**, Technical Officer, Ageing and Health, WHO European Office for Investment for Health and Development

4- Reflections — Civil Society organizations. 8 mins

Highlights from two distinct organizations that champion the health of people, and foster the participation of older people – 4 mins each

- **Dr Elburg van Boetzelaer**, Epidemiology Advisor, Médecins Sans Frontières
- **Robert Bos**, Co-President, Association of Former WHO Staff

5- Closing remarks — WHO leadership. 2 mins

WHO has a new department that demonstrates a life course approach in practice, inclusive of older people and healthy ageing

- **Dr Pascale Allotey**, Director, Department of Sexual, Reproductive, Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health and Ageing (Life Course Health and Research Department), WHO