



NHSMUN

UNESCAP

BACKGROUND GUIDE

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Delegate Experience
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Global Partnerships
Daniela Maciel
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Under-Secretaries-General

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Naina Dhawan
Ximena Faz

Kellie Fernandez
Grace Harb

Adiva Ara Khan

Anshul Magal

Analucia Tello

Sofia Velasco

Renata Venzor

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) at the 2025 National High School Model United Nations Conference! My name is Courtney Thomas, and I will be your Director for Session I. The topics we have prepared for this conference reflect essential trends in Asia and the Pacific. I hope you will find adopting a regional perspective in UNESCAP an exciting experience.

This is my first time at NHSMUN. So, if this is your first time doing NHSMUN, we are in the same boat! I became involved in MUN during my first semester in college. I never thought I would love it as much as I did. Today, I am the Head Delegate of my university's MUN team, and I count down the days until our next conference. I hope this will be your experience, too. To me, MUN is primarily a simulation rather than a contest. It is an exciting opportunity to further your skills, learn more about the world, and meet new people. I encourage you not to fret about awards. Remember that your fellow delegates are students like yourself, also part of the stimulation. My favorite part of a conference is 'putting pen to paper' and creating specific solutions. Doing this will illustrate the strengths and limitations of your committee's mandate.

I am a junior at Long Island University in Brookville, New York. I am a double major in economics and finance. Besides MUN, I am also a member of my university's student consulting group. As part of this organization, I work on semester-long projects for companies to explore an issue they have. Outside of school, I love to go on walks. I once walked a marathon around my neighborhood! I also like listening to music. I enjoy musicals like Disney songs, The Killers, and Taylor Swift.

Our topics for this conference are "Responding to Demographic Changes in Asia and the Pacific" and "Protecting Informal Workers in Asia and the Pacific." After reading about the first topic, I encourage you to research your country's demographics for more background information. Population aging is an essential demographic trend, but you will find many other facets to consider when discussing this topic. Our second topic relates to informal work. I hope you will find this subject as fascinating as I do, as these informal jobs are a vital aspect of the economy in Asia and the Pacific.

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide. I hope you will find it helpful as a starting point for your research. I look forward to reading your position papers and meeting you at the conference! Best of luck, and please reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,

Courtney Thomas

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United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

Session I



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Dear Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2025! My name is Vishva Gajaraj, and I will be your director for Session II of the United Nations Economic and Social Council of Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). I am super excited to meet all of you and see all the great work that you have done in a couple of months! In high school, I attended NHSMUN two times as a delegate. I didn't realize it now, but NHSMUN was an incredibly enriching experience for me. I hope to replicate that same experience for all of you and to allow everyone to gain something valuable from this conference.

First, I would like to introduce myself to all of you briefly! I'm from East Brunswick, New Jersey, attending the University of Pennsylvania. I'm in my second-year majoring in Computer Science with a minor in Math. On campus, I'm involved in a few consulting clubs, the symphony orchestra (I play double bass), and research (mainly in identifying uses of ML in neurologic drug development). In my free time, I like to work out, play & watch basketball (I am a Mavs fan), and read. I'm also super into music and listen to a wide variety of music. My favorites as I write this are Travis Scott, Lil Tjay, Freddie Gibbs, Beabadoobee, Parannoul, and Beach House. I'm always down to try something new, so send me your recs!

Courtney and I have spent the past few months curating our resources to prepare this background guide. We want you to use our resources to create meaningful, innovative resolutions. Topic A and topic B are extremely important issues for the Asia-Pacific region and must be handled with care. As we begin to address these issues, we will undoubtedly take massive steps toward achieving the vision set forth by the UN's Sustainable Development Goal agenda. Keep in mind the global perspective of the region as you do your research and be sure to gather as much in-depth information as possible!

Please use this background guide to frame your initial research into certain subtopics. However, don't feel obligated to stick to only these subtopics mentioned in this guide. Feel free to go beyond what I've listed here and think about unique aspects of this issue. Good luck and do your best!

I'm super excited to meet all of you, and if you have any questions in the meantime, feel free to email me.

Sincerely,

Vishva Gajaraj

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United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
Session II



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A Note on the NHSMUN Difference

Esteemed Faculty and Delegates,

Welcome to NHSMUN 2025! We are Terry Wang and Jordan Baker, and we are this year's Secretary-General and Director-General. Thank you for choosing to attend NHSMUN, the world's largest and most diverse Model United Nations conference for secondary school students. We are thrilled to welcome you to New York City in March.

As a space for collaboration, consensus, and compromise, NHSMUN strives to transform today's brightest thinkers, speakers, and collaborators into tomorrow's leaders. Our organization provides a uniquely tailored experience for all through innovative and accessible programming. We believe that an emphasis on education through simulation is paramount to the Model UN experience, and this idea permeates throughout numerous aspects of the conference:

Realism and accuracy: Although a perfect simulation of the UN is never possible, we believe that one of the core educational responsibilities of MUN conferences is to educate students about how the UN System works. Each NHSMUN committee is a simulation of a real deliberative body so that delegates can research what their country has said in the committee. Our topics are chosen from the issues currently on the agenda of that committee (except historical committees, which take topics from the appropriate time period). We also strive to invite real UN, NGO, and field experts into each committee through our committee speakers program. Moreover, we arrange meetings between students and the actual UN Permanent Mission of the country they are representing. Our delegates have the incredible opportunity to conduct first-hand research, asking thought-provoking questions to current UN representatives and experts in their respective fields of study. These exclusive resources are only available due to IMUNA's formal association with the United Nations Department of Global Communications and consultative status with the Economic and Social Council. No other conference goes so far to deeply immerse students into the UN System.

Educational emphasis, even for awards: At the heart of NHSMUN lies education and compromise. Part of what makes NHSMUN so special is its diverse delegate base. As such, when NHSMUN distributes awards, we strongly de-emphasize their importance in comparison to the educational value of Model UN as an activity. NHSMUN seeks to reward students who excel in the arts of compromise and diplomacy. More importantly, we seek to develop an environment in which delegates can employ their critical thought processes and share ideas with their counterparts from around the world. Given our delegates' plurality of perspectives and experiences, we center our programming around the values of diplomacy and teamwork. In particular, our daises look for and promote constructive leadership that strives towards consensus, as real ambassadors do in the United Nations.

Debate founded on strong knowledge and accessibility: With knowledgeable staff members and delegates from over 70 countries, NHSMUN can facilitate an enriching experience reliant on substantively rigorous debate. To ensure this high quality of debate, our staff members produce detailed, accessible, and comprehensive topic guides (like the one below) to prepare delegates for the nuances inherent in each global issue. This process takes over six months, during which the Directors who lead our committees develop their topics with the valuable input of expert contributors. Because these topics are always changing and evolving, NHSMUN also produces update papers intended to bridge the gap of time between when the background guides are published and when committee starts in March. As such, this guide is designed to be a launching point from which delegates should delve further into their topics. The detailed knowledge that our Directors provide in this background guide through diligent research aims to increase critical thinking within delegates at NHSMUN.

Extremely engaged staff: At NHSMUN, our staffers care deeply about delegates' experiences and what they take away from their time at NHSMUN. Before the conference, our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained rigorously through hours of workshops and exercises both virtual and in-person to provide the best conference experience possible. At the conference,

delegates will have the opportunity to meet their dais members prior to the first committee session, where they may engage one-on-one to discuss their committees and topics. Our Directors and Assistant Directors are trained and empowered to be experts on their topics and they are always available to rapidly answer any questions delegates may have prior to the conference. Our Directors and Assistant Directors read every position paper submitted to NHSMUN and provide thoughtful comments on those submitted by the feedback deadline. Our staff aims not only to tailor the committee experience to delegates' reflections and research but also to facilitate an environment where all delegates' thoughts can be heard.

Empowering participation: The UN relies on the voices of all of its member states to create resolutions most likely to make a meaningful impact on the world. That is our philosophy at NHSMUN too. We believe that to properly delve into an issue and produce fruitful debate, it is crucial to focus the entire energy and attention of the room on the topic at hand. Our Rules of Procedure and our staff focus on making every voice in the committee heard, regardless of each delegate's country assignment or skill level. Additionally, unlike many other conferences, we also emphasize delegate participation after the conference. MUN delegates are well researched and aware of the UN's priorities, and they can serve as the vanguard for action on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Therefore, we are proud to connect students with other action-oriented organizations to encourage further work on the topics.

Focused committee time: We feel strongly that face-to-face interpersonal connections during debate are critical to producing superior committee experiences and allow for the free flow of ideas. Ensuring policies based on equality and inclusion is one way in which NHSMUN guarantees that every delegate has an equal opportunity to succeed in committee. In order to allow communication and collaboration to be maximized during committee, we have a very dedicated administrative team who work throughout the conference to type up, format, and print draft resolutions and working papers.

As always, we welcome any questions or concerns about the substantive program at NHSMUN 2025 and would be happy to discuss NHSMUN pedagogy with faculty or delegates.

Delegates, it is our sincerest hope that your time at NHSMUN will be thought-provoking and stimulating. NHSMUN is an incredible time to learn, grow, and embrace new opportunities. We look forward to seeing you work both as students and global citizens at the conference.

Best,

Terry Wang
Secretary-General

Jordan Baker
Director-General

A Note on Research and Preparation

Delegate research and preparation is a critical element of attending NHSMUN and enjoying the debate experience. We have provided this Background Guide to introduce the topics that will be discussed in your committee. We encourage and expect each of you to critically explore the selected topics and be able to identify and analyze their intricacies upon arrival to NHSMUN in March.

The task of preparing for the conference can be challenging, but to assist delegates, we have updated our [Beginner Delegate Guide](#) and [Advanced Delegate Guide](#). In particular, these guides contain more detailed instructions on how to prepare a position paper and excellent sources that delegates can use for research. Use these resources to your advantage. They can help transform a sometimes overwhelming task into what it should be: an engaging, interesting, and rewarding experience.

To accurately represent a country, delegates must be able to articulate its policies. Accordingly, NHSMUN requires each delegation (the one or two delegates representing a country in a committee) to write a position paper for each topic on the committee's agenda. In delegations with two students, we strongly encourage each student to research each topic to ensure that they are prepared to debate no matter which topic is selected first. More information about how to write and format position papers can be found in the NHSMUN Research Guide. To summarize, position papers should be structured into three sections:

I: Topic Background – This section should describe the history of the topic as it would be described by the delegate's country. Delegates do not need to give an exhaustive account of the topic, but rather focus on the details that are most important to the delegation's policy and proposed solutions.

II: Country Policy – This section should discuss the delegation's policy regarding the topic. Each paper should state the policy in plain terms and include the relevant statements, statistics, and research that support the effectiveness of the policy. Comparisons with other global issues are also appropriate here.

III. Proposed Solutions – This section should detail the delegation's proposed solutions to address the topic. Descriptions of each solution should be thorough. Each idea should clearly connect to the specific problem it aims to solve and identify potential obstacles to implementation and how they can be avoided. The solution should be a natural extension of the country's policy.

Each topic's position paper should be **no more than 10 pages** long double-spaced with standard margins and font size. **We recommend 3–5 pages per topic as a suitable length.** The paper must be written from the perspective of your assigned country and should articulate the policies you will espouse at the conference.

Each delegation is responsible for sending a copy of its papers to their committee Directors via [myDais](#) on or before **February 21, 2025**. If a delegate wishes to receive detailed feedback from the committee's dais, a position must be submitted on or before **January 31, 2025**. The papers received by this earlier deadline will be reviewed by the dais of each committee and returned prior to your arrival at the conference.

Complete instructions for how to submit position papers will be sent to faculty advisers via email. If delegations are unable to submit their position papers on time, please contact us at info@imuna.org.

Delegations that do not submit position papers will be ineligible for awards.

Committee History

The United Nations (UN) Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) was created in 1947. It has 53 member states. There are also nine non-voting member states. It was first called the Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East.¹ The focus of UNESCAP's mandate is economic growth. Other key topics are the environment and technology. UNESCAP is based in Bangkok, Thailand, and is a forum to discuss regional issues.² UNESCAP is a body under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). It meets each year, and discussions are held with governments and other UN bodies. There is one overall theme for the meeting. Besides the yearly meeting, UNESCAP also gives policy advice to countries upon request. This advice often relates to social or economic development. This is called technical assistance. UNESCAP is vital as the only forum for all Asian and Pacific governments.

The Center for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (CAPSA) is a body under UNESCAP.³ CAPSA research farming to help the growing demand for food and to alleviate hunger. UNESCAP shares best practices and training through CAPSA. One of UNESCAP's goals is to protect natural resources. Along with this, it wants to encourage economic growth. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030 direct UNESCAP's work. UNESCAP is focusing on improving transport, the environment, and energy.⁴ UNESCAP has also done significant disaster management and prevention work through its Asia-Pacific Disaster Resilience Network. Additionally, the Trust Fund for Tsunami, Disaster, and Climate Preparedness is a triumph of UNESCAP. The fund promotes uniform instructions for early warning systems. This has saved many lives.⁵ It also contributed to the Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System.

UNESCAP is different from other UN bodies. UNESCAP has non-binding decisions and shared state and national powers. UNESCAP has members from inside and outside of the Asia-Pacific region. This helps it create policy for all countries' needs. UNESCAP trains policymakers on how to respond to issues. It does not bind any of its countries to their membership. UNESCAP believes participation in meetings, activities, and policies should be voluntary. UNESCAP faces challenges despite these successes. Funding is one issue. The non-binding nature of its decisions is another. Countries can be slow to adopt UNESCAP resolutions for this reason. Working with governments and other UN bodies is key for UNESCAP to overcome these struggles.

1 "ESCAP@75," United Nations Economic and Social Council for Asia and the Pacific, accessed September 25, 2024, <https://unescap.org/escap75/history>.

2 "United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)," *Government of the Macao Special Administrative Region - Economic and Technological Development Bureau*, accessed September 25, 2024, www.dsedt.gov.mo/en_US/web/public/pg_eetr_ieto_unescap?_refresh=true.

3 Economic and Social Council, Resolution 80/1, Provisional Agenda, ESCAP/80/1 (April 2024), https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/ESCAP_80_1_E.pdf.

4 "Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP)," United Nations, accessed September 23, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/un-system-sdg-implementation/economic-and-social-commission-asia-and-pacific-unescap-24510>.

5 "Achievements," ESCAP, accessed September 22, 2024, <https://www.unescap.org/disaster-preparedness-fund/achievements>.



UNESCAP

NHSMUN 2025

TOPIC A: RESPONDING TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Photo Credit: Zhitao Zhang

Introduction

Asia and the Pacific is home to 4.7 billion people.¹² This is 60 percent of the entire population, meaning most people live in Asia and the Pacific. Demographic change is happening faster in Asia and the Pacific than in other regions.³ By 2050, more than one in four people will be 60 or older.⁴ This is an estimated 1.3 billion people.⁵ Asia and the Pacific must be prepared for older people to make up more than a quarter of its population. The growth in the share of older people will be even more significant in some places, where as many as one in three people aged 60 or older by 2050.⁶ Just as this remarkable change occurs, families are having fewer children.⁷ The number of young people ages 15 through 24 is decreasing in most countries in the region.⁸ This may mean that there are fewer workers. An uneven age structure is emerging due to these trends.⁹ There will be a disproportionate number of older people compared to younger people. This phenomenon is called population aging.

Demographic changes have economic and social effects, meaning that the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) is responsible for responding to these trends. The growing share of older people will have economic and social effects. People of all ages will be impacted in the region.¹⁰ Many will have to stop working due to their health. Others will face ageism when trying to find a job. For these reasons, older people are more likely to face poverty. This is especially true for older women. Women are often denied education and work opportunities during their lives, which affects them in old age. Older people are more likely to work dangerous, informal jobs that lack benefits. As the older population grows, their economic challenges will become more prevalent.

Health is an essential concern in old age. It is an achievement

that the average lifespan has increased in the past two decades.¹¹ However, people face a higher risk of disability or disease in the later years of their lives. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) illustrated older people's vulnerability to disease. The majority of people who died of the virus were aged 60 or older.¹² However, older people are most often affected by health issues that cannot be spread to other people. These illnesses may require long-term care, which can mean regular treatment or help with daily tasks. In many cultures, families are expected to provide this care at home for their relatives, placing a significant burden on families. It also affects people who lack close relatives to care for them.

Climate change also impacts demographic change. Climate change is the trend of changing temperatures and weather.¹³ A significant part of climate change is global warming. This

1 Marco Roncarati and Sabine Henning, "Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution," *Social Development Policy Papers* no. 2 (2022), <https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/5178/ESCAP-2022-PB-%20Promoting-decent-work-opportunities-older-persons-Asia-Pacific>.

2 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023* (ESCAP: Bangkok, 2023), <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2023/asia-pacific-population-and-development-report-2023>.

3 Marco Roncarati and Sabine Henning, "Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution."

4 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Report on Population Ageing* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2022), <https://repository.unescap.org/rest/bitstreams/0aeae6b6-f480-43c6-9c8c-dfe81bfec6cf/retrieve>.

5 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Ageing in Asia and the Pacific: Overview* (ESCAP: Bangkok, 2017), <https://www.unescap.org/resources/ageing-asia-and-pacific-overview>.

6 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Ageing in Asia and the Pacific: Overview*.

7 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *ESCAP Population Data Sheet* (UNESCAP, 2023), <https://repository.unescap.org/rest/bitstreams/c4201bf0-a134-4a6a-b906-ab3225c518cf/retrieve>.

8 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *ESCAP Population Data Sheet*.

9 "Demographic Changes in Asia and the Pacific," United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed June 10, 2024, <https://www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/>.

10 Andrew Mason and Ronald Lee, "Six Ways Population Change is Affecting the Global Economy," *Population and Development Review* vol. 48, no. 1 (February 2022): 51-73, <http://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12469>.

11 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022* (Paris: OECD, 2022), <https://read.oecd.org/10.1787/c7467f62-en?format=pdf>.

12 World Health Organization, *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Health Ageing, 2021-2023* (Geneva: WHO, November 2023), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240079694>.

13 "What is Climate Change?" United Nations, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change>.

is the increase in the amount of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere, causing temperatures to rise.¹⁴ Older people are more likely to be affected by climate change due to their higher risk of physical disabilities. This makes it harder for them to evacuate in emergencies. When natural disasters happen, a more significant share of deaths are older people rather than younger people. Due to this, the growth in the number of older people means that the whole region is at greater risk from climate change.¹⁵ UNESCAP is mandated to discuss regional issues, such as the connection between this demographic trend and climate change risks.

Another demographic trend in Asia and the Pacific is the sex ratio imbalance. This means that the number of males and females is not equal. Extreme sex ratio imbalance does not occur naturally. As of 2023, 107 boys are born for every 100 girls in Asia and the Pacific.¹⁶ The ratio is more extreme in certain countries, such as India, Qatar, or the Maldives.¹⁷ One reason for the imbalance is that some cultures prefer sons to daughters. Parents with this belief sometimes abort female fetuses or neglect their female children. This leads to an excess of males over females, which can lead to a ‘marriage squeeze.’ This means that there are not enough of the opposite sex for all people who wish to marry. This causes many males to remain unmarried, which negatively impacts their incomes and lifespans.¹⁸ For females, the marriage squeeze can lead to an increased risk of abuse and more significant pressure to marry against their wishes.¹⁹ Progress has been made in reducing the level of sex imbalance at birth. However, the impacts of this disparity will be felt as children born during imbalances reach marriageable age. UNESCAP must respond to these demographic trends, as they have and will impact all countries

in various ways.

History and Description of the Issue

Understanding Demographic Change

Demographics are data used to describe a large group of people over time.²⁰ That group usually consists of all of the people who live in a country or a region. Data is information that is used in planning or decision-making.²¹ It often comes in the form of a statistic, which is a numeric fact from a more extensive set of information. Examples of this information include age, gender, religion, income, family size, health status, and education level.²² The demographics of each country and region in the world are different. Demographics help stakeholders to understand a group of people, as well as the struggles that they may face.

The demographics of a population change over time. There is often more than one reason for the change. Every person makes choices that affect the demographics of the whole group. Politics, economics, and culture influence choices. Demographics change as these factors change. Demographics combine individual decisions, creating a complete picture of a group of people.²³ For example, imagine that a government introduces a tax credit for parents. A family might choose to have a child because the credit makes it more affordable. This might affect thousands of families’ choices. This example shows how personal decisions lead to demographic change. Data is critical to responding to an issue. For instance, data is used to track the Sustainable Development Goals

¹⁴ United Nations, “What is Climate Change?”

¹⁵ Gay Haq, “Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities,” *Social Development Policy Papers* no. 1 (2022), <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4459>.

¹⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023*.

¹⁷ “World Population Prospects 2024,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, accessed July 14, 2024, <https://population.un.org/wpp/Download/Standard/Population/>.

¹⁸ United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications* (Bangkok: UNFPA, 2012), <https://www.unfpa.org/publications/sex-imbalance-birth>; Simon Chang, Kamhon Kan, and Xiaobo Zhang, “Too Many Men, Too-Short Lives: The Effect of the Male-Biased Sex Ratio on Mortality,” *Journal of Human Resources* vol. 59, no. 2 (March 2024), <https://doi.org/10.3368/jhr.0420-10845R3>.

¹⁹ United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

²⁰ C. Melanie Schuele and Marvin Lee, “Demographics,” last modified October 28, 2014, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/demographics>.

²¹ Britannica Dictionary, “Data,” accessed July 14, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/data>.

²² C. Melanie Schuele and Marvin Lee, “Demographics.”

²³ Suzanne M. Bianchi, “A Demographic Perspective on Family Change,” *Journal of Family Theory and Review* vol. 6, no. 1 (March 2014), 10.1111/jftr.12029.

(SDGs).²⁴ Many of the indicators for each of the 17 targets relate to demographics. Governments collect data. These are called vital statistics, which are records of life events such as deaths or marriages.²⁵ UN agencies also collect this data. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) collects and shares demographics.²⁶ This information is helpful for the UN because it allows its agencies to help people who need it most. UNESCAP hosts the Asian and Pacific Population Conference. This meeting began in 1967. It is held every ten years.²⁷ Members discuss changes to the demographics of Asia and the Pacific at this event.²⁸

The rate of population change is rapid. There are more than 8 billion people alive today. One billion of these people were born in the ten years between 2011 and 2022.²⁹ People live longer today than they were decades ago. In the 1970s, each person had 4.5 children on average. As of 2021, the average person had 2.3 children.³⁰ The world population is changing. However, demographic change is occurring in Asia and the Pacific at a faster rate than any other region in the world.³¹ Demographic change will have significant economic and social impacts.³² The demographics of Asia and the Pacific are projected to change in the coming decades. There will be 12 percent more older people in 2050 than there were in 2022.³³ The reason for this is longer lives. Between 1950 and 2023, the average lifespan increased by 32 years to almost 75 years.³⁴ The overall growth rate of the population today is less than

1 percent. This is a measure of how fast the population is growing. It will further decline in the coming years because the average person is having fewer children.³⁵

Some countries' birth rates are falling below replacement level. A population is at replacement level when there are the same number of births as there are deaths.³⁶ Fewer young people means fewer workers. This can make it difficult to pay for pensions and care for older people. As a result of increased lifespans and a decrease in population growth, the population is aging. Fewer young people and more older people will create an uneven age distribution.³⁷ For this reason, the aging population is a significant demographic concern for Asia and the Pacific.

Inequality is also a concern. While lifespans and incomes have increased overall, these increases have not been equal among all countries. 4.8 percent of people live in poverty in Asia and the Pacific. This is down from 71.9 percent in 1981.³⁸ At the same time, the size of the working population is expected to shrink in many parts of Asia and the Pacific by 2050.³⁹ This may have implications for poverty levels and economic growth. Employment demographics are essential to show decision-makers if more must be done to ensure youth are involved in job training, work, or education. 66 percent of all workers in the region are engaged in informal work, which presents risks such as job insecurity and unsafe working conditions.⁴⁰ Responses to population aging must be inclusive and account

24 "Big Data for Sustainable Development," United Nations, accessed July 10, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/big-data-for-sustainable-development>.

25 "Civil registration and vital statistics," World Health Organization Eastern Mediterranean Region, accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.emro.who.int/civil-registration-statistics/about/what-are-civil-registration-and-vital-statistics-crvs-systems.html>.

26 "Demographic and Social Statistics," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed July 10, 2024, <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic-social/>.

27 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Report on the Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference, ESCAP/APPC(7)/4 (Dec. 15, 2023), https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/Report_APPC7_E.pdf.

28 "Seventh Asian and Pacific Population Conference," United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed July 10, 2024, <https://www.unescap.org/events/2023/seventh-asian-and-pacific-population-conference>.

29 "World Population Trends," United Nations Population Fund, accessed July 9, 2024, <https://www.unfpa.org/world-population-trends#readmore-expand>.

30 United Nations Population Fund, "World Population Trends."

31 Roncarati and Henning, "Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution."

32 Mason and Lee, "Six Ways Population Change is Affecting the Global Economy."

33 "Social Development: Ageing Societies," United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed June 10, 2024, <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/social-development/ageing-societies>.

34 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *ESCAP Population Data Sheet*.

35 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *ESCAP Population Data Sheet*.

36 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *ESCAP Population Data Sheet*.

37 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Demographic Changes in Asia and the Pacific."

38 Asian Development Bank, *Key Indicators for Asia and the Pacific 2023* (ADB: Manila, 2023), <https://dx.doi.org/10.22617/FLS230311-3>.

39 UNESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023*.

40 UNESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023*.

for these economic inequalities. Some cultures prefer sons to daughters. Extreme cases of this belief mean that there is an uneven gender balance in some parts of the world.⁴¹ The excess number of men over women is called ‘missing women.’ This imbalance is exceptionally high in Asian and Pacific countries like India and China.⁴² A cause of this imbalance is femicide, which is the killing of girls and women. UNESCAP must ensure that girls and women are protected. Continuing to monitor changes in the sex ratio is one aspect of this.

Demographics are important. The age, gender, and income levels of Asia and the Pacific have changed in the past decades. Further change will occur in the coming years. UNESCAP should take advantage of the opportunities demographic change presents. However, current trends are likely to also result in negative impacts in the future. UNESCAP must prepare for these, as well. Population aging is a significant trend today. It will have economic and social effects. It will impact older people, youth, and vulnerable groups such as women. UNESCAP must first understand these demographic changes in order to respond to them.

Work and Poverty in Old Age

An older person is someone who is 65 years old or older.⁴³ This definition varies between agencies, cultures, and countries. In some places, 60 years old or older is considered old age.⁴⁴ In Asia and the Pacific, more than 697 million people are aged 60 or older.⁴⁵ These people often face poverty. One in ten older people in Asia and the Pacific live in ‘multidimensional

poverty.’⁴⁶ This type of poverty includes low-income people and those lacking access to essential services such as clean water. Income decreases in old age, as does the number of people working.⁴⁷ Many choose to retire. Factors that affect the choice to retire include income, health, education level, and family responsibilities.⁴⁸

Older people experience reduced incomes, in part because many retire. Reasons might include health issues or cultural norms. Health is a significant barrier to income for older people. In old age, the rate of disability and disease increases. This makes it more challenging to work, as well as makes the cost of living higher.⁴⁹ People who have low levels of education or who work low-skill jobs are likely to have low savings and no pensions in their old age.⁵⁰ These workers are less likely to be able to retire. Workers in Asia and the Pacific who have a high level of education are retiring earlier than workers with a lower level of education. Often, workers with low levels of education have to continue to work.⁵¹ Cultural norms are another reason why older people experience reduced incomes. There is a sense of obligation for a person to support older family members.⁵² This is especially true in Asian cultures. For this reason, older people might choose to stop working as there is a norm that they should rely on their adult children and relatives in old age. Older people might also be expected to care for family members like their grandchildren.

Pensions are a solution to help prevent older people from facing poverty. When the number of older people covered by

41 UNESCAP, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023*.

42 UNESCAP Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

43 “Older persons and migration,” Migration Data Portal, last updated September 29, 2023, <https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/older-persons-and-migration>.

44 Migration Data Portal, “Older persons and migration.”

45 “International Day of Older Persons in Asia and the Pacific, 2023,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, last updated October 2, 2023, <https://www.unescap.org/events/2023/international-day-older-persons-asia-and-pacific-2023>.

46 Jose Ramon G. Albert, et al, “An Examination of Poverty Among the Elderly in Asia and the Pacific,” *Aging Well in Asia Background Papers* (2024), <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/964861/adpr2024bp-examination-poverty-elderly-asia-pacific.pdf>.

47 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *How to design inclusive old age pension systems in Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2022), <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4371>.

48 Aiko Kikkawa and Raymond Gaspar, “Trends and Characteristics of Labor Force Participation Among Older Persons in Developing Asia: Literature Review and Cross-Country Assessment,” *Journal of Population Ageing* vol. 16, no. 2 (August 2022), 10.1007/s12062-022-09377-3.

49 ESCAP, *How to design inclusive old age pension systems in Asia and the Pacific*.

50 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, “Older Persons in Vulnerable Situations,” *Policy Briefs on Ageing*, no. 28 (June 2023), <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-06/ECE-WG.1-42-PB28.pdf>.

51 Kikkawa and Gaspar, “Trends and Characteristics of Labor Force Participation Among Older Persons in Developing Asia: Literature Review and Cross-Country Assessment.”

52 Karen Oppenheim Mason, “Family change and support of the elderly in Asia: What do we know?” *Asia-Pacific Population Journal* vol. 7, no. 3 (November 1992), <https://doi.org/10.18356/7082dcfa-en>.



Elderly Woman Selling Items
Credit: Wilfredo R. Rodriguez H.

social protection is higher, the chance of poverty in old age is lower.⁵³ Social security refers to benefits and services sponsored by the government. These include healthcare and pensions. Pensions provide income for those who don't work anymore. 73 percent of people who are above their country's retirement age in Asia and the Pacific receive a pension in some form.⁵⁴ In many places, pensions are not large enough to cover the cost of living. Older people then have to rely on a second source of income, such as personal savings or charity. Others receive payments from family members. Often, these relatives are immigrants to another country. For example, the majority of household income for older people in Laos and Cambodia comes from these payments.⁵⁵

Many countries have a mandatory retirement age. This means people must stop working and start receiving pensions once they reach this age. In some countries, this mandatory age has not increased for decades.⁵⁶ 60 years old is the most common

age of compulsory retirement in Asia and the Pacific.⁵⁷ For example, most companies in the Republic of Korea require their employees to retire at age 60.⁵⁸ However, the average person in the Republic of Korea lives to be 83 years old.⁵⁹ This means many people have lived on pensions and have had savings for over 20 years. As people live longer, more people will rely on pensions from companies or the government for long periods. As fewer children are born, there will be fewer young people to support a more significant number of older people. Pension systems that are adequate and inclusive will be increasingly important as this demographic change occurs.⁶⁰

Work can benefit older people. In some cases, working in old age reduces the risk of certain diseases.⁶¹ Work is not only a source of income. For older people who may feel lonely, it can provide a way to socialize with others and feel connected to their community. Older workers benefit society, too. In the coming decades, there will be fewer younger workers. This

53 Albert, "An Examination of Poverty Among the Elderly in Asia and the Pacific."

54 ESCAP, *How to design inclusive old age pension systems in Asia and the Pacific*.

55 Albert, "An Examination of Poverty Among the Elderly in Asia and the Pacific."

56 Roncarati and Henning, "Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution."

57 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Ageing in Asia and the Pacific: Overview*.

58 Joyce Lee, "Labour unions push to raise retirement age in greying South Korea," *Reuters*, August 29, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/business/labour-unions-push-raise-retirement-age-greying-south-korea-2023-08-29/>.

59 "Life expectancy at birth, total (years) - Korea, Rep.," World Bank, accessed July 13, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN?locations=KR>.

60 ESCAP, *How to design inclusive old age pension systems in Asia and the Pacific*.

61 Harvard Health Publishing, "Working later in life can pay off in more than just income," *Harvard Medical School*, June 1, 2018, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/staying-healthy/working-later-in-life-can-pay-off-in-more-than-just-income>.

shortage of workers can negatively impact economic growth. There may be more jobs available than people who can work. Today, fewer older people are working than younger people.⁶² This is because older people choose to or have to retire. More older people working can help increase the total number of people working.⁶³ This may help prevent a future worker shortage and provide a health benefit for some older workers.

While many people retire in old age, some do not. Older people with low savings are more likely to have informal jobs.⁶⁴ These are jobs that do not provide benefits and are not regulated by the government.⁶⁵ Informal workers are more likely to face job loss and unsafe working conditions. Older people are more likely to work these jobs if they are members of at-risk groups. This includes women and people with disabilities. Members of these groups may have lower incomes during their lives due to inequality in education and employment. For example, in Indonesia, older people are more likely to work in the informal sector if they have a disability, are women, or live in rural areas.⁶⁶

On the other hand, due to cultural norms, older people may perform unpaid care work. This refers to household chores or caring for others, such as children or other older people.⁶⁷ For example, an older person may care for their grandchildren while their adult child works outside the home. Although older people indeed receive unpaid care work, they overall provide more unpaid care than they receive.⁶⁸ The time put into this unpaid work is significant. Globally, domestic work accounts

for 9 percent of output.⁶⁹ The need for older people to provide this work may prevent them from earning an income outside their homes. They may become reliant on their families and struggle to find a paid job if they want or need to. This is especially true for women in old age, as women provide the majority of unpaid care work.⁷⁰ Women are more vulnerable than men to poverty in old age. Compared to older men, older women are more likely to have little to no income.⁷¹ They may be expected to care for family members or perform household chores.⁷² The time that women spend on unpaid work in the home is more significant in Asia and the Pacific than in any other region in the world.⁷³ On average, women spend 4 hours and 20 minutes a day on care work. This is three times the average daily hours that men spend on the same work.⁷⁴ Therefore, women have fewer chances to go to school or work. This means that they may not be able to save for retirement.

In households with a higher income, women are more likely to be involved in paid work outside the home.⁷⁵ Therefore, older women from low-income families face a greater risk of poverty. Online work presents an opportunity for older people, especially women. For some, it allows them to care for family members while earning an income. Others may have a disability that makes other kinds of work difficult. However, older people need training to find online jobs. Older people and women in Asia and the Pacific are more likely than other groups not to have access to the Internet. Workers must adapt to technology by learning new skills. This can be difficult for

62 Roncarati and Henning, “Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

63 Kikkawa and Gaspar, “Trends and Characteristics of Labor Force Participation Among Older Persons in Developing Asia: Literature Review and Cross-Country Assessment.”

64 Laili Rahayuwati, et al, “Factors That Influence the High Number of Elderly People Working in the Informal Sector,” *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare* vol. 17(April 2024): 1827-1837, <https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S450047>.

65 James Heintz, “Defining and Measuring Informal Employment and the Informal Sector in the Philippines, Mongolia, and Sri Lanka,” *United Nations Development Account Project 2006-2009*, No. 3 (March 2010): 5-9, <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/files/Working-paper-no3.pdf>.

66 Rahayuwati, et al, “Factors That Influence the High Number of Elderly People Working in the Informal Sector.”

67 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Addressing unpaid care work in ASEAN* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2021), <https://repository.unescap.org/handle/20.500.12870/4549>.

68 Gretchen Donehower, “Older women and men as providers and recipients of unpaid care work in the Asia-Pacific region,” *Social Development Policy Papers* no. 2 (2020), <https://repository.unescap.org/rest/bitstreams/cd9986ea-7900-4691-a141-ce16e8579211/retrieve>.

69 Rhea Crisologo Hernando, “Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Counting the Costs,” Asian-Pacific Economic Cooperation no. 43 (March 2022), https://www.developmentaid.org/api/frontend/cms/file/2022/03/222_psu_unpaid-care-and-domestic-work.pdf.

70 Donehower, “Older women and men as providers and recipients of unpaid care work in the Asia-Pacific region.”

71 Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *How to design inclusive old age pension systems in Asia and the Pacific*.

72 Roncarati and Henning, “Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

73 Roncarati and Henning, “Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

74 Crisologo Hernando, “Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Counting the Costs.”

75 Crisologo Hernando, “Unpaid Care and Domestic Work: Counting the Costs.”

older people who may need to become more familiar with how fast technology modernization has occurred. This limits the work opportunities that older people have. Older workers tend to have higher levels of education compared to younger workers. Adapting to the Internet and new technology is critical to including a vital part of the population. Investment in education and training for older people is one way to do this.⁷⁶

Technological change may also increase the number of retirees. Workers may choose to retire early if their skills are outdated. Older people are more likely to work in traditional industries. For example, more than half of workers age 70 or older in Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Vietnam work in farming, fishing, or forestry.⁷⁷ Therefore, they may not have experience with new farming technology. As the share of older people increases, the number of retired people will increase. More retired people means more pensions are paid. Young workers fund these benefits in many places. In this way, technology may affect government budgets. This is another reason why older workers need to adapt. Discrimination is a barrier for older workers. Discrimination based on age is called ageism. This might include stereotypes, prejudice, or exclusion of older people.⁷⁸ It is common in many places. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that half of all people are ageist.⁷⁹ Ageism may mean that workers are denied training in new skills or cannot find a formal job.⁸⁰ ‘Self-ageism’ occurs when people adopt a negative attitude about their age.⁸¹ It may cause the person to neglect their health or deny work opportunities. For these reasons, many older people may struggle to adapt if they

lose their jobs. As the average number of years lived increases, people will work for longer. They need age-friendly jobs that are accessible to people with a disability or disease and that do not discriminate based on age.⁸²

Health in Old Age

The average lifespan in Asia and the Pacific has increased in the past two decades.⁸³ However, more years of life does not always mean that these years are spent in good health. People often develop diseases or disabilities in old age.⁸⁴ These health issues can be complex and may require long-term care. This might mean regular treatment or help with daily tasks. Certain diseases, like a cold or the flu, can be spread between people. Others, such as cancer or heart conditions, cannot be spread to others. Older people are often affected by this type of disease that is not contagious.⁸⁵ As the number of older people increases, more people will have complex and long-term healthcare needs. Older people are more vulnerable to diseases and health problems. The majority of people aged 70 or older have an existing health issue.⁸⁶

Costs are a critical factor in healthcare. 6.15 percent of total income in Asia and the Pacific is spent on healthcare. In many countries, older households spend more of their income on healthcare than other age groups.⁸⁷ In the coming decades, healthcare spending will increase. By 2060, regional expenditures will rise to 9.7 and 13.2 percent of total income. A trend observed in Asia and the Pacific is ‘steepening.’ This refers to disproportionate increases in healthcare spending for

76 Roncarati and Henning, “Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

77 Kikkawa and Gaspar, “Trends and Characteristics of Labor Force Participation Among Older Persons in Developing Asia: Literature Review and Cross-Country Assessment.”

78 United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, “Older Persons in Vulnerable Situations.”

79 “Ageism,” World Health Organization, accessed July 25, 2024, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/ageism>.

80 Kikkawa and Gaspar, “Trends and Characteristics of Labor Force Participation Among Older Persons in Developing Asia: Literature Review and Cross-Country Assessment.”

81 Vanessa Steinmeyer and Wenqian Wu, “Combating ageism and ensuring age equality in Asia-Pacific,” *United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific*, May 1, 2020, <https://www.unescap.org/blog/combating-ageism-and-ensuring-age-equality-asia-pacific>.

82 Roncarati and Henning, “Promoting decent work opportunities for older persons in the Asia-Pacific region in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.”

83 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022* (Paris: OECD, 2022), <https://read.oecd.org/10.1787/c7467f62-en?format=pdf>.

84 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022*.

85 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Health at a Glance: Asia/Pacific 2022*.

86 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons* (UNSDG, May 2020), <https://unsdg.un.org/resources/policy-brief-impact-covid-19-older-persons>.

87 Albert, et al, “An Examination of Poverty Among the Elderly in Asia and the Pacific.”

older people compared to younger people.⁸⁸ Growing demand for long-term care outside of a person's family is one reason for steepening. For instance, End-of-life care provides support for people with terminal illnesses. Few countries in Asia and the Pacific have detailed standards for end-of-life care.⁸⁹ As the number of older people increases, the demand for this care will rise. The outcome of this could be that the quality of end-of-life care decreases due to high costs. Healthcare facilities need resources to support the changing population.⁹⁰

Older people are more vulnerable to infectious illnesses. The COVID-19 pandemic illustrated this. As of June 2024, more than seven million people have died as a result of COVID-19.⁹¹ 80 percent of these people were aged 60 or older.⁹² Older people who do have COVID are more likely to die from the disease than younger people are.⁹³ This may be because older

people's immune systems struggle to fight the virus due to other health conditions. Many older people live in nursing homes where they receive long-term care. People in these settings often live close together. One way that the virus spread during the pandemic was through nursing homes. Residents of these homes were 60 times more likely to die from COVID in Asia and the Pacific than younger people were.⁹⁴

A common disease among older people is dementia. The term 'dementia' refers to multiple diseases that affect memory.⁹⁵ A common myth is that memory loss is a natural result of aging, but this is not true. Memory loss is a disease, not a natural process. 55 million people aged 60 and older have dementia as of 2019.⁹⁶ There is no cure for dementia. Treatment and risk reduction are essential. The disease will become more common as the number of older people increases. The number

88 Daniel Howdon and S. Selsah Pasali, "The impact of ageing on accessibility, affordability and availability of healthcare services in Asia and the Pacific," *Social Development Working Papers* (June 2023), <https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12870/4614>.

89 Megan F. Liu, et al, "Palliative Care Development in the Asia Pacific Region: A Review of Assessment Indicators," *Journal of Pain Symptom Management* vol. 62, no. 5 (April 2021): 1008-1014, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2021.04.017>.

90 Jean Woo, "Healthcare for older people in Asia," *Age and Ageing* vol. 51, no. 1 (January 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afab189>.

91 "WHO COVID-19 Dashboard," World Health Organization, accessed July 13, 2024, <https://data.who.int/dashboards/covid19/deaths?n=0>.

92 World Health Organization, *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Health Ageing, 2021-2023*.

93 United Nations Sustainable Development Group, *The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons*.

94 Paul Kowal, "COVID-19 and Older Persons in the Asia-Pacific Region: The Health, Social, and Economic Impacts of the Global Pandemic," *Social Development Division Policy Briefs* no. 02 (May 2022), <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2022/covid-19-and-older-persons-asia-pacific-region-health-social-and-economic-impacts-global>.

95 "Dementia," World Health Organization, accessed July 6, 2024, <https://www.who.int/health-topics/dementia>.

96 Simon Long, Chloé Benoist, and Wendy Weidner, *World Alzheimer Report 2023 – Reducing Dementia Risk: Never too early, never too late* (London: Alzheimer's Disease International, September 2023), <https://www.alzint.org/resource/world-alzheimer-report-2023/>.

Elderly Vietnamese man at Nai Hiem Dong Ward Station Health Clinic

Credit: US Navy



of people with dementia will triple in Asia and the Pacific by 2050.⁹⁷ People with dementia need exceptional support. For some, this means long-term and full-time care. They need help with daily tasks from aides. This can be family members or healthcare workers. This is one reason why dementia treatment is costly. Total spending on dementia treatment will more than double worldwide by 2030.⁹⁸ Two-thirds of people with dementia today live in low- or middle-income countries. This means that funding is needed to support the growing number of people with dementia.

Additionally, people in old age can face health consequences due to elder abuse. Elder abuse is the act of harming or neglecting an older person. It affects an older person's quality of life and can result in early death.⁹⁹ This abuse can be physical, sexual, emotional, or psychological. The UN Principles for Older Persons state that older people should be able to live without abuse of any kind.¹⁰⁰ However, one in six people aged 60 or older face abuse.¹⁰¹ Certain groups face more instances of elder abuse than others. This includes women and people with disabilities. People with dementia have memory issues, meaning that they may be unable to report abuse. Some abuse is the result of ageism. Older people who are members of these vulnerable groups need to be protected against abuse. There are settings where elder abuse is more common, such as crises or prisons. Elder abuse is also common in nursing homes. Two out of three staff members at these homes report that they have abused elders in the past year.¹⁰² Addressing abuse in crises, prisons, and nursing homes is crucial because it is more prevalent in these settings than in other environments.

Health conditions also represent an obstacle in older people's

social and emotional lives. Of all people with a disability, 46 percent are older people.¹⁰³ This is one reason why older people might struggle to interact with others. In some places, a lack of accessible buildings and transport affects the daily lives of people with disabilities. A second barrier to interaction can be ageism. This is exclusion based on age.¹⁰⁴ The Internet is helpful for people who might feel lonely. They can find others to talk with online. Older people in Asia and the Pacific are unlikely to be online. Loneliness can affect a person's health.¹⁰⁵ Lonely people have a higher risk of diseases, such as dementia.¹⁰⁶ Connecting to others can improve an older person's health.

Due to health issues, older people often require long-term care. This means they have to place significant trust in others. In some places, there is a norm that families should care for older relatives. High costs or lack of care availability means that family care can be the only option for some older people. Often, this work is provided by women. This work is unpaid. Many caretakers have other responsibilities, such as work or childcare. This means that the quality of care older people receive at home may be inadequate.¹⁰⁷ For other families, supporting older relatives can be difficult or not possible. In some places, the practice has become less common. Reasons for this include smaller households, more women working away from their homes, and young people moving from rural to urban areas.

This means that more older people need extended-term care from other sources besides family members. Workers at hospitals or nursing homes can provide long-term care. It can also be provided at home by a paid medical aide. However,

97 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Financing for Long-Term Care in Asia and the Pacific."

98 Long, Benoist, and Weidner, *World Alzheimer Report 2023 – Reducing Dementia Risk: Never too early, never too late*.

99 "Abuse of older people," World Health Organization, accessed July 7, 2024, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/abuse-of-older-people>.

100 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 46/91, United Nations Principles for Older Persons, A/Res/46/91 (Dec. 16, 1991), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/united-nations-principles-older-persons>.

101 World Health Organization, "Abuse of older people."

102 World Health Organization, "Abuse of older people."

103 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, *Gender, age, and disability: Addressing the intersection* (New York: UN Women, 2022), <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/06/brief-gender-age-and-disability>.

104 Marijke De Pauw, *Including us: what older people say about the barriers they face to social inclusion* (London: HelpAge International, 2023), <https://www.helpage.org/silo/files/oewgincludingus.pdf>.

105 World Health Organization, "WHO launches commission to foster social cohesion and address loneliness as a pressing health threat," last modified November 17, 2023, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/november-2023/who-launches-commission-foster-social-cohesion-and-address-loneliness>.

106 De Pauw, *Including us: what older people say about the barriers they face to social inclusion*.

107 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Financing for Long-Term Care in Asia and the Pacific," *Social Development Policy Papers* no. 1 (2018), <https://www.unescap.org/resources/social-development-policy-brief-financing-long-term-care-asia-and-pacific>.

these services can be costly. Many older people do not have an adequate pension or savings that they can use to pay for this care. In some countries, governments provide insurance or subsidies to help with the cost of long-term care.¹⁰⁸ Providing this care and recognizing the work of unpaid caretakers is among the recommendations made by UNESCAP in its most recent review of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (MIPAA).¹⁰⁹

The Consequences of Sex Imbalances

A sex ratio measures the number of males in the population for every 100 females.¹¹⁰ It can be calculated at birth to determine how many boys are born for every 100 girls. The ratio is ‘imbalanced’ when there is less or more than one male for each female. Since more boys are born than girls naturally, average sex ratios may be as high as 105.¹¹¹ However, extreme imbalances higher than 105 do not occur naturally.¹¹² Parents alter the sex ratio by acting on a preference for sons. Parents use abortion, neglect, or violence to do this. The use of these methods has resulted in more than 100 million ‘missing women’ in the world.¹¹³ In this way, sex ratios impact the population structure and have consequences for both sexes.¹¹⁴

There are 101.2 males in the world for every 100 females.¹¹⁵ This means there are as many as 44 million more males than females.¹¹⁶ In 86 countries, males outnumber females.¹¹⁷ The

global sex ratio is expected to be balanced by 2050. This means that the difference between the total number of males and females in the world will disappear. However, the sex ratio in Asia and the Pacific is more imbalanced than the global average. There are 103.5 males in Asia and 104.7 males in Oceania for every 100 females.¹¹⁸ These are overall levels, not ratios measured at birth. The share of males in the population began to rise above normal levels in the 1970s.¹¹⁹ In certain countries in Asia and the Pacific, sex ratios at birth are extreme. Examples include 163.7 in the Maldives, 157.4 in Brunei, and 116.9 in Qatar.¹²⁰ Sex ratios vary by age group. When a population has a larger share of children, its sex ratio skews male. The situation is reversed in old age. Older females often outnumber older males. This is because males tend to live for fewer years than females.¹²¹ These sex ratio differences by age are seen in Asia and the Pacific. For people older than 50, there are more females than males in the region. As people get older, this difference becomes more stark. For example, in Asia, there are 42.4 males aged 90 or older for every 100 females of the same age.¹²² This means that the majority of the oldest people in the world are female.

Sex imbalances in Asia and the Pacific are a result of discrimination against and mistreatment of females. For centuries, females have had few rights and a low status in most parts of the world. There is a history of preference for

108 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “Financing for Long-Term Care in Asia and the Pacific.”

109 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Accelerating Implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002 to Build a Sustainable Society for All Ages in Asia and the Pacific, ESCAP/MIPAA/IGM.3/2022/3/Add.1 (July 14, 2022), https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/MIPAA_IGM.3_3_Add.1_E.pdf.

110 World Health Organization, “Sex ratio at birth (male births per female births),” accessed July 14, 2024, [https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/sex-ratio-at-birth-\(male-births-per-female-births\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/indicator-metadata-registry/imr-details/sex-ratio-at-birth-(male-births-per-female-births)).

111 Christopher Z. Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses,” *Population Environment Development Laboratory*, https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/regional_analysis.pdf.

112 United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

113 Asian Development Bank, “Gender Equality and Discrimination in Asia and the Pacific: 12 Things to Know,” September 18, 2012, <https://www.adb.org/features/12-things-know-2012-gender-equality>.

114 Mengjun Tang, “Addressing skewed sex ratio at birth in China: practices and challenges,” *China Population and Development Studies* vol. 4 (February 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42379-020-00075-1>.

115 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2024.”

116 Isabel Webb Carey and Conrad Hackett, “Global population skews male, but UN projects parity between sexes by 2050,” *Pew Research*, August 31, 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/08/31/global-population-skews-male-but-un-projects-parity-between-sexes-by-2050/>.

117 Webb Carey and Hackett, “Global population skews male, but UN projects parity between sexes by 2050.”

118 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2024.”

119 Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses.”

120 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2024.”

121 Webb Carey and Hackett, “Global population skews male, but UN projects parity between sexes by 2050.”

122 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2024.”

sons in the UNESCAP region, especially in Asia.¹²³ In some cultures, parents and sons are expected to share funds.¹²⁴ Sons are expected to support their parents financially in old age. These ideas are a norm in some cultures, meaning that having sons benefits parents later in their lives. There is also a symbolic meaning to having a son, as they are expected to give their surnames to their children.¹²⁵ This bias towards sons over daughters is called ‘son preference.’ Daughters, however, may be expected to marry and care for their own families. In some cultures, parents may give a dowry to their daughter’s husbands. A dowry is a payment from a bride or her family to the groom and is a norm in some cultures.¹²⁶ More valuable dowries allow women to marry a man with a higher income and status than her.¹²⁷ Therefore, parents view their daughters as a future cost. While fewer cultures practice the tradition of dowries today, the ideas it created about women’s statuses remain and may contribute to bias against daughters.

Economic factors also contribute to son preference. Farming and fishing are an essential part of the economy in Asia and the Pacific. Most cultures consider males to be better suited to physical labor than females. For this reason, families might prefer sons to daughters. These families hope that their son will support a family farm or earn an income in a job that requires physical labor.¹²⁸ These attitudes may be more common in countries where fewer females have jobs outside the home or in rural areas where farming is an important part of the economy.¹²⁹

These harmful attitudes against females have existed in Asia and the Pacific for centuries. There are historical cases

of murders of newborn girls at birth due to their sex. This practice was common in some parts of the world in the past. Today, the killing of newborns is not usually seen outside of isolated communities. However, femicide can also take the form of neglect. This may mean that parents do not feed their daughters as they do their sons or that they are more likely to seek medical care for their sons than for their daughters.¹³⁰ This neglect of female children has contributed to the high share of males in the population. Remaining vigilant against gender-based violence is important to protect girls and maintain a balanced sex ratio.

The introduction of new medical technology in the 1970s allowed parents to learn the sex of their unborn children before birth.¹³¹ At the same time, abortion first became widely available. Abortion is a medical procedure that terminates a pregnancy. Due to these advancements, it became easier for parents with son preferences to act on their beliefs. Parents could choose to abort their child in the early stages of pregnancy after learning they were a girl. This is one of the reasons for the rise in sex ratios since the 1970s.¹³² Today, abortion based on the sex of the fetus is illegal in countries such as China and India.¹³³ However, not every country with these laws enforces them.¹³⁴ One reason for this is that it can be difficult to determine a parent’s motivation for choosing abortion.

Parent education level is a factor that impacts son preference. Mothers with higher levels of education are less likely to have son preference.¹³⁵ The same is true for fathers. Men with secondary education are 31 percent less likely to prefer sons

123 United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

124 Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses.”

125 Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses.”

126 “Dowry,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, accessed July 14, 2024, <https://www.unescwa.org/sd-glossary/dowry>.

127 Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses.”

128 John Burn-Murdoch, “Culture and policy explain why sex ratios are skewed in Asia,” *Nikkei Asia*, April 13, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Culture-and-policy-explain-why-sex-ratios-are-skewed-in-Asia>.

129 Burn-Murdoch, “Culture and policy explain why sex ratios are skewed in Asia.”

130 Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses.”

131 Guilmoto, “Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses.”

132 James Kingsland, “Preference for sons could lead to 4.7 m ‘missing’ female births,” *Medical News Today*, August 4, 2021, <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/preference-for-sons-could-lead-to-4-7-m-missing-female-births>.

133 Wei Xing Zhu, Li Lu, and Therese Hesketh, “China’s excess males, sex selective abortion, and one child policy: analysis of data from 2005 national intercensal survey,” *British Medical Journal*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b1211>; Amrit Dhillon, “Selective abortion in India could lead to 6.8m fewer girls being born by 2030,” *The Guardian*, August 21, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/21/selective-abortion-in-india-could-lead-to-68m-fewer-girls-being-born-by-2030>.

134 Dhillon, “Selective abortion in India could lead to 6.8m fewer girls being born by 2030.”

135 Quanbao Jiang and Cuiling Zhang, “Recent Sex Ratio at Birth in China,” *BMJ Global Health* (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1136/>

to daughters.¹³⁶ This preference is even weaker for fathers who graduate college.¹³⁷ This suggests that the more education a father has, the less likely he is to have a strong preference. This is because parents with more education are more likely to learn about gender equality. For this reason, increasing education levels can help reduce son preference.¹³⁸

Marriage squeeze is one consequence of sex ratio imbalance. This situation arises when there are not enough males and females in the same age group for every person who wishes to marry.¹³⁹ Many people marry between 20 and 40, so imbalances in these age groups are where a marriage squeeze is most often observed. When the sex ratio skews males, the number of males who do not marry increases. By 2035, there will be as many as 65 million more males than females in Asia.¹⁴⁰ Millions of males in the region might delay marriage for this reason. This delay causes the squeeze to last longer, as these males may compete with the next generation of males for spouses.

A marriage squeeze negatively impacts both sexes. There is more competition for wives, but this does not improve the status of females.¹⁴¹ The squeeze means that females face more significant pressure to marry. A greater emphasis is placed on their traditional roles as wives, mothers, and caretakers. Therefore, many women are denied the opportunity to focus on their careers or choose not to marry. Sex imbalances also can contribute to an increase in cases of abuse against females.¹⁴² This might include forcing females into marriage or sex work. More males remain unmarried as a result of the

marriage squeeze.

Males who are not married are more likely to have low incomes compared to males who do marry.¹⁴³ Marriage also affects males' mortality.¹⁴⁴ Males who experience a marriage squeeze when they are younger are more likely to die between the ages of 50 and 64 compared to males who do not experience this situation.¹⁴⁵ This is likely because males in this situation are more likely to spend more of their time working as a result of the increased competition for spouses.¹⁴⁶ This increases their stress levels. A marriage squeeze is associated with shorter lives and lower incomes for males. It is important to remember that not everyone marries someone of the opposite sex. Same-sex relationships might impact a marriage squeeze. When males marry or partner with each other, fewer males compete for a relatively smaller number of females. When more females marry or partner with each other, there are fewer females for males to marry. This may exacerbate the marriage squeeze. However, there is little data on same-sex marriage in Asia and the Pacific. This is because only three countries in the region legally recognize same-sex marriage. These are Australia, Nepal, and New Zealand.¹⁴⁷ For this reason, it is difficult to assess the impact that same-sex relationships may have on the marriage squeeze.

China is an example of a country with an extreme sex ratio imbalance. China's sex ratio at birth began to skew toward males beginning in the 1980s.¹⁴⁸ In 1980, China introduced a law that prohibited a couple from having more than one child. The 'One Child Policy' meant that parents could not

bmjgh-2021-005438.

136 Rebha Sabharwal, "Male Education, Son Preference, and the Ideal Number of Children," State University of New York at Fredonia, 2016, https://paa.confex.com/paa/2017/mediaprofile/ExtendedAbstract/Paper15122/Sabharwal_PAA_2016_Ideal%20number%20of%20children%26composition.pdf.

137 Sabharwal, "Male Education, Son Preference, and the Ideal Number of Children."

138 Jiang and Zhang, "Recent Sex Ratio at Birth in China."

139 United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

140 Burn-Murdoch, "Culture and policy explain why sex ratios are skewed in Asia."

141 Guilmoto, "Sex imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences, and policy responses."

142 United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

143 United Nations Population Fund Asia and the Pacific Regional Office, *Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current trends, consequences, and policy implications*.

144 Chang, Kan, and Zhang, "Too Many Men, Too-Short Lives: The Effect of the Male-Biased Sex Ratio on Mortality."

145 Chang, Kan, and Zhang, "Too Many Men, Too-Short Lives: The Effect of the Male-Biased Sex Ratio on Mortality."

146 Chang, Kan, and Zhang, "Too Many Men, Too-Short Lives: The Effect of the Male-Biased Sex Ratio on Mortality."

147 "Same-Sex Marriage Around the World," *Pew Research*, June 28, 2024, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/fact-sheet/gay-marriage-around-the-world/>.

148 Tang, "Addressing skewed sex ratio at birth in China: practices and challenges."

have additional children in hopes of having a son.¹⁴⁹ Son preference has existed in China long before the beginning of the One Child Policy. This can be attributed to Confucianism, a system of beliefs first practiced thousands of years ago. Its influence is present in Chinese culture today. This ideology emphasizes men having control over women, contributing to son preference.¹⁵⁰ This led to instances of abortion due to the sex of the fetus, as well as the neglect of female children. It also led to families not registering their daughters' births with the government. This lack of reporting meant that sex ratios appeared more extreme than reality.¹⁵¹ Today, there are 110.5 boys born in China for every 100 girls.¹⁵² The imbalance of boys over girls born in China declined around 2009. This resulted from the Chinese government's efforts to alleviate the sex ratio imbalance. Laws were introduced to prevent abortions based on the sex of the fetus. The government also sought to provide more economic opportunities for females.¹⁵³ In 2013, China changed parts of the One Child Policy.¹⁵⁴ This allowed families to have a second child in some cases. Although it is improving, China's sex ratio at birth remains imbalanced.

Son preference has existed for centuries in Asia and the Pacific. The lower status of women in society is a major reason for this bias. New technology allowed more parents to act on their son's preferences. Abortion based on the sex of the fetus led to more boys being born than girls. The neglect of female children has worsened this imbalance. However, the examples of China and India show that governments can help balance sex ratios. Marriage squeeze is a consequence of sex imbalance. It negatively affects both males and females. In Asia and the Pacific, sex ratios at birth remain more extreme than in other parts of the world. This is especially true in certain countries. UNESCAP should seek to address son preference and end

discrimination against female children, as well as consider the impacts of the marriage squeeze.

Climate Change and Population

Climate change is the world's greatest health threat.¹⁵⁵ Climate change refers to a trend of changing temperatures and weather. This can occur naturally but has been caused by human actions for more than two hundred years. Climate change will result in a greater frequency of extreme weather events.¹⁵⁶ These include droughts, storms, floods, fires, and heat waves. These are also called natural disasters, which are instances when weather events occur more rapidly or slowly than usual.¹⁵⁷ When crises occur, there may be a temporary or permanent loss of power, shelter, food, medicine, or water. Disasters can also force people to move away from their homes to escape, sometimes for long periods due to destruction.

When extreme weather happens, older people are historically some of the most vulnerable. The reasons for this include their health, mobility, and lack of financial resources.¹⁵⁸ For example, the Great East Japan earthquake in 2011 resulted in 15,853 deaths. Half of these people were aged 65 or older. Another example is Typhoon Haiyan, which affected Southeast Asia in 2013. 40 percent of the people who died from the typhoon were older, even though they made up 8 percent of the population at the time.¹⁵⁹ As these examples illustrate, older people are more likely to die in an extreme weather event. This is the case even if they make up a small share of the population. Older people face greater risks from climate change than younger people.¹⁶⁰ This is because they have lower incomes and are more likely to have diseases or disabilities. Older people are also less able to adapt to change

149 Jiang and Zhang, "Recent Sex Ratio at Birth in China."

150 Burn-Murdoch, "Culture and policy explain why sex ratios are skewed in Asia."

151 Jiang and Zhang, "Recent Sex Ratio at Birth in China."

152 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024."

153 Tang, "Addressing skewed sex ratio at birth in China: practices and challenges."

154 Jiang and Zhang, "Recent Sex Ratio at Birth in China."

155 Haq, "Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities."

156 United Nations. "What is Climate Change?"

157 "Disaster Risk Reduction," United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/en/disaster-risk-reduction>.

158 Pillemer, Cope, and Noltem, "Older People and Action on Climate Change: A Powerful But Underutilized Resource."

159 Haq, "Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities."

160 Karl Pillemer, Marie Tillema Cope, and Julia Noltem, "Older People and Action on Climate Change: A Powerful But Underutilized Resource," HelpAge International and Asian Development Bank, 2021, https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/KPillemer_paper.pdf.



Floods and extreme weather in Ayutthaya, Thailand
 Credit: United Nations

for psychological reasons. When an unexpected event occurs, older people respond more slowly than younger people.¹⁶¹ This is a threat to their safety in a crisis. This means they may have slower response times when hearing a siren warning of a tsunami or feeling the first shake of an earthquake. In its most recent review of the MIPAA, UNESCAP recommended protecting older people in disasters.¹⁶²

Another reason that extreme weather is a risk for older people is mobility. Older people have less mobility compared to younger people. They are also more likely to have a disability or health issue, which may mean they require medical care or assistance with daily tasks. Due to this, it is difficult for older people to evacuate in the event of a severe storm or a fire. Lives are at risk when evacuation routes or shelters are not accessible for people with disabilities. Asia and the Pacific will face greater risk from extreme weather due to the rapid growth in the number of older people.¹⁶³ Extreme temperature is also a reason why older people are more vulnerable to disasters. Very hot temperatures can be part of extreme weather, such as heat waves or severe storms. People who experience these hot temperatures are more likely to die prematurely. Heat waves

are a type of weather event that will become more frequent, last longer, and be more intense due to climate change. More than half of the deaths were caused by temperature from 2000 to 2019 in Asia and the Pacific.¹⁶⁴ Specific health issues and medicines affect a person's ability to cope with extreme heat. As people age, they are less able to cool their bodies down because their heart is less able to pump high volumes of blood through their body. Therefore, older people are more affected by heat waves.

Countries create plans to prepare for natural disasters. Few of these plans focus on protecting older people.¹⁶⁵ Steps must be taken to ensure that older people are part of these disaster plans. For example, evacuation centers must be accessible to people with limited mobility. Early warning systems allow weather alerts to be shared. This helps people react quickly to a threat. These systems should reach and be understood by older people. This means considering that many people in old age have trouble seeing or hearing.¹⁶⁶

The impacts of climate change can also harm the socioeconomic lives of older people. Many people in Asia and the

161 Kevin M. Trewartha, Virginia B. Penhune, and Karen Z.H. Li, "Movement Kinematics of Prepotent Response Suppression in Aging During Conflict Adaptation," *The Journal of Gerontology* vol. 66B, no. 2 (March 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1093/geronb/gbq090>.

162 ESCAP/MIPAA/IGM.3/2022/3/Add.1.

163 Haq, "Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities."

164 Haq, "Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities."

165 World Health Organization, *The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030 in a Climate-changing World*.

166 Haq, "Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities."

Pacific work in farming.¹⁶⁷ 12.1 percent of farmers in Asia are over the age of 55.¹⁶⁸ Rising temperatures will result in more frequent and more intense droughts. Droughts are a long-term shortage of water that can last from weeks to years.¹⁶⁹ A lack of water kills crops. In this way, they can cause poverty. Younger farmers may be able to adapt to a drought by earning income from a new job. Older farmers, who are more likely to have a disability and might face ageism, do not have the same ability to adapt. Therefore, droughts may be more devastating for these people. Learning new information becomes harder as people age.¹⁷⁰ This means it may be harder for an older person to develop skills for a new job. The example of older farmers illustrates that a lack of resources and economic opportunities can put older people at more risk from extreme weather.

Another example of the impact of climate change on older people is the earthquake in Nepal in April 2015. The earthquake caused more than 8,800 deaths¹⁷¹ 29 percent of these people were older people.¹⁷² In many cases, older people were abandoned by their families. Others could not tell that there was an earthquake occurring due to a disability.¹⁷³ The disaster affected older people's health and livelihoods. 95 percent of older people lost their property in the earthquake.¹⁷⁴ This might mean medications or essential items, such as a wheelchair. Almost two-thirds of older people said their savings were lost due to the damage. The government provided some support to older people. However, older people are often reliant on family members. Family members stealing older people's government allowances rose following the disaster.

Older people suffer from mental health conditions. They experienced above-average rates of anxiety and depression.¹⁷⁵ This devastating earthquake in Nepal shows the many ways in which older people are affected by disasters.

Hence, climate change affects everyone, and older people are especially vulnerable to its consequences. Therefore, it's essential to work on mitigating the impacts of climate change. Climate action requires help from people of all ages. For older people, this can mean joining an advocacy group or volunteering. Older people are motivated by a desire for a legacy. They tend to have more time for unpaid activities as many older people are retired. They have funds to contribute, as well as the ability to vote for laws that protect the Earth. Climate action benefits older people, too. It helps them remain physically active and involved in their communities.¹⁷⁶

However, older people face barriers to involvement in climate action. Some do not understand the danger posed by the issue. For example, older people are less willing than younger people to give up some of their income to help the environment.¹⁷⁷ Accepting the changing climate can be hard for older people. Understanding the effects that global warming will have on the Earth requires a person to accept that their lives may change. Many older people experience cognitive decline and health issues that they cannot control. Resisting change allows people to hold on to familiar ideas when things around them are changing.¹⁷⁸ Those who understand the issue may not know they can take action. Volunteering activities must be

167 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *The Workforce We Need: Social Outlook for Asia and the Pacific* (Bangkok: ESCAP, 2022), <https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/Social-Outlook-2022.pdf>.

168 Sif Heide-Ottosen, *The ageing of rural populations evidence on older farmers in low- and middle-income countries* (London: HelpAge International, 2014), <https://www.helpage.org/silo/files/the-ageing-of-rural-populations-evidence-on-older-farmers-in-low-and-middle-income-countries.pdf>.

169 "The Drought Initiative," United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, accessed July 17, 2024, <https://www.unccd.int/land-and-life/drought/drought-initiative>.

170 Paul C. Stern and Laura L. Carstensen, *The Aging Mind: Opportunities in Cognitive Research* (Washington D.C.: National Academies Press, 2000), 10.17226/9783.

171 Puk Ovesen and Stine Heiselberg, "The Humanitarian Response to the 2015 Nepal Earthquake," *Humanitarian Action: A Shared Responsibility* vol. 53, no. 1 (May 2016), <https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/humanitarian-response-2015-nepal-earthquake>.

172 "Why were so many older people killed during the Nepal earthquake?" *HelpAge International*, April 14, 2016, <https://blog.ageinternational.org.uk/nepal-earthquake-older-people-killed/>.

173 HelpAge International, "Why were so many older people killed during the Nepal earthquake?"

174 National Disaster Risk Reduction Centre Nepal, et al, *Assessing the Impact of Nepal's 2015 Earthquake on Older People and Persons with Disabilities and How Gender and Ethnicity Factor into That Impact* (2016), <https://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/assessing-impact-nepal-s-2015-earthquake-older-people-and-persons-disabilities-and-how>.

175 NDRC Nepal, et al, *Assessing the Impact of Nepal's 2015 Earthquake on Older People and Persons with Disabilities and How Gender and Ethnicity Factor into That Impact*.

176 Haq, "Climate Change and Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region: Status, Challenges and Opportunities."

177 Pillemer, Cope, and Noltem, "Older People and Action on Climate Change: A Powerful But Underutilized Resource."

178 Joseph M. Casciani, "Redirecting Resistance," *Aging Well* vol. 1, no. 4 (2008), <https://www.todaygeriatricmedicine.com/archive/101308p20.shtml>.

accessible to people with disabilities. One way to help older people get involved is to connect with them through nursing homes or community centers.¹⁷⁹

The Demographic Dividend

Most people in the world live in a country where not enough children are born to replace every person who dies.¹⁸⁰ They are concerned that pensions will not be funded as the number of workers declines. Others worry that fewer young people means that there will not be enough healthy people to join the military.¹⁸¹ However, demographic change is not a reason to panic. These potential issues can be avoided by responding to change. Demographic dividends present opportunities to benefit from population changes. Three demographic dividends represent three stages of demographic change. For centuries, families had many children.¹⁸² Then, between 1950 and 2021, the global birth rate fell from 5 children to 2.3 children per woman.¹⁸³ Historically, one reason for high birth rates has been that many children die before reaching adulthood. This was a result of poor nutrition and healthcare. Science and technological advancements helped many people survive childhood, starting around the late 1800s. These developments also allowed adults and older people to live longer lives. As child mortality rates fell, families had fewer children because their children were less likely to die young. At the same time, women gained more rights. Many began to work outside of the home. This was in part due to the introduction of birth control, which allowed people to get married and have children later in their lives.¹⁸⁴ This further reduced birth rates. These changes led to a shift in the population structures of many countries. The population aged as the number of adults

increased. This meant the number of working-age people was greater than the number of dependents. Dependents include children and older people, both groups that usually rely on working people to support them. Fewer dependents create an opportunity called the first demographic dividend. The first demographic dividend is a society's transition from high birth rates to low birth rates.¹⁸⁵

The first demographic dividend presents an opportunity for fast economic growth. Workers can devote more energy to their jobs when there are fewer dependents. This provides a boost to economic growth, which measures the increase in the number of goods and services that a population produces.¹⁸⁶ Income per person also increases.¹⁸⁷ More resources can be devoted to families. However, a country must invest in its population to benefit from the first dividend. The education, employment, and health of workers is key.¹⁸⁸ Also, women must be able to decide when and how many children they want to have. This allows women to be part of the workforce. These efforts ensure that adults can be productive. What the dividend looks like varies by country. The WHO says that the first dividend begins when fewer than four children are born per woman.¹⁸⁹ The dependency ratio is the number of children or older people for each working person. Another way of understanding the first dividend is that the opportunity begins when the dependency ratio begins to fall.¹⁹⁰

Papua New Guinea is an example of a country beginning to experience a demographic dividend. Papua New Guinea's birth rate has fallen for the past two decades. As of 2003, the average woman in Papua New Guinea had 4.36 children. This average declined yearly, reaching 3.1 children per woman by 2023. Despite the decrease in birth rates, the population

179 Pillemer, Cope, and Noltem, "Older People and Action on Climate Change: A Powerful But Underutilized Resource."

180 "The Problem With 'Too Few,'" United Nations Population Fund, accessed July 19, 2024, <https://www.unfpa.org/swp2023/too-few>.

181 United Nations Population Fund, "The Problem With 'Too Few.'"

182 "Demographic Dividend Atlas: The Future is Young," United Nations Population Fund, accessed July 19, 2024, <https://www.unfpa.org/data/demographic-dividend>.

183 United Nations Population Fund, "The Problem With 'Too Few.'"

184 United Nations Population Fund, "Demographic Dividend Atlas: The Future is Young."

185 Ronald Lee and Andrew Mason, "What is the Demographic Dividend?," *International Monetary Fund Finance & Development* vol. 43, no. 3 (Sep. 2006), <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2006/09/basics.htm>.

186 Max Roser, "What is economic growth? Why is it so important?" *Our World in Data*, May 13, 2021, <https://ourworldindata.org/what-is-economic-growth>.

187 Lee and Mason, "What is the Demographic Dividend?"

188 United Nations Population Fund, "Demographic Dividend Atlas: The Future is Young."

189 World Bank and International Monetary Fund, *Global Monitoring Report 2015/2016: Development Goals in an Era of Demographic Change* (Washington, DC: IMF and World Bank, 2016), <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/global-monitoring-report>.

190 United Nations, "Dependency Ratio: Brief Definition," June 15, 2007, https://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/natlinfo/indicators/methodology_sheets/demographics/dependency_ratio.pdf.

growth rate continues to be positive. Lower birth rates have decreased the number of children dependent on each adult. However, women's involvement in the workforce remains low. Just 20 percent of women in Papua New Guinea have a formal job, compared to 75 percent of men.¹⁹¹ More women working outside their homes is key for economic growth in Papua New Guinea. The UN Development Programme found that if the same number of women worked as men, there could be a 20 percent increase in income per person.¹⁹² Based on birth rates, Papua New Guinea has the conditions for a first demographic dividend.

Countries like Papua New Guinea must support workers and families to benefit from the first dividend. Multiple policies can do this. One of these is maternity leave. This allows a person to take off of work to have or care for a new child. There is a higher risk of women not returning to work when maternity leave is short.¹⁹³ The International Labor Organization says that mothers should get at least 14 weeks of paid leave.¹⁹⁴ Longer maternity leave allows workers to return to their jobs and contribute to the productivity gains from the dividend. A second policy that can support workers is education. Workers with a high number of skills help to increase a country's productivity.¹⁹⁵ This fuels economic growth and gives workers more job opportunities and higher wages. Countries can provide funds for colleges and job training programs. This ensures workers have the skills needed for dividend-related economic growth. These policy examples show what governments can do to enable the first dividend.

These measures allow workers, especially women, to increase their productivity by providing help with child care.

This first dividend can last for more than five decades. However, it is temporary. Fewer children are born, so there are fewer workers when these children grow older. People live longer. Income per person grows more slowly.¹⁹⁶ At this time, there is an opportunity for the second demographic dividend. Gains from the second demographic dividend are usually larger than the first.¹⁹⁷ Specifically, the second dividend begins when the birth rate is at or below replacement level. Replacement level is reached when there are exactly as many people born as people dying. The WHO states that countries are in the final years of the first dividend when there are around 2.1 births per woman.¹⁹⁸ This benchmark is roughly when the opportunity for the second dividend arises. Countries that are most likely to be able to take advantage of the second dividend have higher incomes and standards of living. This is because these countries are more likely to have a more significant share of older people in their populations.¹⁹⁹

This occurs after the first dividend as the share of older people in the population begins to grow. Some of these people work for more years because they live longer. They invest more in their education and job training. Others stop working and retire. When people retire for a longer period, they have a reason to invest to support themselves in old age.²⁰⁰ Like the first dividend, the second allows for more resources to be invested in each person.²⁰¹ This helps fuel economic growth and development. The positive effects of the second dividend are

191 United Nations Development Programme, *UNDP Papua New Guinea Gender Equality Strategy 2023-2025* (UNDP, 2023), <https://www.undp.org/papua-new-guinea/publications/undp-papua-new-guinea-gender-equality-strategy-2023-2025>.

192 Nicholas Booth, "Invest in Women, Build a More Peaceful and Prosperous Papua New Guinea," *United Nations Development Programme*, March 8, 2014, <https://www.undp.org/papua-new-guinea/blog/invest-women-build-more-peaceful-and-prosperous-papua-new-guinea>.

193 Grace Puliye, Hoolda Kim, and Sophie Mitra, "Paid Maternity Leave and Child Mortality in Asia and the Pacific," *Asia-Pacific Sustainable Development Journal* vol. 27, no. 1 (June 2021), <https://doi.org/10.18356/26178419-27-1-5>.

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196 Lee and Mason, "What is the Demographic Dividend?"

197 Africa Union Commission and Economic Commission for Africa, "Beyond the First Dividend: Sustaining the Second Demographic Dividend," *CoM 2013: Industrialization for a Emerging Africa*, March 2013, <https://www.prb.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/africa-second-demographicdividend.pdf>.

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199 Manuel Mejido, "Harnessing the Second Demographic Dividend: Population Ageing and Social Protection in Asia and the Pacific," *Social Development Working Papers*, no. 3 (2019), <https://repository.unescap.org/rest/bitstreams/8455a7fc-bfd6-4d13-94b3-c39392bfc47c/retrieve>.

200 Lee and Mason, "What is the Demographic Dividend?"

201 Africa Union Commission and Economic Commission for Africa, "Beyond the First Dividend: Sustaining the Second Demographic Dividend."

not guaranteed. Like the first dividend, adequate investment and policies are necessary.²⁰² Countries need to support older people to benefit from the dividend.²⁰³ An aging population can harm growth. This is because there are many older people and few workers to support them.²⁰⁴ This is why the second dividend is vital. It allows for growth even when there are fewer workers. Pensions are a key issue. They reduce older people's risk of poverty. Older people facing poverty cannot invest, which is central to the second dividend. Therefore, old-age poverty is a barrier to this dividend. If fewer people are working, fewer people are paying taxes. Taxes fund pensions in many places. Countries must determine how to fund benefits for older people to benefit from the second dividend. In this way, the demographic dividends can impact policy.

New Zealand is experiencing the conditions for a second demographic dividend. The birth rate has been below replacement level since 2013.²⁰⁵ In 2023, the average woman in New Zealand had 1.67 children. The average person lives to be 82.1 years old.²⁰⁶ As lifespans increase, older New Zealanders invest their savings for retirement. With a longer time horizon, investment returns may be higher. They also can invest more time and money into their education, as they may be able to work for more years. Every older person in New Zealand receives a pension from the government.²⁰⁷ They may also choose to participate in a savings program called KiwiSaver.²⁰⁸ With these policies, New Zealand has taken steps to benefit from the second dividend by supporting older people and encouraging them to invest.

The third demographic dividend occurs when the health of the older population improves.²⁰⁹ Even if people live for many years, it does not mean they are in good health for their entire lives. Health issues likely prevent them from working in old age. However, the overall health of older people will improve as medicine advances.²¹⁰ This third dividend refers to the opportunity to improve the health of older people so that they can work for more years of their lives, boosting economic growth. The opportunity for this dividend arises when the number of years of working hours increases. This dividend is emerging as the average healthy lifespan increases in more developed countries.

The population of Asia and the Pacific will continue to grow in the coming decades before peaking before the year 2100.²¹¹ The demographic change during the rest of this century will vary by country. This is because the birth rate and the share of older people are different in each country.²¹² However, what is true among all UNESCAP members is that there will be an opportunity to take advantage of one of three demographic dividends. These opportunities will exist at different times. For a boost to economic growth to occur, adequate investment must be made in the health and productivity of people of all ages. Each country can be categorized based on the first demographic dividend. Countries can be divided into four groups: pre-dividend, early-dividend, late-dividend, and post-dividend.²¹³ Pre-dividend countries are low-income. 40 percent of people in less developed countries are teenagers or younger.²¹⁴ Each woman has more than four children. Population growth is rapid. Many young people depend

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214 James Gribble and Jason Bremner, "The Challenge of Attaining the Demographic Dividend," *Population Reference Bureau*, November 26, 2012, <https://www.prb.org/resources/the-challenge-of-attaining-the-demographic-dividend/>.

on relatively few adults. Hence, these countries have yet to experience the dividend. Yet, they will be able to take advantage of the dividend in the future.²¹⁵

Early and late-dividend countries can benefit from the first dividend.²¹⁶ In these countries, birth rates are falling, and the number of workers is growing. This is when supporting workers is necessary to create economic growth. Lastly, post-dividend countries are often high-income. The share of older people in the population is high and growing. These countries can look towards the second dividend to generate economic growth. Dividends explain how countries can benefit from demographic change. Policy and investment are central to benefiting from the dividends. The first dividend occurs when fewer children are born and the number of workers grows. Each worker has fewer dependents. The higher productivity of these workers creates economic growth. A country must support its workers for this to happen, especially parents. The second demographic dividend occurs when the share of older people in the population grows. People living longer have a stronger incentive to invest their money. They also may invest more in their education. Both investments generate economic growth. The third demographic dividend is emerging but occurs when the number of healthy years of life increases. This allows people to work for more years of their life. They can make even greater investments in their education and training. This may create economic growth, contributing to a better quality of life. UNESCAP should encourage and support its members so that they can benefit from one of the three demographic dividends.

Current Status

Case Study: Japan's Aging Population

The growing number of older people in Asia and the Pacific will present social, economic, and political challenges. Effective policies, such as pensions and laws to prevent elder abuse, are crucial for supporting this demographic. Countries with a high proportion of older people, known as 'super-aged' countries, provide valuable insights into which policies are effective. 'Super-aged' countries are those where more than one in five people are aged 65 or older.²¹⁷ A clear example is Japan, a country located in Asia. Japan

has the highest percentage of older people globally.²¹⁸ Japan's population is even older than that of a super-aged society since more than a quarter of people are aged 65 or older.²¹⁹ There is also a high share of people at very advanced ages. One in ten people are aged 80 or older.²²⁰ There are more than 90,000 people in Japan who are 100 years or older and are called centenarians.²²¹

One reason for Japan's high share of older people is long lifespans. The average person in Japan lives to be 84.7 years old.²²² This is 11.5 years longer than the global average lifespan of 73.2 years.²²³ The country's median age is 48 years old. This is the highest median age of any country in the world.²²⁴ This means that half of all people in Japan are older than 48 years old. People live longer in Japan for many reasons. Japanese people tend to eat healthy diets and drink clean water. Fewer people face social isolation, contributing to disease risk in old age. Older people are valued in Japanese culture. *Keiro no Hi*, or Respect for the Aged Day, has been celebrated each year

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220 Charlotte Edmond and Madeleine North, "More than 1 in 10 people in Japan are aged 80 or over. Here's how its ageing population is reshaping the country," *World Economic Forum*, September 28, 2023, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/09/elderly-oldest-population-world-japan/>.

221 The Japan Times, "Number of centenarians in Japan hits record 92,139," September 15, 2023, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/09/15/japan/centenarians-record-number/>.

222 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024."

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224 D'Ambrogio, "Japan's ageing society."

since 1966.²²⁵

Families in Japan have fewer children relative to the number of older people. Therefore, the share of older people in the population is growing. The birth rate is below replacement level.²²⁶ That means not enough people are born to replace every person who dies. The average woman has just 1.21 children.²²⁷ Families in Japan have few children due to many reasons. For one, working long hours is common in Japan, making it hard to care for children. Women are obligated to work and also tend to their houses and children. Young people have few opportunities to find well-paying jobs that could support a family.²²⁸ Therefore, many choose to marry later in their lives or not at all. This impacts birth rates because people in Japan are unlikely to have a child with someone who they are not married to. For example, just 2.3 percent of children born in 2018 were born to parents who were not married.²²⁹ This means that fewer marriages are associated with fewer children. To encourage people to have children, the government introduced new programs such as free preschool and daycare for children ages 3 to 5.²³⁰

The large number of older people in Japan means they face additional challenges. For example, old-age poverty is very common.²³¹ 44.5 percent of older women in Japan live in poverty.²³² This is more than older men, 30 percent of whom live in poverty.²³³ One reason for this is the idea that older women are cared for by their husbands. This means that society does not consider older women to provide for themselves. Older people also struggle with poverty due to cultural ideas.

A belief in Japanese culture is *meiwaku*, meaning ‘being a nuisance.’²³⁴ Older people feel they should not rely on their families for support, as they do not want to be bothersome. However, this independence can be an issue when older people face poverty. It might cause some people to continue working in old age even if it harms their health. Others may rely on the government for support rather than their families. About 1 million older people in Japan receive income support from the government.²³⁵ About half of all people receive this support.²³⁶ Since older people face higher rates of poverty, this issue is likely to worsen as the number of older people increases.

Another consequence of the growing share of older people is that Japan needs more workers. Low birth rates are contributing to the problem. More young workers are needed to replace the number of retirees. Japan is projected to be short 11 million workers by 2040.²³⁷ The labor shortage has led to more older people and women joining the workforce.²³⁸ Still, this only satisfies some of the demands of workers. The lack of younger workers specifically may also be an issue. Younger people can be more productive due to their good health and knowledge of new technology.²³⁹ This means the need for more young workers can decrease productivity. Older workers may struggle with physical jobs. This includes jobs in the farming and manufacturing industries.

Additionally, the worker shortage creates a need for more tax revenue. Japanese workers pay income taxes. When there are fewer people to pay taxes, it can be harder to fund government budgets.²⁴⁰ These budgets often include benefits

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235 Oshio Takashi, “Growing Poverty among the Elderly: Public pension system is the framework that should respond,” *Research Institute of Economy, Trade, and Industry*, April 26, 2018, <https://www.rieti.go.jp/en/papers/contribution/oshio-takashi/01.html>.

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Three women walk in the city of Nikko, Japan

Credit: Adam Jones

for older people and children. Fewer workers in Japan means less income tax can be collected, making it more difficult for the government to pay for these benefits. Immigration is one way that a country can alleviate a labor shortage. If not enough workers are born in the country, they can be allowed to migrate from other places. However, this is not a reality in Japan. About 2 percent of people in Japan are immigrants.²⁴¹ Often, foreign residents are viewed as visitors rather than Japanese citizens. Companies often avoid hiring immigrants, as they consider it costly to train them.²⁴² This resistance to immigration contributes to the labor shortage in Japan.

Another aspect of the labor shortage is the need for long-term care workers. This refers to people who work in nursing homes or as at-home care aides. When there are more older people, there is a greater demand for these workers. Families have fewer children, meaning fewer workers will be in the next generation. This applies to healthcare jobs, as well. The Japanese government hoped to solve this problem by developing

robots to perform these tasks. They can socialize with older people and help with daily medical care or basic needs. Japan's government has spent more than USD 300 million to research these robots.²⁴³ These robots were developed, but their effectiveness is limited. They are sold to nursing homes, but just 10 percent of care facilities in Japan have one of these care robots.²⁴⁴ In reality, care robots tend to create more work for caregivers rather than help to reduce their workloads.²⁴⁵ Innovative solutions are important to address the shortage of care workers, but human care providers will be difficult to replace.

The growing population has also impacted Japan's policies. For example, due to the need for long-term medical care, Japan's government introduced long-term care insurance (LTCI) in 2000.²⁴⁶ If they need it, this insurance pays for older people's at-home aides or stays at care facilities. People aged 40 and older pay premiums.²⁴⁷ Once a person is aged 65 or older, they can begin to receive benefits. Younger adults with disabilities

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243 James Wright, "Inside Japan's long experiment in automating elder care," *MIT Technology Review*, January 9, 2023, <https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/01/09/1065135/japan-automating-eldercare-robots/>.

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246 "Long-term Care Insurance," *Japan Health Policy Now*, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://japanhpn.org/en/longtermcare/>.

247 Japan Health Policy Now, "Long-term Care Insurance."

are also eligible.²⁴⁸ Insured people pay a 10 percent copayment for the services they receive.²⁴⁹ Older people with higher incomes pay an extra 20 percent copayment.²⁵⁰ The goal of LTCI is to separate long-term care from other medical costs.²⁵¹ Many older people lived in hospitals rather than nursing homes before the introduction of LTCI, which was costly for taxpayers.²⁵² LTCI also intends to help families caring for their relatives and older people without families. The system has been successful to an extent, but challenges exist. The shortage of care workers contributes to long waits to receive LTCI benefits.²⁵³ Unmet demand for care is greatest in urban areas.²⁵⁴ The cost of building and staffing facilities means the process can be slow. Funding LTCI is another challenge. Premiums pay for half of LTCI, while taxes pay for the other half.²⁵⁵ Paying for the program with taxes may become more difficult as the number of workers decreases.

Japan also has a region with longer life expectancy than the rest of the world. This refers to the state of Okinawa. Okinawa is located southwest of the main island and consists of 48 smaller islands.²⁵⁶ The group of islands of Okinawa is famous for being a ‘Blue Zone,’ which is an area where people live unusually healthy, long lives.²⁵⁷ Lifespans in Okinawa are similar to the national average.²⁵⁸ What is unique is that people in Okinawa spend many of these years without disability or disease. Even though Okinawa is one of the poorest places in Japan, its older residents have below-average risk of cancer and heart attacks.²⁵⁹ They also face low rates of depression.²⁶⁰ Genetics is one of the reasons for this, but lifestyle plays a bigger role. Vegetables are a major part of the diet in Okinawa. Many people frequently eat soybeans, goya, and tofu. Many

people believe in *hara hachi bu*, meaning that they eat only until they are 80 percent full.²⁶¹ Many people do not often drink alcohol. Besides diet, culture is also relevant. Common in Okinawa and the rest of Japan is *ikigai*. This means ‘sense of purpose’. Many older people in Okinawa volunteer, work, or participate in activities.²⁶² For this reason, they feel connected to others. This contributes to lowering disease risks, reducing isolation, and integrating exercise into daily life. The example of Okinawa shows how lifestyle and culture factor into aging.

Population aging is a key aspect of demographic change. The number of older people is increasing globally. As the most aged society in the world, Japan serves as an example for other countries. Japan’s experiences show the challenges that other countries might face. Key issues related to aging in Japan include old-age poverty and a labor shortage that results in lower tax revenues. This makes it more difficult to pay for pensions. The shortage of workers is especially severe in long-term care jobs, which are in high demand due to the many older people. Policies that have or have not worked in Japan can guide responding to population aging. For example, care robots are largely ineffective. Social interaction and accessible healthcare help to extend lifespans. Programs like LTCI reduce the burden on families. Still, funding the system remains a challenge. Delegates can consider Japan’s experiences when considering how to respond to the growing number of older people in the UNESCAP region.

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260 Mishra, “Secret of Eternal Youth; Teaching from the Centenarian Hot Spots (‘Blue Zones’).”

261 Mishra, “Secret of Eternal Youth; Teaching from the Centenarian Hot Spots (‘Blue Zones’).”

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Progress on the Decade of Healthy Aging: 2021-2030

Aging is a major aspect of demographic change. It is an issue globally, not just in Asia and the Pacific. The number of older people in the world will more than triple between 2024 and 2074.²⁶³ This trend will have negative economic and social impacts. An international response is required to mitigate these effects. The UN General Assembly (UNGA) recognizes that action must be taken to address the growing number of older people. On December 14, 2020, the UNGA decided that 2021 to 2030 would be the Decade of Healthy Aging. The Decade is not the first international observance related to aging. On December 14th, 1990, the UNGA declared the International Day of Older Persons.²⁶⁴ This day has been observed annually since then on October 1st. Objectives of the Day are similar to the Decade. They include calling on all entities to consider older persons' needs. The International Day is still observed throughout the Decade. In 2023, the theme of the Day was a human rights perspective on older people's issues.²⁶⁵

A major goal of the Decade of Healthy Aging is to encourage governments, scholars, the private sector, and the UN to work together to improve the lives of older people.²⁶⁶ Countries are invited to create policies that support older people.²⁶⁷ The vision for the Decade is for everyone to live a long and healthy life while enjoying the human rights they are entitled to.²⁶⁸ Healthy aging means ensuring older people's well-being.²⁶⁹ This includes mental and physical health. It also includes the freedom from abuse, as well as the ability to continue to contribute to society.²⁷⁰ Accessible public transport is an example of what healthy aging looks like. Older people more

often have disabilities. This means that accessible buses, trains, and paths allow them to work and interact with others for more years of their lives. When elder abuse laws are enforced, it means that fewer older people experience violence. This is an example of what healthy aging is. Older people who do not face abuse can enjoy a better quality of life. Healthy aging allows people to retain their agency, dignity, and productivity for as many years as possible.

The World Health Organization first proposed the concept because of the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. 80 percent of the people who died from the virus were aged 60 or older.²⁷¹ The UNGA called upon the WHO to lead the Decade.²⁷² The WHO decided on four areas for action to guide progress. The first area is to change how people perceive age. This means ending ageism, which prevents older people from finding jobs or meeting others. The WHO recommends laws that ban ageism to address this area of action. It also suggests allowing people from different generations to interact with each other. This might include local events or volunteer work that includes all age groups. The idea is that younger people may be less ageist if they interact with older people. The second area for action is enabling communities. Accessibility is considering the needs of all people with disabilities. This means ensuring they can physically access and be part of daily activities. Many older people have disabilities, so that is why this goal is related to aging.

The third area for action is healthcare.²⁷³ Older people's care should be low-cost and effective. Integrated care is the idea that a person's healthcare should be coordinated among providers.²⁷⁴ This is important because older people often face health issues. These issues can be complex and related,

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so integrated care is important. The fourth area for action is long-term care.²⁷⁵ As the number of older people increases, the number of people needing this care will increase. This is because older people are the age group that most often requires this type of care.²⁷⁶ This is especially important for low-income people who do not have families to care for them. Countries, the UN, and the private sector are all responsible for using their resources to address the four areas for action during the Decade.

The WHO also identified four enablers of progress in the Decade.²⁷⁷ The first enabler is engaging older people. This means hearing their views on policies and encouraging them to advocate for progress. The WHO intends to amplify older people's ideas and work on healthy aging. The second enabler is capacity building. This means teaching people more about older people and healthy aging. It is important to show how people can lead progress during the Decade and beyond. The third enabler is connecting stakeholders. This is important to allow the exchange of ideas. The fourth enabler is more data and research, which is important to understand the challenges that older people face.²⁷⁸ The WHO's Ageing Data Portal is an aspect of the fourth enabler.²⁷⁹

The online Decade of Healthy Ageing Platform was created to promote the four areas for action.²⁸⁰ The purpose of the Platform is to encourage action and the sharing of ideas on aging.²⁸¹ The Platform is a website that includes research

on aging and updates on progress made. Age-related policy guidance is also available. People can submit their work towards promoting healthy aging.²⁸² This includes work that older people have done advocating for age-friendly policies.²⁸³ Users on the website can learn about key topics, such as long-term care, elder abuse, and isolation in old age.

The UNGA asked that Decade progress reports be shared in 2023, 2026, and 2029.²⁸⁴ The purpose of these reports is to share ideas and to inspire action.²⁸⁵ The WHO published the first report on November 22, 2023. Progress in the Decade is defined by ten indicators.²⁸⁶ Each of these measures the number of countries that fit certain criteria. For example, the fourth goal counts how many countries enforce laws against ageism.²⁸⁷ Other indicators related to health, engagement, medical devices, accessible cities, social inclusion, long-term care, and data collection.²⁸⁸ The WHO Technical Advisory Group ensures that data collection on aging is uniform across countries.²⁸⁹ This ensures that the Decade indicators are in use and reflect the topics they monitor.

Based on these indicators, the WHO reported that progress was made during the first two years of the Decade. This is encouraging, as these years coincided with recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. The report noted that the most progress was made regarding ageism, access to medical devices, and healthcare. Related to healthcare, the WHO reported that more countries have adopted Integrated Care for Older

275 World Health Organization, *Decade of Healthy Ageing: Plan of Action*.

276 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *The Growing Need for Long-Term Care: Assumptions and Realities*, https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/ageing/documents/un-ageing_briefing-paper_Long-term-care.pdf.

277 "WHO's work on the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)," World Health Organization, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>.

278 World Health Organization, "WHO's work on the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)."

279 "Ageing Data," World Health Organization, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/find-knowledge/resources/databases-repositories/who-ageing-data-portal>.

280 "What is the Platform? A Guide to Knowledge," Decade for Healthy Ageing Platform, accessed July 27, 2024, <https://www.decadeofhealthyageing.org/>.

281 World Health Organization, *Decade of Healthy Ageing: Plan of Action*.

282 Decade for Healthy Ageing Platform, "What is the Platform? A Guide to Knowledge."

283 Decade for Healthy Ageing Platform, "What is the Platform? A Guide to Knowledge."

284 A/RES/75/131.

285 World Health Organization, *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021-2023* (Geneva: WHO, 2023), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240079694>.

286 World Health Organization, *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021-2023*.

287 World Health Organization, *Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health* (Switzerland: WHO, 2017), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241513500>.

288 World Health Organization, *Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health*.

289 "Technical Advisory Group for Measurement, Monitoring and Evaluation of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing," World Health Organization, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://www.who.int/groups/technical-advisory-group-for-measurement-monitoring-and-evaluation-of-the-un-decade-of-healthy-ageing>.

People (ICOPE) since the Decade began.²⁹⁰ This is a guide for integrated care created by the WHO.²⁹¹ Its wider adoption suggests that more countries prioritize integrated care for older people. Lack of public support and resources limited the number of age-focused policies introduced in many countries. Greater steps can be taken to ensure that older people from vulnerable groups are included in progress. These groups include women, LGBTQIA+ people, and refugees. The WHO emphasized that there must be a focus on low- and middle-income countries. 80 percent of older people will live in these countries by 2050.²⁹²

The UN recognized aging as a key issue by declaring the Decade of Healthy Aging. UNESCAP, as a UN agency, must observe the Decade. This means using its resources to advance the goals of the Decade. The four areas for action are ageism, accessibility, integrated care, and long-term care. There are also four enablers for progress. These are partnership, data and research, capacity building, and engaging older people.²⁹³ These are the main ways the WHO works towards the areas for action. The enablers can be used to design solutions on this topic. Delegates can use the WHO's aging country profiles to see their country's progress on healthy aging relative to the rest of UNESCAP.²⁹⁴ The Decade of Healthy Ageing Platform also provides a source of ideas on aging-related issues.²⁹⁵

Sustainable Development Goals

The UNGA adopted the Sustainable Development Agenda on September 25, 2015.²⁹⁶ This document is a global effort

to benefit all people. The goal is to achieve the Agenda by 2030. It includes 17 goals, which are called SDGs. Sustainable development means economic growth, decent jobs, and protecting the Earth.²⁹⁷ The Agenda also has 169 targets.²⁹⁸ Each SDG has between seven and 19 of these. The purpose of the targets is to guide action and measure progress on the Agenda. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development is a group that meets each year to discuss the Agenda.²⁹⁹ Its meeting is called the SDG Summit. The SDGs call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030, all people enjoy peace and prosperity.³⁰⁰ Hence, achieving the SDGs is closely related to addressing demographic change in Asia and the Pacific.

For instance, SDG 1: No Poverty relates to demographic change in Asia and the Pacific for two reasons.³⁰¹ First, the three demographic dividends are chances to fuel economic growth. This may help reduce poverty. The first dividend is relevant to extreme poverty. This is the most severe form, in which people live on less than USD 1.90 each day.³⁰² People with fewer dependents may have more income to support themselves. When there are more workers, the government can support impoverished people. Second, the share of older people in Asia and the Pacific is increasing. Older people face a higher risk of poverty due to health, disability, or ageism. Therefore, ending poverty also involves addressing old-age poverty. Demographic change can help achieve SDG 1, which relates to population aging.

290 World Health Organization, *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021-2023*

291 World Health Organization, *Integrated care for older people (ICOPE): guidance for person-centred assessment and pathways in primary care* (Switzerland: WHO, 2019), <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-FWC-ALC-19.1>.

292 World Health Organization, *Progress report on the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021-2023*.

293 World Health Organization, "WHO's work on the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)."

294 "Ageing country profiles," World Health Organization, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://platform.who.int/data/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-ageing/static-visualizations/ageing-country-profile>.

295 Decade for Healthy Ageing Platform, "What is the Platform? A Guide to Knowledge."

296 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 70/1, Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1 (Oct. 21, 2015), <https://documents.un.org/api/symbol/access?j=N1529189&t=pdf>.

297 United Nations, "Fast Facts - What is Sustainable Development?" August 8, 2023, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2023/08/what-is-sustainable-development/>.

298 "The 17 Goals," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed July 28, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

299 "The Sustainable Development Agenda," United Nations, accessed July 28, 2024, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>.

300 "What are the Sustainable Development Goals?" United Nations Development Programme, accessed September 9, 2024, <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals>.

301 "SDG 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed June 30, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>.

302 "Understanding Poverty," World Bank, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/understanding-poverty>.

Seven targets are used to measure progress on SDG 1.³⁰³ The fourth target is the share of people covered by social protection. This refers to policies that help reduce poverty.³⁰⁴ These policies include pensions and benefits for families, injured workers, or unemployed people. These benefits are most important for members of vulnerable groups.³⁰⁵ This is because these groups are more likely to face discrimination, which can lead to fewer work opportunities. Other targets relate to the right to own land, climate risk, and assistance for low-income countries. The WHO shared updates on these targets in the 2024 SDG Report.³⁰⁶ Rates of extreme poverty fell in many countries to levels before the COVID-19 pandemic.³⁰⁷ This is encouraging, but the pandemic has slowed progress in many places. Millions of people still live in poverty. Lack of funding is a barrier to providing social protection to more people.³⁰⁸ Considering demographic change, the growing number of older people means that poverty may increase. Therefore, responding to demographic change is part of achieving this SDG.

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth also relate to demographic change.³⁰⁹ Decent work refers to jobs that provide a good income and working conditions.³¹⁰ Workers of both sexes are treated equally at these jobs. Each worker has the chance to express any concerns to their employer. Economic growth is key for development.³¹¹ Demographic change is related to SDG 8 because it has economic effects. Decent work should be available to everyone, including older people. However, older people in Asia and the Pacific often work informal jobs.³¹² Longer lifespans mean that some people are working for more years of their lives. Age-friendly jobs must be accessible for people with disabilities, which are more common among older people. Countries must make

sure that employers are not ageist. Factors such as informal work and ageism must be considered so that older people can access decent work.

There are ten targets used to measure SDG 8.³¹³ The first two targets relate to the rate of growth of the economy. This relates to demographic change because old-age poverty relates to demographic change. Economic growth can reduce poverty by raising incomes and creating jobs. The third target is the share of people who have informal jobs. This connects to demographic change because these jobs are common among older people in Asia and the Pacific. This is because of barriers that older people face to formal work, such as ageism. The fifth target measures the number of unemployed people. Similar to the fourth target, this target relates to older people because one component of unemployment is older people who face ageism in the hiring process.

In the 2024 SDG Report, the WHO stated that economic growth has slowed.³¹⁴ This means that economic development may be at risk. Globally, unemployment is at a record low. A decline in worker's rights is a concerning development. The SDG Report notes that more than 2 billion people have informal jobs.³¹⁵ Often, these workers are older people. With the growing number of older people, informal work will remain a key issue. Considering stagnant global economic growth, demographic dividends may be a way to fuel growth. The effectiveness of this depends on what policies countries enact and what phase of demographic change they are in. Other SDGs are related to demographic change. One of these is SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being.³¹⁶ Population aging is a major demographic trend. As people age, they experience

303 "SDG Indicators: Metadata Repository," United Nations, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/metadata/>.

304 "What is Social Protection?" United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://socialprotection.org/learn/glossary/what-is-social-protection>.

305 United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, "What is Social Protection?"

306 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goal Report 2024* (UN: New York, 2024), <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2024/>.

307 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goal Report 2024*.

308 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goal Report 2024*.

309 "SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed June 30, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>.

310 "Decent work," International Labor Organization, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work>.

311 "Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth," United Nations Environment Programme, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/sustainable-development-goals/why-do-sustainable-development-goals-matter/goal-8>.

312 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, *Asia-Pacific Population and Development Report 2023*.

313 United Nations, "SDG Indicators: Metadata Repository."

314 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goal Report 2024*.

315 United Nations, *The Sustainable Development Goal Report 2024*.

316 "Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages," United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal3>.

health issues. Better health can improve the quality of life for an older person.

For this reason, healthcare is closely connected to population aging. Healthcare costs are one aspect of this SDG. This is important because many older people experience poverty, which means that they need affordable healthcare. Another related goal is SDG 5: Gender Equality.³¹⁷ This is because women are more likely than men to face old-age poverty. This is due to the disadvantages that women face throughout their lives. Gender equality, therefore, would reduce the rates of poverty among older women. This SDG is also related to demographic change because most older people are women, as women tend to live longer than men.

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

The first demographic dividend is a stage of demographic change.³¹⁸ It represents a chance for fast economic growth due to families having fewer children. The number of workers rapidly increases. Due to lower birth rates, fewer children are dependent on these workers. This means that there are more resources to devote to each child. It also makes workers more productive, as they spend less time raising children. However, the boost to economic growth can only occur if policies are in place that support workers and children.³¹⁹ The demographic dividend relates to the aging aspect of demographic change rather than gender or migration. The dividend takes place due to a changing age structure. Countries can be categorized based on their status relative to the first demographic dividend. These three blocs are pre- and early-dividend countries, late-

dividend countries, and post-dividend countries. World Bank researchers first defined these categories in 2016.³²⁰ The authors divided countries based on the projected change in the share of workers in the population, as well as the birth rate.³²¹ The birth rate is one way to determine which countries fall into which blocs. The population growth level and income per person are also relevant. These lists, provided by the World Bank, can help determine the phase that a country is in.³²² These definitions are supported by statistics showing the economic conditions of countries in the same category.

Pre and Early Demographic Dividend Countries

Countries in this bloc have yet to experience or are in the early stages of the first demographic dividend. Pre-dividend countries are usually low-income. More than four children are born to each woman. This means that population growth is rapid. Many young people depend on a relatively small number of adults. Many resources are used to care for dependents. These countries rank low in indicators of development level.³²³ This means that they may need higher quality education or healthcare. Only two countries in UNESCAP are pre-dividend. They are Afghanistan and Iraq.³²⁴ At this pre-dividend stage, countries may seek to lower birth rates and increase the number of workers. Early-dividend countries are in the first years of the dividend. Birth rates are falling. The average woman has fewer than four children.³²⁵ The number of people who rely on workers is decreasing, but the share of workers in the population is growing. Examples in UNESCAP include Bahrain, Turkmenistan, and the Philippines. Vanuatu, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands are also part of this bloc.³²⁶ These countries need to enact policies so they can benefit from

317 “Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls,” United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>.

318 Lee and Mason, “What is the Demographic Dividend?”

319 World Bank, “Achieving the Demographic Dividend: An Operational Tool for Country-Specific Investment Decision-Making in Pre-Dividend Countries,” <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/781891550815372274/pdf/Demographic-Dividend-Operational-Tool-for-Pre-Dividend-Countries.pdf>.

320 S. Amer Ahmed, et al, “Demographic Change and Development: A Global Typology,” *World Bank Policy Research Working Paper* no. 7893 (2016), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/867951479745020851/pdf/WPS7893.pdf>.

321 Ahmed, et al, “Demographic Change and Development: A Global Typology.”

322 “Countries and Economies,” World Bank, accessed August 1, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/>.

323 “Metadata glossary: pre-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadata/glossary/gender-statistics/country/PRE>.

324 “Pre-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/pre-demographic-dividend>.

325 “Metadata glossary: early-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed July 31, 2024, <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadata/glossary/gender-statistics/country/EAR>.

326 United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2024.”

the dividend. This means supporting workers and families.

Most people in the world live in an early-dividend country.³²⁷ These places are home to more than 3.5 billion people. Pre-dividend is the least common stage in the world, with about 1 billion people living in these countries.³²⁸ Both pre-and early-dividend countries have low incomes per person compared to post-dividend countries.³²⁹ These countries also have a lower percentage of people using the Internet. More than half of people in early-dividend countries use the Internet, while 35 percent of people in pre-dividend countries do.³³⁰ This may limit the job opportunities that they have. It also suggests that people have limited access to utilities. Annual population growth is 2.7 percent in pre-dividend countries, while it is 1.1 percent in early-dividend countries.³³¹ This reflects that these countries have greater shares of children in their populations. Therefore, this bloc is characterized by low incomes, low rates of Internet usage, and high population growth.

Late-Demographic Dividend Countries

Countries in this bloc are medium-income countries. Birth rates are decreasing but are still above replacement levels of 2.1 children per woman.³³² These countries may be beginning to face population aging. They are nearing the end of the time when they can benefit from the dividend.³³³ Examples in the UNESCAP region include Vietnam, Thailand, Fiji, and Azerbaijan. These countries still have the chance to support families and workers. For this reason, they may enact policies similar to those of early-dividend countries. A priority for these countries might be creating conditions for the second demographic dividend.³³⁴ This means preventing old-age

poverty and encouraging investment.

The second most common phase is late-dividend. About 2.33 billion people live in these countries.³³⁵ Annual population growth in late-dividend countries is 0.1 percent. This reflects the fact that birth rates are still above replacement levels. The total value of all products and services these countries produce each year is USD 28.34 trillion, USD 12,180.20 per person. This is nearly three times the amount in early-dividend countries. Nearly 80 percent of people in these countries use the Internet.³³⁶ This allows people access to jobs they otherwise may not be able to work. Late-dividend countries have lower population growth, higher incomes, and more significant Internet usage than pre- and early-dividend countries.

Post-Demographic Dividend Countries

Countries in this bloc are high-income countries. Birth rates have fallen below replacement levels.³³⁷ This means that there are not enough children born to replace each person who dies. The share of older people in the population is high. The share of workers is decreasing. The first dividend has ended in these countries. However, they can take advantage of the second demographic dividend. The second dividend occurs when people live longer, giving them more incentive to invest in the economy and their education. Examples in the UNESCAP region include Australia, Singapore, the Republic of Korea, and China. Palau and Nauru are also part of this bloc.³³⁸ The focus for these countries is the second or third demographic dividend. A policy priority may be social protection to support workers and older people.³³⁹

³²⁷ World Bank, “Early-demographic dividend.”

³²⁸ World Bank, “Pre-demographic dividend.”

³²⁹ “Data for Pre-demographic dividend, Post-demographic dividend, Early-demographic dividend, Late-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/?locations=V1-V4-V2-V3>.

³³⁰ World Bank, “Data for Pre-demographic dividend, Post-demographic dividend, Early-demographic dividend, Late-demographic dividend.”

³³¹ World Bank, “Data for Pre-demographic dividend, Post-demographic dividend, Early-demographic dividend, Late-demographic dividend.”

³³² “Metadata glossary: late-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadata/glossary/gender-statistics/country/LTE>.

³³³ Ahmed, et al, “Demographic Change and Development: A Global Typology.”

³³⁴ World Bank, “Achieving the Demographic Dividend: An Operational Tool for Country-Specific Investment Decision-Making in Pre-Dividend Countries.”

³³⁵ “Late-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/region/late-demographic-dividend>.

³³⁶ World Bank, “Late-demographic dividend.”

³³⁷ “Metadata glossary: post-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://databank.worldbank.org/metadata/glossary/gender-statistics/country/PST>.

³³⁸ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, “World Population Prospects 2024.”

³³⁹ World Bank, “Achieving the Demographic Dividend: An Operational Tool for Country-Specific Investment Decision-Making in Pre-

About 1.12 billion people live in post-dividend countries, meaning it is the third most common stage.³⁴⁰ Population growth is negative at -0.2 percent.³⁴¹ This reflects that birth rates are below replacement levels. People in these countries live longer than those in the other stages. The average person in a post-dividend country lives to be 80 years old. The most significant difference between post-dividend countries and other blocs is income level. The total value of all goods and services produced in post-dividend countries is USD 59.85 trillion. This is USD 53,464 per person. This is more than four times the per-person income in late-dividend countries, which still have much higher incomes than pre- and early-dividend countries.³⁴² Therefore, post-dividend countries are characterized by their negative population growth and very high incomes.

Committee Mission

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) is a regional arm of the United Nations.³⁴³ It is the most inclusive intergovernmental platform for the region and the only forum that includes all countries and territories of Asia and the Pacific.³⁴⁴ The mandate of UNESCAP is to promote cooperation among member states to encourage economic growth and development in Asia and the Pacific.³⁴⁵ UNESCAP's mission is to further sustainable economic and social development in Asia-Pacific. The commission can encourage general actions, conduct studies, and share data to achieve these goals.³⁴⁶ UNESCAP

also provides policy advice to countries.³⁴⁷ According to its mandate, UNESCAP cannot direct a UN agency or a country to take a specific action.³⁴⁸ It can provide recommendations rather than make demands

UNESCAP also allows countries to discuss regional issues and facilitate trade. Dialogue between countries can mean sharing experiences to create more effective policies. It also means coordinating responses to issues that affect the entire region. Demographic change will have economic and social impacts. It will affect every Asian and Pacific country, even though change will not be the same everywhere. This topic of demographic change is within the committee's mandate because it is a regional issue with economic and social effects.

Therefore, UNESCAP is obligated to address the topic. UNESCAP is composed of nine committees that each relate to one or more of its key objectives.³⁴⁹ Poverty, disasters, and statistics are among UNESCAP's objectives.³⁵⁰ All of these topics are linked to the demographic change that the region is facing today. Aging is a topic that UNESCAP has worked to address already. For example, UNESCAP provides a resource that shows national policies on aging to promote the adoption of these laws.³⁵¹ The demographic dividends present the chance for development. Countries can benefit from the dividends through adequate policies. Delegates must be aware of UNESCAP's mandate when considering how to respond to the causes and impacts of demographic change.

Dividend Countries.”

340 World Bank, “Data for Pre-demographic dividend, Post-demographic dividend, Early-demographic dividend, Late-demographic dividend.”

341 “Post-demographic dividend,” World Bank, accessed August 3, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/country/post-demographic-dividend>.

342 World Bank, “Data for Pre-demographic dividend, Post-demographic dividend, Early-demographic dividend, Late-demographic dividend.”

343 “About UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP),” United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, accessed September 15, 2024, <https://www.refworld.org/document-sources/un-economic-and-social-commission-asia-and-pacific-escap>.

344 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, “About UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).”

345 “Our Work,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.unescap.org/our-work>.

346 United Nations Economic and Social Council, Resolution 37 (IV), Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East, E/RES/17/37(IV) (March 28, 1947), [http://undocs.org/en/E/RES/37\(IV\)](http://undocs.org/en/E/RES/37(IV)).

347 “Regular Programme of Technical Cooperation,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed August 5, 2024, <https://www.unescap.org/partnerships/capacity-development/rptc>.

348 E/RES/17/37(IV).

349 “Committees,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://www.unescap.org/about/committees>.

350 United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “Our Work.”

351 “Dashboard of National Policies on Ageing,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://www.population-trends-asiapacific.org/policies>.



UNESCAP

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TOPIC B: PROTECTING INFORMAL WORKERS IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Photo Credit: Jose Murillo

Introduction

Informal employment is defined as any worker and employee who does not report earnings/income for tax purposes.¹ Many types of work characterize it. The work done is specified as productive for society.² This is done to exclude criminal activity from the work of honest working-class people. Informal work is often associated with periods of economic downturn.³ When businesses cannot offer as many formal opportunities, individuals take up this work style to support themselves. In this sense, informal work is seen as a necessary force in the economy to maintain stability.⁴ When informal work remains the standard for long periods, economic and social problems become more widespread.⁵ This is because there is a lack of clear direction for the future.

Many informal workers are stigmatized as criminals.⁶ Yet, there must be a clear distinction. Informal workers, as defined by the World Economic Forum, are not encompassed by things like drug & human trafficking schemes.⁷ This negative stigma surrounding informal work is a major reason for the lack of successful policies to protect these workers. Countries tend to avoid assistance as they see informal workers in this negative light.⁸ The truth of the matter is that they are often the key that allows for society to function. At times, informal workers are referred to as entrepreneurs.⁹ These entrepreneurs can find it difficult to complete the relevant regulatory requirements to be considered formal workers.¹⁰

Informal work is an essential part of society and economies in the Asia-Pacific region. These workers make many meaningful contributions, whether through offering affordable goods or pieces of regional culture. This can be illustrated by workers who make cultural artwork or affordable street food.

Additionally, almost all agricultural employment is informal in the Asia-Pacific.¹¹ It rises to levels as high as 99.3 percent in South Asia.¹² Agriculture is a key component of the economies of many of these regions. This is because it serves as the base for other forms of societal progress, as no country can successfully function without food. Informal workers tend to face many problems that are not faced by their formal counterparts. These people are often at a much higher risk of abuse in the workplace.¹³ This is because there are no guardrails against employer abuse.¹⁴ Children, women, and persons with disabilities are also especially affected by these problems. Other issues faced by these people are linked to their work. Problems like sexism, ageism, and child labor are especially relevant.

The lack of job security is also a major concern. Individuals tend to have very little safety in the case of external shocks (like COVID-19 or a recession).¹⁵ This is because once their businesses shut down, governments cannot reach them with

1 Paulina Restrepo-Echavarría and María A. Arias, “What Is the Informal Labor Market?” *Saint Louis Fed Eagle*, December 9, 2021, <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2017/april/informal-labor-market>.

2 Restrepo-Echavarría and Arias, “What Is the Informal Labor Market?”

3 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening Skies* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2019), <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/4aa0b654ecdabaf8302d5901aaada3bf-0350012021/related/Global-Economic-Prospects-January-2019.pdf>.

4 Emilio Colombo, Lorenzo Menna, and Patrizio Tirelli, “Informality and the Labor Market Effects of Financial Crises,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3285133>.

5 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening Skies*.

6 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy and Why Is It Important to Understand It?” accessed August 10, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2024/06/what-is-the-informal-economy>.

7 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

8 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

9 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

10 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

11 International Labour Organization, “More than 68 per Cent of the Employed Population in Asia-Pacific Are in the Informal Economy,” *International Labour Organization*, February 1, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/more-68-cent-employed-population-asia-pacific-are-informal-economy>.

12 International Labour Organization, “68% in Asia-Pacific Are in the Informal Economy.”

13 International Labour Organization, “Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific,” *International Labour Organization*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/asia-and-pacific-deprecated/ilo-asia-and-pacific/areas-work/child-labour-asia-and-pacific>.

14 International Labour Organization, “Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific.”

15 Colombo, Menna, and Tirelli, “Informality and the Labor Market Effects of Financial Crises.”

financial/social support.¹⁶ Workers often enter this field of employment out of necessity.¹⁷ As such, informal work is often associated with low levels of education as people haven't gotten the chance to complete school.¹⁸ This results in further vulnerability for these workers. If their jobs were to be destroyed, they would have very little flexibility. Finding new work is often very difficult as their skills were fit for only their one form of production.¹⁹ This is another way in which the workers tend to lack meaningful safety nets. A report by the International Labor Organization shows that over 1.3 billion people in the Asia-Pacific region work informally.²⁰ This accounts for more than 68 percent of the region's population.²¹ This reveals the scale of the issue at hand. There have been some efforts to better integrate and support informal workers. However, many efforts have been limited in efficiency and success.²² Efforts have had limited success due to a lack of commitment and execution.

The sheer number of informal workers in the Asia-Pacific should make this issue a top priority. Addressing their conditions and passing meaningful resolutions will help impact hundreds of millions of people.

History and Description of the Issue

Global & Colonial Context of Informal Work

Many characteristics can define globalization. The key trait is the rise of greater economic interdependence.²³ This may include increased monetary movements across borders and technological progress.²⁴ There may also be the rise of transnational problems and societal consciousness.²⁵ Coupled with this is the increased pressure on governments to adjust to international governance and policy behavior standards.²⁶ As countries engage more with one another, they can share international standards. Organizations like the UN are critical for these efforts. A greater global community allows for further accountability for countries and more reforms.

During the 1900s, much of the globalization of Asia and the Pacific was a result of Colonialism.²⁷ Europeans mainly carried out colonialism in these areas in search of wealth. Exotic produce, ranging from silk in China to tea in India, was a great motivator for these global powers.²⁸ These markets are huge economic opportunities. They allow for massive economic progress for the colonial powers.²⁹ Foreign powers, like Europe, were especially dominant due to their quick development of technology.³⁰ The Industrial Revolution allowed for extreme output growth in the West.³¹ Through the rise of procedures

16 Colombo, Menna, and Tirelli, "Informality and the Labor Market Effects of Financial Crises."

17 "Child Labour Is Keeping Millions of Children out of School." International Partnerships. Accessed July 30, 2024. https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/child-labour-keeping-millions-children-out-school_en.

18 "Child Labour Is Keeping Millions of Children out of School." International Partnerships.

19 Zhan Gao, "China Boosts Training, Benefits for Skilled Workers amid Industrial Upgrading." *State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China*, February 29, 2024, http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/in-depth/2024-02/29/content_117028340.htm.

20 International Labour Organization, "68% in Asia-Pacific Are in the Informal Economy."

21 International Labour Organization, "68% in Asia-Pacific Are in the Informal Economy."

22 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, "Hidden, Unprotected, and Vulnerable: Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh," *Global Fund to End Modern Slavery*, November 5, 2021, <https://gfems.org/reports/hidden-unprotected-and-vulnerable-supporting-informal-rmg-workers-in-bangladesh/>.

23 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, *Globalization in Asia: Getting the Breeze Without the Bugs: Report from the Conference on Globalization and Regional Security: Asian Perspectives, February 23-25, 1999, Honolulu, Hawaii* (Honolulu, HI: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 1999), https://dkiapcss.edu/Publications/Report_Globalization_in_Asia.html.

24 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, *Globalization in Asia*.

25 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, *Globalization in Asia*.

26 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, *Globalization in Asia*.

27 Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, *Globalization in Asia*.

28 Maria Cruz Berrocal and Cheng-hwa Tsang, eds., *Historical Archaeology of Early Modern Colonialism in Asia-Pacific: The Asia-Pacific Region* (University Press of Florida, 2017), accessed August 11, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.2307/lj.ctvx1htgn>.

29 Berrocal and Tsang, eds., *Historical Archaeology of Early Modern Colonialism in Asia-Pacific*.

30 George Clark, *The Industrial Revolution*, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://faculty.econ.ucdavis.edu/faculty/gclark/papers/HEG%20-%20final%20draft.pdf>.

31 Clark, *The Industrial Revolution*.

like the factory system for cotton production, countries like Britain were able to increase their output.³² This economic and social progress is also related to greater literacy rates and human capital development.³³ Economists like Robert Lucas Jr. say that “for the first time in history, the living standards of the masses of ordinary people have begun to undergo sustained growth” as a result of the Industrial Revolution.³⁴

Thus, these foreign countries could capitalize on the Asia-Pacific region. The West was largely responsible for many cases of informal work because it subjugated these Eastern countries. Another key motivator for foreign powers was the spread of their belief systems. For example, countries like the United States have rationalized their colonialism ventures in the Philippines as a way of exporting democracy and preparing their people for self-government.³⁵ This was, however, just one of many motivations. The United States also looked to use the Philippines as a strategic military base to improve foreign reach.³⁶ These ulterior motives greatly shaped the economic landscape of Asia and the Pacific. The presence of foreign powers, as mentioned earlier, reduced the ability of states to develop independently. The presence of external powers thus prevented unique identities from developing. There was always a hierarchical structure because of the numerous technologies that the Westerners possessed.³⁷

Despite the fronts of altruism, many countries sought short-term economic growth, which stunted the progress of many different Asian countries.³⁸ However, this is not to say that all efforts were exclusively harmful to the regions. Some diplomats argue that Western investment in economic development is wholly incompatible with Asian nationalism and society.³⁹ The argument is greatly built upon the idea that local people should control local enterprises and the economy’s direction.⁴⁰

The concept behind this is that individuals should determine their own future and keep their cultures. As such, many say that the West should not have interfered. A desire for individualism is at the core of the argument. Countries should thus be independent of the hierarchical systems imposed by the West.

However, in many cases, domestic powers in the Asia-Pacific region have argued for an increased relationship between foreign economies. Many governments and diplomats are at the center of this push. This is because of the accelerated progress that the West can afford. The Industrial Revolution took many years to take full effect in the West. Similarly, simply waiting for innovation to occur in the East may also take much time, and fast-tracking progress is often seen as a better approach. This would allow for great prosperity very quickly.

This trend is shown in the Philippines. The Philippines created a central bank that was backed by the US Dollar in 1948.⁴¹ This central bank of the Philippines is still in operation today, largely modeled on the American system. Similarly, in India, geopoliticians under K.M. Panikkar called for an “Indian Monroe Doctrine” where they would gain the West’s help in industrialization and in offsetting the Soviet Union.⁴² Indians collectively joined in these legal pushes to better support the domestic economy. In offsetting communist ideals, they were better able to push for capitalism and rapid economic growth, thereby fast-tracking overall progress. This was ultimately an effort to model domestic progress based on successful foreign projects.

In 1950, ECOSOC reported investments being used specifically for national development and independence, as opposed to

32 Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26070355>.

33 Clark, *The Industrial Revolution*.

34 Robert E. Lucas, *Lectures on Economic Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41795119>.

35 Waiden Bello, “U.S. Imperialism in the Asia Pacific,” *Peace Review* 10, no. 3 (1998): 367–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10402659808426171>.

36 Bello, “U.S. Imperialism in the Asia Pacific.”

37 Clark, *The Industrial Revolution*.

38 Bello, “U.S. Imperialism in the Asia Pacific.”

39 Ernst B. Haas, “IMPERIALISM AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA,” *Columbia Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1950): 7–22, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24354469>.

40 Haas, “Imperialism and Economic Development in Asia.”

41 Haas, “Imperialism and Economic Development in Asia.”

42 Haas, “Imperialism and Economic Development in Asia.”

foreign interests and demands from the global market.⁴³ The organization focused on separating politics and the economics of the capital-exporting states.⁴⁴ In the late 1960s, Asia was considered the poorest continent in the world.⁴⁵ In 1965, Asia had a life expectancy of 49 years, a literacy rate of 43 percent, and a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of USD 714, compared to 2016's GDP of USD 11,009.⁴⁶ When it came to income levels and indicators of social development, all these statistics were at their lowest relative to the rest of the world.⁴⁷ Following the catastrophic effects of the Second World War and colonialism, the general quality of life was much lower in the Asia-Pacific region compared to the West. By 2016, the continent accounted for around 30 percent of the world's income and 40 percent of the world's trade.⁴⁸ Yet, the overall income per capita still converges to the world average.⁴⁹ Whether it be the colonial powers or the nature of different national movements, the magnitude of the countries involved has resulted in the transformation of Asia being largely unequal across differences.⁵⁰ It is imperative to understand South Asia and Japan to demonstrate the nuance of the effects of colonialism and globalization.

Following the events of World War II, Japan became a major exporting country.⁵¹ More open partnerships with the United States allowed for the government to become a global power.⁵² Japan rebounded following the war and greatly left its imprint on the global economy. Their GDP per capita went from USD 25,340 in the 60s and 70s to USD 48,766 in the 2000s. Some

of the protocols used in the Japanese post-war model were based on American visions of suburbia.⁵³ It was primarily concerned with the housewife model for women and a white-collar/blue-collar working relationship for men. This formalized much of the work procedures in Japan. Japan made leaps in reducing informal employment until the end of the 1980s.⁵⁴ The Japan Labor Survey shows that, in 1963, Japan had 42 percent of informal workers, which has since decreased. In 2017, it was only 10 percent. Industrial employment was expanded because of Japan's economic growth period from 1955 to 1985, along with industrial policies that supported Japan's potential as an exporting country. This suggests rigidity and technological innovation is correlated with a reduction in informal labor.⁵⁵ The implementation in Japan was particularly successful because the country was reduced to a blank slate following the war.

However, in many other countries, the adoption of Western systems could have been more successful. In South Asia, the blind integration of Western bureaucratic models led to long-term problems. The influence of the British in countries like Pakistan and India has left long-standing issues.⁵⁶ Without taking into consideration historical and social context, adversarial colonial traits have been preserved.⁵⁷ Colonial powers originally utilized the military and bureaucracy as tools to suppress freedom movements.⁵⁸ This disparity of power persisted even after the colonial powers left.⁵⁹ The top-down nature of Western bureaucracies has often made the

43 United Nations, "Proceedings of the Economic and Social Council, 1950," *United Nations*, https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2020/06/1430-201404101306554721577_0.pdf.

44 Haas, "Imperialism and Economic Development in Asia."

45 Deepak Nayyar, *Catch Up: Developing Countries in the World Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/catch-up-9780198784753>.

46 Nayyar, Deepak. "The Rise of Asia." In Oxford University Press eBooks, 29–58, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198849513.003.0002>.

47 Nayyar, Catch Up.

48 Nayyar, Catch Up.

49 World Bank, "GDP per Capita (Current US\$) - East Asia & Pacific | Data," accessed August 11, 2024, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD?locations=Z4>.

50 Nayyar, Catch Up.

51 International Labour Organization, "Development and Formalization in Asia: Insights from Japan, Republic of Korea and Singapore," *International Labour Organization*, January 29, 2024, https://www.ilo.org/asia/publications/WCMS_831141/lang-en/index.htm.

52 International Labour Organization, "Development and Formalization in Asia."

53 International Labour Organization, "Development and Formalization in Asia."

54 International Labour Organization, "Development and Formalization in Asia."

55 International Labour Organization, "Development and Formalization in Asia."

56 M. Shamsul Haque, "Incongruity Between Bureaucracy and Society in Developing Nations: A Critique," *Peace & Change* 22, no. 4 (1997): 432–462, https://profile.nus.edu.sg/cgi-bin/FAS_STFPRFL/stfprfl.pl?id=polhaque&opt=P.

57 Haque, "Incongruity Between Bureaucracy and Society in Developing Nations."

58 Haque, "Incongruity Between Bureaucracy and Society in Developing Nations."

59 Haque, "Incongruity Between Bureaucracy and Society in Developing Nations."

civil servant feel greater than the common folk.⁶⁰ The unstable political entities that have come about in India and Pakistan can largely be traced to these failed colonial systems.⁶¹ They resulted in limited political participation, military rule, and the subsequent rise of the “bureaucratic-military oligarchy.”⁶²

The result of such failed institutions is the rise of informal work. When workers do not have strong systems in place to guide them to formal work, they are forced into more informal forms of labor. In addition, the fact that India and Pakistan had conflicting ideals with the West is largely the cause of the failed integration efforts. Another major potentially failed export to South Asia was the “European Model” of nationalism.⁶³ The “two-nation theory,” the divide between Muslims and Hindus, was a result of this belief system centered around cultural homogeneity.⁶⁴ The idea of a nation-state for South Asia is at odds with much of the region’s culture that promotes unity.⁶⁵ Experts like Ashis Nandy suggest that South Asia as a whole can be thought of as a “reluctant state” acting to appease the more powerful Europeans.⁶⁶ He argues that as a result of colonial rule, the territories that were once in harmony with one another define themselves exclusively by their differences, regardless of all the commonalities.⁶⁷ The civil and military unrest that has sprawled for generations due to these beliefs has ultimately altered how the economies of these regions function.⁶⁸

These colonial influences are much of the reason for the presence/absence of informal work in Asian and Pacific countries. The interactions between various entities and cultural standards have shaped the way work has evolved.⁶⁹ As

mentioned previously, informal work is often linked to poor living conditions. It is also heavily correlated with government instability and a lack of social support. The absence of major social/governing entities results in a rise of unskilled and informal forms of labor. Ranging from the bureaucracy to the belief systems that support different countries, colonialism was ultimately a key driver for the economic conditions of the modern era. As such, it is clear why informal work has risen to become a standard in certain Asian countries and not in others. The depth of colonial experience in Asia and the Pacific requires this committee to consider the context within which informal work has arisen in each country.

Socio-economic Impact of Informal Workers

The amount of informal workers in Asia-Pacific cannot be understated. These 1.3 billion people greatly shape the economies and societies of their regions.⁷⁰ Agricultural work, for example, is mostly made up of informal workers, with as high as 94.7 percent of workers being informal in the Asia-Pacific region. The revenue in 2023 of this type of work was USD 349.95 million.⁷¹ Agricultural exports from Asia account for at least 90 percent of the world’s palm oil exports and more than 40 percent of the rice imported to the European Union.⁷² Whether it be through monetary movements or the creation of culturally significant services, these people play key roles in their respective countries. The informal worker can range from someone selling street food to cultural artwork passed down through generations. Understanding this impact will be relevant for discussing how to best deal with their futures.

60 Haque, “Incongruity Between Bureaucracy and Society in Developing Nations.”

61 Hamza Alavi, “The State in Post-Colonial Societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh,” *New Left Review* 1, no. 74 (1972): 50-70, <https://newleftreview.org/issues/i74/articles/hamza-alavi-the-state-in-post-colonial-societies-pakistan-and-bangladesh>.

62 Alavi, “The State in Post-Colonial Societies.”

63 Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Nations_and_Nationalism.html?id=XPHpUSUAsF0C&redir_esc=y.

64 Mishra, Sandip Kumar. “The Colonial Origins of Territorial Disputes in South Asia.” *The Journal of Territorial and Maritime Studies* 3, no. 1 (2016): 5–23. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/266664123>.

65 Mishra, “The Colonial Origins of Disputes in South Asia.”

66 Ashis Nandy, “The Idea of South Asia: A Personal Note on Post-Bandung Blues,” *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (2006): 541-545, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233440462_The_Idea_of_South_Asia_A_Personal_Note_on_Post-Bandung_Blues.

67 Nandy, “The Idea of South Asia.”

68 Mishra, “The Colonial Origins of Disputes in South Asia.”

69 Mishra, “The Colonial Origins of Disputes in South Asia.”

70 International Labour Organization, “68% in Asia-Pacific Are in the Informal Economy.”

71 Dharmadhikari, Swasti “Asia Pacific Agriculture Analytics Market Report 2024, Market Size, Share, Growth, CAGR, Forecast, Revenue.” Cognitive Market Research, May 14, 2024. <https://www.cognitivemarketresearch.com/regional-analysis/asia-pacific-agriculture-analytics-market-report>.

72 Camarero, Sergio, “Sourcing of Agricultural Products in Southeast Asia: An Introduction - ARC Group.” ARC Group, June 29, 2023. <https://arc-group.com/southeast-asia-agriculture-industry-exports/>.



Street market in Hanoi
 Credit: Syced

It is important to recognize that informal work is largely separate from illegal activities like drug trafficking.⁷³ NGOs like Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) are making strides in advocacy efforts for informal workers.⁷⁴ They hope to dispel the idea that informal work is associated with the “shadow economy” and crime/unethical activities.⁷⁵ Through different advocacy measures and conferences with government officials, the NGO hopes to shed light on the reality the informal worker faces.⁷⁶

These long-standing beliefs are largely to blame for the lack of progress in providing adequate support to informal workers. The lack of appropriate social nets and employment assistance is a key problem these workers face. In periods of economic downturn, formal workers are often compensated via unemployment income or other forms of assistance. However, in many cases, none of this applies to the informal sector. Such

advocacy programs aim to emphasize the need for protection from the government and greater societal change.⁷⁷

The United Nations has stated that there should be a transition to more formal economies to reduce poverty and inequalities.⁷⁸ The argument is based on a desire for greater “decent work” for individuals as defined by the International Labor Organization (ILO).⁷⁹ This term is defined as work that allows productive, freely chosen employment. It also allows for fair income and security. Equally relevant is freedom of speech and preservation of families.⁸⁰ Still, for many informal workers, this is not a reality. Studies have shown that workers without job contracts tend to have a 20 percent increased risk of occupational injury than workers with a formal contract.⁸¹ The leading cause of this is thought to be a lack of regulation in the workplace.⁸² Without protective systems, employers can take advantage of their employees to make a

73 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

74 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

75 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

76 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

77 World Economic Forum, “What Is the Informal Economy?”

78 United Nations, “Nearly Two-thirds of Global Workforce in the ‘Informal’ Economy – UN Study,” *United Nations Sustainable Development*, August 9, 2018, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2018/04/nearly-two-thirds-of-global-workforce-in-the-informal-economy-un-study/>.

79 “Decent Work,” International Labour Organization, Accessed August 12, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work>.

80 International Labour Organization, “Decent Work.”

81 Vilma Santana and Dana Loomis, “Informal Jobs and Non-Fatal Occupational Injuries,” *The Annals of Occupational Hygiene*, March 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/annhyg/meh009>.

82 Fernando G. Benavides, Michael Silva-Peñaherrera, and Alejandra Vives, “Informal Employment, Precariousness, and Decent Work: From Research to Preventive Action,” *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 48, no. 3 (March 15, 2022): 169–72, <https://doi.org/10.5271/sjweh.4024>.

profit.⁸³ Furthermore, a lack of social security coverage and employment benefits is associated with a greater amount of self-perceived health issues and mental health problems.⁸⁴ A lack of a safety net for workers ultimately causes a sense of discomfort for their futures.

This has the negative effect of bringing down communities and preventing social progress. Due to the inequitable distribution of resources, these informal workers are unable to thrive properly. They are hindered by physical and mental issues caused by a lack of necessary support systems. When the population is in this position, it is doomed to a cyclical increase in informal employment and social problems.

Yet, it is important to note that many of these problems are only mainly visible in low-income countries.⁸⁵ In high-income countries, there does not appear to be a marked difference in the quality of life between informal and formal workers.⁸⁶ For example, a country like China is much less affected by the negative aspects of informal work than Bangladesh (which is almost dependent on labor).⁸⁷ Due to large corporate influences in China, they can push further and further for industrial influence simply. The goal is to reduce informal work by increasing the number of corporate jobs.⁸⁸ Again, this speaks to the Asia-Pacific region's diversity and the magnitude of differences across borders. It is important to consider these differences when sparking debate to adequately address the needs of each country and not give solutions considering only certain aspects of the topic.

Undoubtedly, informal workers in the Asia-Pacific region are

the backbone of much of society. This is best highlighted by the services they offer. Whether talking about the rickshaw drive in Bangladesh or the home-based garment embroideries in India, these individuals contribute key products for the local economies. These services, though not flashy, are necessary for society to function. In Cambodia, for example, informal workers make up to 80 percent of the country's total workforce.⁸⁹ Without these workers, the country would lose much of its revenue.

In many cities around the world, individuals are penalized for trying to earn a living through the informal economy.⁹⁰ This is because they are hard to track.⁹¹ This lack of transparency is a threat to the government as it may be the case that these people are involved in crime. In addition, the lack of transparency makes it hard to track taxes and ensure that people are playing their part in helping governments function.⁹² The persecution ultimately occurs out of fear. Governments need to ensure that their people are accurately accounted for and engaging in meaningful, safe projects in the best interest of the general person.

The government stigmatizes their actions despite their serving as the backbone of modern cities. Many of these people provide services that are key to society's continued progress. Those in support of these informal workers' businesses argue that these individuals add vibrancy to public spaces and are key players in the preservation of cultural heritage.⁹³ One street vendor in Kuala Lumpur named Masidah Jais has been able to bring homemade ethnic cuisine to big cities.⁹⁴ Individuals like Masidah can provide invaluable services to communities that

83 Benavides, Silva-Peñaherrera, and Vives, "Informal Employment, Precariousness, and Decent Work," *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 48, no. 3 (March 15, 2022): 169–172.

84 Mireia Julià et al., "Informal Employment in High-Income Countries for a Health Inequalities Research: A Scoping Review," *Work* 53, no. 2 (February 18, 2016): 347–56, <https://doi.org/10.3233/wor-152176>.

85 Benavides, Silva-Peñaherrera, and Vives, "Informal Employment, Precariousness, and Decent Work," *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 48, no. 3 (March 15, 2022): 169–72.

86 Benavides, Silva-Peñaherrera, and Vives, "Informal Employment, Precariousness, and Decent Work," *Scandinavian Journal of Work, Environment & Health* 48, no. 3 (March 15, 2022): 169–72.

87 Lincoln-Superuser, "Urban Spatial Patterns and Infrastructure in Beijing," *Lincoln Institute of Land Policy*, September 22, 2016, <https://www.lincolnst.edu/publications/articles/urban-spatial-patterns-infrastructure-beijing/>.

88 Lincoln-Superuser, "Urban Spatial Patterns and Infrastructure in Beijing," *Lincoln Institute of Land Policy*, September 22, 2016.

89 Dabla-Norris, Era. "A 'New Deal' for Informal Workers in Asia." International Monetary Fund, April 30, 2020. <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2020/04/30/blog043020-a-new-deal-for-informal-workers-in-asia>.

90 Marcela Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.wiego.org/our-work-impact/themes/inclusive-cities-and-urban-informal-economy>.

91 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

92 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

93 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

94 Michael Taylor, "Cheap and Cheerful: Street Traders Undervalued in Asia's Cities," *Reuters*, accessed July 29, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-asia-cities-economy-vendors/cheap-and-cheerful-street-traders-undervalued-in-asias-cities-idUSKBN1HR0CW/>.

may not be willing to spend large amounts of money on home-cooked meals.⁹⁵ The ability of these workers to contribute to the maintenance of cultural heritage is key to this issue. The informal worker ultimately links ancient eras and the modern, global age. Their work allows their countries to avoid being culturally erased by the globalization, modernization, and influence of bigger economies.

Preserving aspects of their work is relevant for many reasons. Gaining a deep understanding of culture and heritage can help humans better understand their present problems and future. It allows groups to celebrate their differences and prevent an unnecessary homogenization of the world. In large part due to elitist city planning, informal workers have been pushed out of urban areas.⁹⁶ A large focus on large enterprises and businesses has reduced the amount of influence these informal workers can exert.⁹⁷ And despite being the most needed in poverty-stricken areas, these informal workers face the most struggles in such territories.⁹⁸ From getting permits to sell their food to being forced out by law enforcement, these individuals find it hard to thrive in their businesses properly.

Street vendors are often the most accessible source of low-cost goods and services to poor city residents, and the dangers they face prevent many individuals from meeting their needs.⁹⁹ The key to this issue is ultimately keeping a wide array of individuals in mind during city planning. Exclusively paying attention to either group of people (informal or formal workers) may result in problems for cities as a whole.¹⁰⁰ Another key output of these informal workers is agriculture.¹⁰¹ In rural areas, agriculture is the sector with the highest share of informal employment.¹⁰² These percentages are especially high in agricultural and developing countries like Lao PDR,

Myanmar, and Vietnam.¹⁰³

Agriculture is an especially valuable output of informal labor. Agriculture is largely informal because it is conducted by family farms that often do not report their business activities. The goods these people produce are key for society to function. The food that they provide serves as the backbone for the entire world.

Even though informal workers primarily serve poorer communities, this does not reduce their impact. In the Asia-Pacific region, informal output is approximately 30 percent of GDP on average in 2010-2016.¹⁰⁴ Yet, over the past two decades, informality has declined as a result of sustained growth, industrialization, and urbanization.¹⁰⁵ Urbanization is tied with a decline in informal work as manufacturing tends to have significantly stricter regulations than typical service jobs.¹⁰⁶ This is not to say that one work style is inherently better. They are simply competing entities that should be considered.

When looking at individuals who have completed post-secondary education, there is a 59 percent decrease in the number of informal workers.¹⁰⁷ Looking at a country like Malaysia can tell us a great deal about this relationship. Malaysia is among the countries with the greatest investment in human capital and the lowest share of informal employment in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁰⁸ The total percent has declined from 38.4 percent in 2012 to 26.8 percent in 2022.¹⁰⁹ This also illustrates the long time horizon of this issue. Much of the problems surrounding informal work require system changes over decades.

Another major context relevant to informal work is the

95 Taylor, "Cheap and Cheerful: Street Traders Undervalued in Asia's Cities," *Reuters*.

96 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

97 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

98 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

99 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

100 Valdivia et al., "Inclusive Cities and the Urban Informal Economy," *WIEGO*.

101 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

102 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

103 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

104 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

105 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

106 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

107 International Labour Organization, "More than 68 per Cent of the Employed Population in Asia-Pacific Are in the Informal Economy," February 1, 2024.

108 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

109 Yashodhan Ghorpade et al., *Informal Employment in Malaysia* (World Bank, 2024), <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099022124104015011/pdf/P1810931e836170db184871b5fe7b37157c.pdf>.

presence of high taxes and stringent labor regulations. In the Asia-Pacific region, weak institutions and excessive rules increase informal labor because workers find it hard to get formal employment. These weaker systems are usually coupled with national and household poverty. Since many informal workers are in poverty, they are often mistakenly tied to crime.

The value that informal workers provide to society cannot be understated. These individuals contribute significantly to progress through cultural preservation, agriculture, or support for struggling communities. However, in many cases, informal work is tied to signs of a struggling economy and a lack of progress. As such, we, as a committee, must examine the delicate balance between these two opposing ideas. A goal to keep in mind is the desire for communities to prosper in the short and long term. This means that implemented policies should consider protection and long-term community development visions.

Challenges faced by vulnerable populations of Informal Workers

Informal work often causes negative outcomes for vulnerable populations.¹¹⁰ Women, children, and persons with disabilities are especially affected. Child labor is widespread in the Asia-Pacific region. An estimated 122 million children aged 5-14 years work just to make ends meet for their families.¹¹¹ As a result of poverty, many children are forced into early forms of work. This economic pressure can cause many to drop out of school, with over 50 million in Asia alone.¹¹² This accounts for over 75 percent of the total number of child workers.¹¹³

In some of the most affected areas, like South Asia, countries have actually taken large steps to outlaw child labor and place heavy restrictions.¹¹⁴ However, the fact that there exist so many child laborers suggests that these policies have massive deficiencies.¹¹⁵ The lack of follow-ups, adequate punishments for perpetrators, and numerous ambiguities make the ratification of International Labour Organization (ILO) agreements largely meaningless in practice.¹¹⁶ So, many of these child workers are considered to be “informal” components of the economy.

Child labor in the Asia-Pacific region has many negative consequences. Medical researchers have studied children’s vulnerability in working environments extensively. They have found that child labor is often associated with numerous negative health outcomes.¹¹⁷ Children are at a much higher risk of malnutrition, infection disease, and behavioral/emotional disorders.¹¹⁸ These results in a much higher likelihood of becoming a victim of sexual abuse and human trafficking.¹¹⁹

Considering that many child laborers are forced to work to support their families, they may be lured by scheming individuals. This positions them at a much greater risk of violence. The long-term consequences of child labor are massive. Millions of children, who are the future of a country, fail to develop meaningful skills. Rather than becoming educated and productive, they are drawn to menial tasks.

Most child laborers are found in rural areas.¹²⁰ This is because in cities, regulations regarding child work are monitored more carefully.¹²¹ In rural areas, specifically in agriculture, keeping

110 Abdalla Ibrahim et al., “Child Labor and Health: A Systematic Literature Review of the Impacts of Child Labor on Child’s Health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries,” *Journal of Public Health* 41, no. 1 (February 2, 2018): 18–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/ffy018>.

111 “Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific,” *International Labour Organization*, January 28, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/asia-and-pacific-deprecated/ilo-asia-and-pacific/areas-work/child-labour-asia-and-pacific>.

112 International Labour Organization, “Child Labor in South Asia,” *International Labour Organization*, August 19, 2014, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/child-labour-south-asia>.

113 “Child Labour Is Keeping Millions of Children out of School,” *International Partnerships*, accessed July 30, 2024, https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/news-and-events/stories/child-labour-keeping-millions-children-out-school_en.

114 “Development of Child Labour Laws in South Asia,” *PROPHETS OF PROFIT*, February 23, 2023, <https://arthagyaipcw.wordpress.com/2023/02/23/development-of-child-labour-laws-in-south-asia/>.

115 PROPHETS OF PROFIT, “Development of Child Labour Laws in South Asia,” February 23, 2023.

116 PROPHETS OF PROFIT, “Development of Child Labour Laws in South Asia,” February 23, 2023.

117 Ibrahim et al., “Child Labor and Health: A Systematic Literature Review of the Impacts of Child Labor on Child’s Health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries,” *Journal of Public Health* 41, no. 1 (February 2, 2018): 18–26.

118 Ibrahim et al., “Child Labor and Health: A Systematic Literature Review of the Impacts of Child Labor on Child’s Health in Low- and Middle-Income Countries,” *Journal of Public Health* 41, no. 1 (February 2, 2018): 18–26.

119 International Labour Organization, “Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific,” January 28, 2024.

120 Dutt, Ashok K. *The Asian City: Processes of development, characteristics, and planning*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994.

121 “Development of Child Labour Laws in South Asia.” PROPHETS OF PROFIT, February 23, 2023. <https://arthagyaipcw.wordpress.com/2023/02/23/development-of-child-labour-laws-in-south-asia/>.



Tachileik, Myanmar: Woman working at her loom.
 Credit: CEphoto, Uwe Aranas

track of child labor is much harder. This positions them mainly in the agricultural and service industries.¹²² Those workers in more urban areas are often not taken into account in the census and other surveys.¹²³ Extracting relevant figures and information is necessary to tackle this issue, so this lack of information must be addressed as a committee.

The ILO has engaged in numerous efforts to tackle these issues. They are mainly involved with Education for All (EFA) initiatives to ensure compulsory education until the minimum employment age.¹²⁴ However, the problem that the organization has failed to deal with adequately is the sheer level of poverty from which many of these child workers are operating. In most cases, they are not working out of desire but out of necessity. As such, this issue is largely tied to the economic status of countries and individuals. For example, in Cambodia, 17.8 percent of the population lives in poverty, and their child labor rates go up to 45 percent.^{125,126} In Vietnam,

4.2 percent live in poverty, and the percentage of children involved in child labor is around 9.5 percent.¹²⁷ These statistics show how child labor is related to poverty. When the poverty rates are higher, children are left with no choice but to work to support and help their families, and the child labor rates increase, too. The failure to offer alternatives to many of these children in extreme poverty is the root cause for many of the failed past efforts.

In most cases, women tend to make up the majority of informal workers in the Asia-Pacific region.¹²⁸ When looking at South Asia, for example, we can see that over 80 percent of women in non-agricultural jobs are in informal employment.¹²⁹ In seeing such statistics, delegates should consider whether this is a result of women simply being predisposed to seeking out these jobs or whether it is a result of systemic oppression within these parts of the world. Adverse working conditions are also overwhelmingly prevalent among women in the informal

122 Ashok K. Dutt, *The Asian City: Processes of Development, Characteristics, and Planning* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994), <https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=zjASWo54WKgC&printsec=frontcover>.

123 Dutt, *The Asian City: Processes of Development, Characteristics, and Planning* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1994).

124 International Labour Organization, "Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific," January 28, 2024.

125 Van, "Cambodia: Poverty." Asian Development Bank, May 3, 2024. <https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/cambodia/poverty>.

126 Humanium, "Children of Cambodia - Humanium," April 3, 2019. <https://www.humanium.org/en/cambodia/>.

127 Ralph, "Viet Nam: Poverty." Asian Development Bank, May 3, 2024. <https://www.adb.org/where-we-work/viet-nam/poverty>; Giang, Long Thanh, Van Tuong Nguyen, and Tue Dang Nguyen. "Child Labor in Vietnam: Issues and Policy Implications." *Children and Youth Services Review* 130 (November 1, 2021): 106222. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2021.106222>.

128 UN Women, "Women in Informal Economy," Accessed July 30, 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/women-in-informal-economy>.

129 UN Women, "Women in Informal Economy."

economy.¹³⁰ Women are often without protection from labor laws, social benefits, and health insurance, which all contribute to lower standards of living later in life.¹³¹ The Philippines can serve as an example of this issue. Under the social security scheme, the amount of female old-age beneficiaries is nearly half that of men (29 percent versus 53 percent).¹³²

The above issue should be carefully examined in the Asia-Pacific region. Since women tend to have longer life expectancies than men, the majority of the elder communities in regions like Southeast Asia are female.¹³³ It is globally observed that elderly populations tend to engage in higher rates of informal work.¹³⁴ There are a diverse set of reasons for these people. For some, it is an economic necessity, and for others, it may be personal preference¹³⁵ However, for many more, it is simply the presence of preexisting gendered inequalities.¹³⁶

In old age, it has been found that these women tend to face more significant difficulties than their male counterparts.¹³⁷ This is largely due to difficulties finding formal jobs due to age and a lack of old-age income security.¹³⁸ These women also come face to face with discrimination in the form of ageism, lower income, poor working conditions, and general exploitation.¹³⁹ Older workers, both men and women, have limited opportunities because employers tend to focus retraining and redeployment schemes on younger people.¹⁴⁰ This has the unintended consequence of causing greater numbers of older workers to seek out informal employment.

Persons with disabilities in the Asia-Pacific region are often concentrated in the informal economy with minimal to no protection nets available.¹⁴¹ Since many of these individuals live in rural areas, their potential to contribute to the economy has largely been untapped for much of the region. These

individuals, in many cases, take this work out of necessity. Due to discrimination in the workplace, it is difficult for these people to find alternative forms of work.

In the Asia-Pacific region, around 15 percent of the entire population live with a disability.¹⁴² This is a sizable portion of the population, and policy decisions can impact hundreds of millions of people. Some of the main limitors to the success of these groups of people include discriminatory practices as well as inaccessible environments.¹⁴³ One common example of this is the tendency to prefer younger workers because of their potential to stick with a company for much longer. However, this is often unfairly preventing elders from entering the formal workplace. The consequences of such practices are massive. They result in a lower standard of living for many people and individuals are unable to secure “decent work” for themselves and their families.

Individual companies have made much of the progress toward incorporating persons with disabilities. Companies like Accenture, IBM, and Allegis Group India have been particularly successful in ensuring that they maintain equality in the employment process. Countries could look into the progress that these companies have made. Tapping into these persons with disabilities could serve as a meaningful tool for growth.

Through these quick case studies into children, women, elderly populations, and persons with disabilities in the informal sector, we have been able to uncover some of the long-standing issues that have caused these vulnerable groups to remain in poor conditions. In many cases, it is not the informal work itself that is the problem. Rather, the informal work is tied to long-standing social issues within the Asia-Pacific region.

130 UN Women, “Women in Informal Economy.”

131 UN Women, “Women in Informal Economy.”

132 Laura Alfery and Aura Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy,” *The ASEAN Magazine*, September 9, 2022, <https://theaseanmagazine.asean.org/article/older-women-workers-in-southeast-asias-informal-economy/>.

133 Alfery and Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

134 Alfery and Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

135 Alfery and Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

136 Alfery and Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

137 Alfery and Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

138 Alfery and Sevilla, “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

139 Sharon L. Gorman, et al. “Development and Validation of the Function in Sitting Test in Adults with Acute Stroke.”

140 Alfery, Laura, and Aura Sevilla. “Older Women Workers in Southeast Asia’s Informal Economy.”

141 International Labour Organization, “Employability: Tapping the Potential of Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific,” April 18, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/publications/employability-tapping-potential-persons-disabilities-asia-and-pacific>.

142 International Labour Organization, “Employability: Tapping the Potential of Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.”

143 International Labour Organization, “Employability: Tapping the Potential of Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific.”

As mentioned earlier, this could include ableism, sexism, or racism. Addressing these will be key to ensuring the rights of these vulnerable groups of people. Delegates should look beyond just these examples of vulnerable communities and look into addressing many aspects of struggles faced by workers.

Policy Response to Informal Workers

Government and policy responses to informal workers are key for their preservation. The lack of meaningful policies in place causes many of the issues these people face. A lack of care in protection and recognition is central to the issue. Meaningful policy creation would involve allowing for better recognition of these individuals. Policies that would allow for these types of workers to avoid being in vulnerable situations such as falling into debt and poverty or health related-issues like high risk of infections.¹⁴⁴

Countries across the Asia-Pacific region continue to put forth policies that pose negative effects on informal workers.¹⁴⁵ This may include poorer mental/physical health or greater financial risk. We can look no further than The Convention on Domestic Workers. This convention took place during the 189th International Labor Organization meeting.¹⁴⁶ The goal of this meeting was to establish “decent work” for all domestic workers.¹⁴⁷ However, out of the 51 countries in the Asia-Pacific region, only the Philippines ratified the document.¹⁴⁸ The overwhelming majority of the region failed to commit

themselves to maintaining this level of protection for their workers. This document is relevant because nearly all informal workers are classified as domestic workers. So, the governments are basically refusing basic rights to informal workers.

Workers in the region also tend not to have any major legal protections from employers.¹⁴⁹ The vast majority of domestic workers do not have legal limits on working time (around 71 percent), nor do they have the right to have weekly rest (around 64 percent).¹⁵⁰

Many of these issues are posturized by Bangladesh’s textile industry. Bangladesh’s garment exports are worth nearly USD 42.613 billion, making it the second-largest clothing exporter in the world.¹⁵¹ Informal workers do a large portion of this labor. The Rana Plaza factory is an example of a large garment factory in Bangladesh. Its collapse in 2013 is considered the worst institutional failure in the garment industry.¹⁵² In April 2013, workers were forced to work in the building despite its many structural problems.¹⁵³ As a result, the building collapsed and killed over a thousand workers.¹⁵⁴ Managerial pressure was the root cause. Management forced these workers to work in harsh conditions, ultimately causing the massive tragedy.¹⁵⁵ Safety measures and standards for health were also missing.

Ever since the Rana Plaza factory collapse in 2013, Bangladesh’s government has enacted greater inspection and accountability standards for factories.¹⁵⁶ One example of this is better and safer working standards.¹⁵⁷ The government has also implemented

144 WIEGO. “Informal Workers in Southeast Asia: Resourceless, yet Resourceful,” November 22, 2021. <https://www.wiego.org/blog/informal-workers-southeast-asia-resourceless-yet-resourceful>

145 “Informality and Exclusion from Labour Laws Remain Barriers to Decent Work for Asia Pacific Domestic Workers,” *International Labour Organization*, April 19, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/news/informality-and-exclusion-labour-laws-remain-barriers-decent-work-asia>.

146 “C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189),” *International Labor Organization*, accessed July 30, 2024, https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/?p=NORMLEXPUB%3A12100%3A0%3A%3ANO%3A%3AP12100_ILO_CODE%3AC189.

147 International Labour Organization, “C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189),”.

148 International Labour Organization, “C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189),”.

149 International Labour Organization, “Informality and Exclusion from Labour Laws Remain Barriers to Decent Work for Asia Pacific Domestic Workers,” April 19, 2024.

150 International Labour Organization, “Informality and Exclusion from Labour Laws Remain Barriers to Decent Work for Asia Pacific Domestic Workers,” April 19, 2024.

151 “Export Promotion Bureau,” *Export Promotion Bureau-Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*, accessed July 30, 2024, https://epb.gov.bd/site/view/epb_export_data/-.

152 Clean Clothes Campaign, “Rana Plaza,” March 28, 2024.

153 Clean Clothes Campaign, “Rana Plaza,” March 28, 2024.

154 Clean Clothes Campaign, “Rana Plaza,” March 28, 2024.

155 Clean Clothes Campaign, “Rana Plaza,” March 28, 2024.

156 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

157 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

checks and balances on management procedures.¹⁵⁸ These workers often reap minimal benefits from their work.¹⁵⁹

This is because they are largely not recognized as targets for assistance. Governments also fail to check their employers as the employment is not recognized. So, many of these programs do not apply to workers in the informal clothing sector.¹⁶⁰ Without maintaining the same standards for these “other” businesses, the government leaves informal workers isolated.¹⁶¹ Many individuals work long hours beyond legal limits.¹⁶² Others are forced to endure harsh and unsafe working environments.¹⁶³ A study by the University of Chicago suggests that a large part of the issue comes from a lack of consumer visibility into supply chains and production.¹⁶⁴

Bangladesh’s situation is not isolated. Many countries in the Asia-Pacific region have created broad policies to help the general worker. But they repeatedly miss the informal sector. This is not to say that all countries have failed in their efforts.

Thailand has attempted to solve this issue by offering cash transfers of up to USD 153 for over 10 million farmers and 16 million workers not covered by social security.¹⁶⁵ The government set up a cash-less digital platform to facilitate this transfer called PromptPay.¹⁶⁶ This form of emergency support is also seen in Vietnam, where forms of cash transfers have become available following various adverse shocks.¹⁶⁷ Emergency cash assistance is particularly valuable for these individuals navigating social problems and unfavorable business cycles. When workers cannot support themselves, this cash is extremely useful. It offers a buffer for short-term relief. It allows individuals to meet basic food and consumption needs when business operations are halted.

Other countries seek to pull individuals out of the informal economy by reducing barriers to entry into formal employment.¹⁶⁸ Indonesia, Bangladesh, and China have taken steps to “cut red tape” or remove bureaucratic obstacles to

158 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

159 Export Promotion Bureau, “Export Promotion Bureau,” *Export Promotion Bureau-Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh*.

160 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

161 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

162 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

163 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

164 Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, “Supporting Informal RMG Workers in Bangladesh.”

165 Era Dabla-Norris, “A ‘New Deal’ for Informal Workers in Asia,” *International Monetary Fund*, April 30, 2020, <https://www.imf.org/en/Blogs/Articles/2020/04/30/blog043020-a-new-deal-for-informal-workers-in-asia>.

166 “PromptPay,” *Bank of Thailand*, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://www.bot.or.th/en/financial-innovation/digital-finance/digital-payment/promptpay.html>.

167 Dabla-Norris, “A ‘New Deal’ for Informal Workers in Asia,” *International Monetary Fund*, April 30, 2020.

168 Simon Roughneen, “Asian Countries Seek to Pull Millions out of Informal Economy,” *Nikkei Asia*, January 20, 2019, <https://asia>.

Ajay Maken, an Indian politician, addressing the National Convention of Informal Workers

Credit: Indian Government



employment.¹⁶⁹ This comes in the form of simplifying business processes. It also involves reducing the paperwork needed for work registration.¹⁷⁰

Another fruitful venture has been supporting microenterprises.¹⁷¹ Malaysia has made massive strides in providing resources for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) as they are the backbone of the country's economy.¹⁷² An SME refers to businesses with under 250 people.¹⁷³ They make up over 97 percent of businesses in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁷⁴ Allowing greater recognition and ease of access is key to their success. Malaysia has allowed thousands to join this formal employment system. Enabling individuals to create these enterprises and operate legally massively reduces the number of informal workers. Some examples of legalized SMEs may be small family agricultural firms. As long as firms do not turn over RM 50 million, they can qualify as an SME.¹⁷⁵ This approach is an easy way to facilitate the migration from informal to formal work as workers preserve their original lifestyle largely unchanged. Under the Ministry of Economy, Malaysia has created interventions/initiatives in partnership with various local banks to finance local progress.¹⁷⁶ Whether it be in direct advisory or financial assistance, these forms of aid have contributed greatly to small businesses that often have less than five workers conducting operations.¹⁷⁷

On a more regional scale, the World Bank suggests a tailored approach to policy.¹⁷⁸ Higher-income countries should prioritize social protection of informal workers.¹⁷⁹ Lower-

income countries should focus on reforms to increase productivity.¹⁸⁰ Social protection is specifically relevant to the protection of workers from adverse shocks. These shocks unexpectedly disturb daily activities.¹⁸¹ Economists have reasoned that during periods of financial crisis (an example of an adverse shock), labor markets tend to become more dominated by informal work.¹⁸² Econometric simulations suggest that this greater allocation of resources in the informal market is a "crisis amplifier" for the official economy.¹⁸³ This is because it contracts the labor market and available employees. However, this is not to say that the informal workers are a net negative. When workers are unable to support themselves by traditional means, informal work acts like a safety net.¹⁸⁴ The cyclical nature of the movement between informal/formal employment requires careful policy decisions. The World Bank argues for policy response based on the cause of the co-movement between informal/formal employment and generally taking a hands-off approach to policy.¹⁸⁵ Policy decisions must keep in mind the finding that although informal work can act as a safety net in the short term, in the long run, it is often more indicative of poverty and social distress.¹⁸⁶ As established earlier, countries like Vietnam offer short-term assistance. They seek to assist these individuals through direct cash payments. However, a country like China focuses more on the long-term industrial development.

Reforms to urban planning are also seen as a keyway to address the concerns of informal workers.¹⁸⁷ Through uniform systems

nikkei.com/Economy/Asian-countries-seek-to-pull-millions-out-of-informal-economy.

169 Roughneen, "Asian Countries Seek to Pull Millions out of Informal Economy," *Nikkei Asia*, January 20, 2019.

170 Roughneen, "Asian Countries Seek to Pull Millions out of Informal Economy," *Nikkei Asia*, January 20, 2019.

171 "A Guide for SMEs in Malaysia to Government Grants and Financing Programmes," *SYNC*, March 29, 2024, <https://syncpr.co/2024/02/29/grants-and-finance-aids-for-smes-in-malaysia/>.

172 *SYNC*, "A Guide for SMEs in Malaysia to Government Grants and Financing Programmes," March 29, 2024.

173 "SME Definition," *Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs*, accessed July 30, 2024, https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/sme-fundamentals/sme-definition_en.

174 "Building SME Resilience in Asia," *Insurance and Risk Finance Facility*, accessed July 30, 2024, <https://irff.undp.org/events/building-sme-resilience-asia>.

175 Insurance and Risk Finance Facility, "Building SME Resilience in Asia,"

176 "Korporat." TERAJU. Accessed July 30, 2024. <https://www.teraju.gov.my/inisiatif>.

177 Dabla-Norris, Era. "A 'New Deal' for Informal Workers in Asia."

178 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

179 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

180 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

181 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

182 Colombo, Menna, and Tirelli, "Informality and the Labor Market Effects of Financial Crises."

183 Colombo, Menna, and Tirelli, "Informality and the Labor Market Effects of Financial Crises."

184 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects*, January 2019.

185 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects*, January 2019.

186 Frédéric Docquier, Tobias Müller, and Joaquín Naval, "Informality and Long-Run Growth," *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2014, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2381135>.

187 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

and accessible resources, disadvantaged communities are largely able to overcome systemic barriers.¹⁸⁸ These barriers may include harsh compliance requirements or lack of education. An example of a successful urban planning project is Beijing, China. The city has been carefully crafted for greater space and accessibility.¹⁸⁹ This is correlated with the double-digit growth in its GDP in the past decade and increased government revenue.¹⁹⁰

To the end of increasing productivity, countries have considered promoting the growth of small enterprises. Countries like China and Vietnam saw a great increase in the number of micro-enterprises, family enterprises, and family entrepreneurs in the 1970s.¹⁹¹ Lowering barriers to entry for these businesses has been especially successful in China. However, in countries like Indonesia, firms tend to be very small (less than five employees).¹⁹² They also tend to avoid expansion and stick to smaller, local markets.¹⁹³

These policies above show the failure of legislation to unify standards. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to this problem. However, what has been successful is individualized country policy. This approach better takes into context individual region history and social/cultural beliefs.

Current Status

COVID-19 and Informal Work

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on global economies. However, these developments have particularly impacted informal work in the Asia-Pacific region. The pandemic also revealed many of the vulnerabilities faced

by informal workers. Those realizations motivated much of the change that countries in the region have witnessed in the past few years.

The implications of COVID-19 on the informal sector were massive. In just Southeast and South Asia, more than 1.6 billion informal workers, as estimated by the UN, were impacted by various lockdown measures.¹⁹⁴ In the Asian and Pacific region, 73 percent of informal workers were significantly impacted by the measures.¹⁹⁵ Most of the informal work could not be done remotely; therefore, many faced the dilemma of “dying from hunger or the virus.” This has the effect of putting informal workers in an extremely vulnerable position. COVID-19 risked their livelihood and increased the inequalities that existed before the pandemic. It also exposed and aggravated the conditions of poor employment, shelter, and social welfare services. Because these individuals are not officially recognized to be in the workforce, they were offered very little to no economic or humanitarian assistance.¹⁹⁶ For example, in Thailand, more than one million informal and migrant workers were excluded from state protection while trying to get back to their countries because of mobility restrictions.¹⁹⁷

This can tell a lot about these individuals’ situation within the informal economy. These informal workers have been taken advantage of for many years. Estimates indicate that in the South/Southeast regions of Asia, more than 50 percent of the labor force relies upon the informal sector.¹⁹⁸ They can often serve as the backbone of many different communities. Informal workers tend to offer many affordable dining and service options for communities in the Asia-Pacific region. Beyond this, they are responsible for preserving major aspects of culture in their respective communities. In addition, the

188 World Bank Group, *Global Economic Prospects: Darkening skies*.

189 Lincoln-Superuser, “Urban Spatial Patterns and Infrastructure in Beijing,” *Lincoln Institute of Land Policy*, September 22, 2016.

190 Lincoln-Superuser, “Urban Spatial Patterns and Infrastructure in Beijing,” *Lincoln Institute of Land Policy*, September 22, 2016.

191 Albert Park, Yaowu Wu, and Yang Du, *Informal Employment in Urban China* (July 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1596/27218>.

192 Alexander D. Rothenberg et al., “Rethinking Indonesia’s Informal Sector,” *World Development* 80 (April 2016): 96–113, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2015.11.005>.

193 Rothenberg et al., “Rethinking Indonesia’s Informal Sector,” *World Development* 80 (April 2016): 96–113.

194 *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work. Third Edition Updated Estimates and Analysis* (Geneva: International Labor Organization, April 2020), https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@dgreports/@dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_743146.pdf.

195 *Impact of lockdown measures on the informal economy* (Geneva: International Labor Organization, May 2020), <https://www.ilo.org/media/9736/download>.

196 Murray Mckenzie, Do Young Oh, and Hyun Bang Shin, *Southeast Asia: Insights for a post-pandemic world* (London: LSE Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.31389/lsepress.cov.a>.

197 Mckenzie, Young Oh, and Bang Shin, *Southeast Asia: Insights for a post-pandemic world*.

198 Ali, S. Harris, Creighton Connolly, and Roger Keil, *Pandemic urbanism: Infectious diseases on a planet of cities*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2023, <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/Pandemic+Urbanism%3A+Infectious+Diseases+on+a+Planet+of+Cities-p-9781509549856>.

intersection between other causes of vulnerability (race, gender, ethnicity, class, and age) contributed further to problems faced by these communities.¹⁹⁹

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many governments began an accelerated digital transformation.²⁰⁰ The need to track different health statistics, like the transfer of the COVID-19 virus, allowed for greater technological tools available to countries.²⁰¹ This left many resources available to governments to help improve communities in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, further documentation of individuals allowed for a greater understanding of the informal economy. To preserve individual health and safety, governments were able to diagnose better the issues facing their countries. For example, Indonesia positively affected informal workers after digitalizing different public services, such as social security. In addition, digitalization can significantly increase the formalization of the informal sector.²⁰²

However, a relevant concern is the security of information as well as the extent to which governments should interfere with individuals. Delegates in this committee should consider the balance between appropriate government information surveillance and personal privacy. Keeping this in mind, it becomes clear that there is not a one-size fits all approach to using government power. The rights of informal workers must be protected, but this should not come at the expense of mass personal privacy infringements.

For example, COVID-19 in the Philippines implied the rise of authoritarian governance and human rights violations. Philippines' President Rodrigo Duterte threatened to murder lockdown violators. Therefore, civilian killings increased by over 50 percent during the COVID-19 lockdown.²⁰³ Informal workers were at greater risk, as many depended on going out

to work to earn income.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to numerous policy responses that have sustained progress for many informal workers. One way that governments have been able to make this progress is by expanding existing social assistance programs. This may range from social welfare programs to direct cash transfers to needy individuals.

Nepal is an example of a country that has been successful in such efforts. During the height of the pandemic, the country chose to offer numerous digital cash assistance programs to communities unable to continue work.²⁰⁴ The program operated in coordination with UNICEF, and families were able to scan QR codes via their mobile phones to claim the cash (approximately NRs. 10,000).²⁰⁵

Before this, many countries would write down the names of people to distribute the cash to on paper - a very tiresome process.²⁰⁶ In this case, it is clear to see how COVID-19 needed governments to take immediate action. Using this new distribution system, the resources could reach greater numbers. This method allowed a greater proportion of the informal workforce to be supported.

Nepal has continued to expand on this progress. The COVID-19 support was not just a one-off transfer of money. The government has learned from the effects of the pandemic and has taken measures to safeguard the informal workforce better.

Having learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2022, the government implemented many cash-relief measures to support workers and vulnerable people in the upcoming monsoon season.²⁰⁷ Through pre-loaded debit cards and other

199 Redento Recio, et al., "The COVID Cost for Asia's Informal Workers," Pursuit, The University of Melbourne, June 30, 2023, <https://pursuit.unimelb.edu.au/articles/the-covid-cost-for-asia-s-informal-workers>.

200 Redento Recio, et al., "The COVID Cost for Asia's Informal Workers."

201 Redento Recio, et al., "The COVID Cost for Asia's Informal Workers."

202 Suryo Adi Rakhmawan, "Digital Transformation of Informal Workers in the New Normal Era: "Can It Be the Solution We Are Searching For?" East Java Economic Journal 6 no. 2, (September 2022), 182-207, <https://doi.org/10.53572/ejavec.v6i2.87>.

203 "World Report 2021: Rights Trends in Philippines," Human Rights Watch, January 13, 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/philippines>.

204 "A Digital Solution for Emergency Cash Transfers," UNICEF, March 22, 2023. <https://www.unicef.org/nepal/stories/digital-solution-emergency-cash-transfers>.

205 "A Digital Solution for Emergency Cash Transfers," UNICEF, March 22, 2023.

206 "A Digital Solution for Emergency Cash Transfers," UNICEF, March 22, 2023.

207 Sivanu, Sajjanika, Sayanti Sengupta, and Alina Karki., "Implementing Cash Transfers through Social Protection in Nepal – Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre," Climate Centre, July 3, 2022, <https://www.climatecentre.org/7966/implementing-cash-transfers-through->

similar efforts, the country was able to learn how to leverage these cash tools best to protect civilians. The Nepal Red Cross Society (NCRS) has been at the center of much of this progress.²⁰⁸ In addition, large portions of the funds came from groups like the European Union.²⁰⁹ This reveals the global scale of many of the problems faced by countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Many of these regions cannot solve the issues at hand on their own for a host of reasons. Whether it be poor governance, embezzlement, fraud, lack of resources, or something else, cooperation is key for ensuring the well-being of the informal worker.

Delegates should consider that this approach, though effective, could be better. Universal cash transfers, although extremely effective, are costly. Many countries simply still need the bandwidth to support such measures. This results from much of the Asia-Pacific region developing their economies and identities. As such, transferring such large amounts of money may be irresponsible for long-term progress. However, certain countries have the resources to make such commitments and may even have the resources to support the broader region.

In addition, previous sentiments about Asia's magnitude should also be considered here. The impact of COVID-19 on the Philippines may be greatly different from the impact on China. Such nuances should be considered to gain a better understanding of the Asia-Pacific region.

Digital technologies like India's Aadhar system are key in this methodology. Ensuring that everyone can get access to help is the best way to protect informal workers. The Aadhar system is the world's largest biometric system for identifying individuals.²¹⁰ Such programs are not feasible for all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The Aadhar system requires ten fingerprints, two iris scans, and a facial photograph.²¹¹ This system can scale up during a crisis and offer more resources to

vulnerable groups.²¹²

The general wisdom on how to approach the issue after the COVID-19 pandemic has centered on expanding programs and ensuring the basic needs of informal workers. Countries in developing regions of Asia should look for new ways to fund these programs. In addition, setting up more expansive safety nets is key to protecting informal workers.

It is also clear that technology has a key intersection with this COVID-19 issue. The availability of digital resources and online facilities greatly reduces the difficulties of supporting many informal workers. But as mentioned above, they are also associated with reducing certain jobs. It is clear that the informal work issue cannot be reduced to simply one problem. Many issues are interlinked, where decisions regarding one may have long-lasting effects on the other.

However, there is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic helped reveal many of the systemic weaknesses within many of the Asia-Pacific countries. For that reason, many of the most recent developments in ensuring the rights of informal workers have even begun to take place. Once these groups of people, which large portions of society rely upon, suddenly cease to exist, action is necessary to preserve society. And from that action, much of the reforms of the early 2020s have been seen in the status of informal workers. It is thus in large part because of the COVID-19 pandemic, that this conversation even exists today.

Technology and its Effect on Informal Work

The Industrial Revolution changed the global economy and allowed certain countries and people to become very powerful. In the modern age, we are witnessing similar progress with Artificial Intelligence (AI). These new technologies might bring major changes to informal work.

social-protection-in-nepal/.

208 Sivanu, Sajanika, Sayanti Sengupta, and Alina Karki. "Implementing Cash Transfers through Social Protection in Nepal – Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre," Climate Centre, July 3, 2022, <https://www.climatecentre.org/7966/implementing-cash-transfers-through-social-protection-in-nepal/>.

209 Sivanu, Sajanika, Sayanti Sengupta, and Alina Karki, "Implementing Cash Transfers through Social Protection in Nepal – Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre."

210 "Security in UIDAI System - Unique Identification Authority of India: Government of India," Unique Identification Authority of India, Accessed August 6, 2024, <https://uidai.gov.in/en/my-aadhaar/about-your-aadhaar/security-in-uidai-system.html>.

211 Unique Identification Authority of India, "Security in UIDAI System - Unique Identification Authority of India: Government of India."

212 Unique Identification Authority of India, "Security in UIDAI System - Unique Identification Authority of India: Government of India."

Artificial intelligence is a part of computer science. It deals with creating systems to model human intelligence.²¹³ Although people have dreamed about AI for hundreds of years, it has only been recently that technology has caught up to human visions. In the 2010s, Deep Learning and Big Data became very popular. They are useful and key techniques/tools that engineers and businesses use for better production.

Many industries have adopted AI to greatly improve their productive output. Online stores like Amazon use AI to understand consumer preferences.²¹⁴ Other industries, like consulting and manufacturing, use AI to automate repetitive tasks and analyze data to make better decisions.²¹⁵ Since AI can do many human tasks faster and more efficiently, businesses can save both time and money. However, the future of work can be greatly affected by how artificial intelligence progresses. It is estimated that artificial intelligence will replace some 85 million jobs by 2025.²¹⁶ The general sentiment is not unanimous. By the mid-2030s, about 30 percent of jobs worldwide could be automatable.²¹⁷

While some think that the number of jobs created will outweigh those destroyed, others are more pessimistic about the future of the technology. Keeping up-to-date with the status of AI and the current developments will be key to understanding how much room businesses still have for growth, and how that might affect work.

The biggest concern surrounding the rise of AI is job displacement. Many workers are afraid that machines and AI systems may replace their livelihoods. This can be illustrated by looking at different manufacturing plants in China. UBTech,

a Chinese robotics company, has manufactured humanoid robots for an automobile company in production.²¹⁸ Although these technologies have been applied to companies that engage with formal work, their implications are massive. With technologies that can automate these menial tasks, many workers may be without jobs. Since informal workers tend to have limited education, transitioning to a new job may be more difficult. China has taken steps to address this concern. During China's 14th five-year plan meeting, it established a vocational training program for workers that would benefit over 75 million workers.²¹⁹ However, these efforts will be challenging and take time. In a country like China, these problems are not as pronounced as in other territories due to there being a smaller share of informal work (around 20 percent).²²⁰

In Bangladesh, where the informal work estimates reach over 89 percent of the working population, these problems are much more pronounced.²²¹ The textile industry is one of the biggest employers for informal workers.²²² Yet, through the creation of machines that can cut and sew fabric more efficiently than humans, many garment workers with no education are threatened.²²³ Like China, although Bangladesh has made efforts to retrain workers, the scale of the problem is much larger.²²⁴ Bangladesh has partnered with the ILO and the European Union to reach these ends.²²⁵ The problem persists due to the large number of informal workers. This reveals a key consideration for this topic. Some of the projects in certain countries work only because informal work is a small part of the broader economy. However, in others, that same stability is not present.

213 "What Is the History of Artificial Intelligence (AI)?" *Tableau*, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://www.tableau.com/data-insights/ai/history>.

214 "The State of AI in 2023: Generative AI's Breakout Year." McKinsey, August 1, 2023, <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai-in-2023-generative-ais-breakout-year>

215 "The State of AI in 2023: Generative AI's Breakout Year," McKinsey, August 1, 2023.

216 Mark Talmage-Rostron, "How Will Artificial Intelligence Affect Jobs 2024-2030," *Nexford University*, Januar 9, 2024, <https://www.nexford.edu/insights/how-will-ai-affect-jobs>.

217 Talmage-Rostron, "How Will Artificial Intelligence Affect Jobs 2024-2030."

218 Zhang Yiyi, "More Humanoid Robots Now Work on Auto Assembly Lines in China, Enhancing Efficiency," *Global Times*, (June 2024), <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202406/1313605.shtml>.

219 Gao, "China Boosts Training for Skilled Workers."

220 Gao, "China Boosts Training for Skilled Workers."

221 Asian Development Bank, *The Informal Sector and Informal Employment in Bangladesh*, Accessed August 13, 2024, <https://www.adb.org/publications/informal-sector-and-informal-employment-bangladesh>.

222 Asian Development Bank. *The Informal Sector and Informal Employment in Bangladesh*

223 Asian Development Bank. *The Informal Sector and Informal Employment in Bangladesh*

224 "A Boost to Skills Training in Bangladesh," International Labour Organization, August 25, 2021. <https://www.ilo.org/resource/boost-skills-training-bangladesh>

225 "A Boost to Skills Training in Bangladesh," International Labour Organization, August 25, 2021.

Generative AI refers to algorithms that can create new content.²²⁶ Recent breakthroughs by companies like OpenAI have opened the doors to major innovation.²²⁷ The creation of tools like ChatGPT and Dall-E has allowed individuals to take ideation to new heights. These technologies, though largely used by formal employment, do also have major implications for informal workers.

The Philippines is a well-known destination for outsourced office work.²²⁸ Outsourcing refers to companies hiring third parties to do corporate work.²²⁹ It is usually more profitable for foreign companies to engage in this practice than to hire domestic workers. This is because of a need for more regulation and lower expectations from foreign employees.²³⁰ The Philippines is typically home to major business processing outsourcing.²³¹ This refers to the outsourcing of individual tasks and entire business operations. This might involve something like data entry or customer service. Generative AI can remove millions of these jobs. This is because the technology can generate responses and complete tasks more accurately than many humans. Economists and government officials in the Philippines agree that something must be done to appropriately integrate these individuals into society.²³² A large part of this is the arms race between companies globally. The desire to outcompete and out leverage AI has been a key driver for these changes.²³³

The key point to note in these discussions is the competing interests of optimization and worker well-being. This committee will need to determine this balance. While it is relevant to continue producing output for communities as a whole, this does not mean that the individual well-being of informal workers should be sacrificed.

While AI and other technological developments eliminate certain jobs, they also create many others. Various forms of short-term and freelance work are on the rise because of online platforms. Smartphones and the internet became widespread in the Asia-Pacific region during the 2010s.²³⁴ Most of the region has slowly become reliant on these technologies.

In Southeast Asia, ride-hailing services like Go-Jek have been integral in engaging many members of the economy in new ways.²³⁵ The company has been able to sustain year-over-year growth and make large contributions to GDP.²³⁶ It helps contribute over USD 7 billion yearly to the economy.²³⁷ However, the conditions of these workers are not always the best. As they are considered independent contractors over employees, the informal workers tend to have little to no job security. Further, many workers have low incomes and low long-term stability.

Technology is also seen as a key tool for individual development. Many informal workers tend to be uneducated. This leads to them facing many problems when transitioning in and out of roles because their skills are often fit to only one position. And many countries are using technology and online resources to help support individuals. By offering free resources online, many people can uplift themselves into more formal employment. Considering the almost ubiquitous nature of the internet in the Asia-Pacific region in the modern age, these tools have been extremely effective.

Online education in India can serve as a case study of these developments. The creation of government initiatives like PMeVidya has been effective in offering digital/online/on-air education through radio/TV and the internet.²³⁸ However, this

226 "What Is Generative AI?," McKinsey & Company, April 2, 2024. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/mckinsey-explainers/what-is-generative-ai>.

227 "What Is Generative AI?" McKinsey & Company.

228 Soriano, Paul, "AI Tools Spark Anxiety among Philippines' Call Center Workers," Rest of World, July 17, 2023, <https://restofworld.org/2023/call-center-ai-philippines/>.

229 "What Is Job Outsourcing? Definition, Benefits and Examples," Indeed, September 8, 2023, <https://in.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/what-is-job-outsourcing>.

230 "What Is Job Outsourcing? Definition, Benefits and Examples."

231 Soriano, Paul, "AI Tools Spark Anxiety among Philippines' Call Center Workers."

232 Soriano, Paul, "AI Tools Spark Anxiety among Philippines' Call Center Workers."

233 Soriano, Paul, "AI Tools Spark Anxiety among Philippines' Call Center Workers."

234 "History of Internet in Singapore: From Niche Toy to Must Have Essential," GovTech, The Government of Singapore, <https://www.tech.gov.sg/media/technews/history-of-the-internet/>.

235 "Gojek Tech," Gojek, <https://www.gojek.io/about>.

236 "Gojek Tech," Gojek.

237 "Gojek Tech," Gojek.

238 "Digital Education Initiatives," Central Institute of Educational Technology, <https://ciet.ncert.gov.in/initiatives>.

initiative, and many others like it, tend to focus on offering resources to people of traditional schooling age.²³⁹ Expanding these resources to encompass other communities will be key for long-term success. This is because a large portion of the informal economy is not even encompassed by traditional schooling. Limiting offers of skill development may cause many to be overlooked.

Technology has many dimensions in the sphere of informal work. For some individuals, work may no longer be feasible. For others, modern technology can serve as a tool for optimizing productivity. Technology can impact informal workers in many ways, and this committee must consider how to best manage multiple competing interests.

Sustainable Development Goals

The UN sustainable development goals are a set of 17 goals set forth by the United Nations.²⁴⁰ All UN member states agreed in 2015 to share this blueprint for peace and prosperity by the year 2030.²⁴¹ Many goals are broad, including targets and indicators to achieve them—some of these range from eliminating poverty to bringing clean energy worldwide.

This topic can be related to the 8th SDG: bringing decent work and economic growth worldwide.²⁴² Over a billion informal workers exist in the Asia-Pacific region. “Decent work” is defined by the ILO as the opportunity to do productive work with a fair income, workplace safety, and social protection.²⁴³ Therefore, Asia and the Pacific must protect the informal workers so they can meet these goals by 2030. Some specific targets could guide the region, such as 8.8. This target aims to promote labor rights and safe working environments for

all workers.²⁴⁴ Other targets, such as 8.3 and their indicators, 8.3.1, also look to create policies that create and formalize decent jobs, therefore improving the conditions and reducing informal work.²⁴⁵

Much of this problem of informal work is tied to SDGs 1 and 4. SDG 1 refers to no poverty. Indicators like 1.3 aim to create appropriate social protection systems and measures for all.²⁴⁶ It is important as it is estimated that most of the informal workers lack social protection, which is 79 percent of the workforce in the region.²⁴⁷ Informal workers are vulnerable to many different social problems because of a lack of proper recognition and resources. Change must occur as long as this large portion of people does not have access to safe and “decent” work as defined by the ILO.

In addition, SDG 4 refers to quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all. Much of the informal working population is drawn to it by necessity, so individuals must take up gig work or other forms of informal labor to support their families.²⁴⁸ Many of these workers tend to be children; it is estimated that 122 million children aged 5-14 years are working in the region.²⁴⁹ Working interferes with them getting a quality education. In the long term, the lack of a quality education will reduce their chances of formal work and overcome poverty. The goals to eliminate poverty and provide quality education to individuals go hand-in-hand with informal workers. Poverty rates are directly proportional to informal workers, as well as low levels of education.

In addition, SDG 5, which aims for gender equality, can be related to informal workers. Informal workers are largely

239 “Digital Education Initiatives,” Central Institute of Educational Technology.

240 “The 17 Sustainable Development Goals.” United Nations, Accessed August 7, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>.

241 “The 17 Sustainable Development Goals.” United Nations.

242 “The 17 Sustainable Development Goals.” United Nations.

243 “Decent Work,” International Labour Organization, June 8, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/topics/decent-work>.

244 “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all - Targets and Indicators,” United Nations, accessed September 7, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal8>.

245 United Nations, “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all - Targets and Indicators.”

246 “End poverty in all its forms everywhere - Targets and Indicators,” United Nations, accessed September, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal1>.

247 Quynh Anh Nguyen, Andi Sanusi, Ipeei Tsuruga, Nuno Meira Simoes da Cunha, *How To Extend Social Protection To Workers In Informal Employment In The Asean Region* (Bangkok: International Labour Organization, 2019), https://www.ilo.org/sites/default/files/wcmsp5/groups/public/@asia/@ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_735508.pdf.

248 Aura Sevilla et al., “Links with Poverty,” WIEGO, accessed August 11, 2024, <https://www.wiego.org/informal-economy/poverty-growth-linkages/links-poverty>.

249 “Child Labour in Asia and the Pacific,” International Labour Organization, accessed September, 2024, <https://www.ilo.org/regions-and-countries/asia-and-pacific/child-labour-asia-and-pacific>.

women, and they face many problems by ancient patriarchal systems.²⁵⁰ Specifically, it can relate to target 5.4, which aims to recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work.²⁵¹ Women in Asia and the Pacific are estimated to work the longest hours globally. Women in the region work more than seven hours daily, but only three of those hours are paid.²⁵² Beyond this, women also face discrimination and sexual violence in the informal workplace.²⁵³ Ensuring the safety of women informal workers will be key to achieving this goal.

SDG 9, which deals with improving industry, innovation, and infrastructure, is also relevant to the topic of informal work. Informal work is largely born from a lack of sound infrastructure and industries.²⁵⁴ Specific targets like 9.2 aim to raise industry and formal work. Other targets, such as 9.3, look to formalize small and medium industries, improving and formalizing the conditions of workers. A lack of formal alternatives makes informal work way more attractive. Ensuring the proper development of human capital, physical infrastructures, and industry will be key in pulling people out of informal work.²⁵⁵

Finally, ensuring the development of strong institutions in SDG 16 is closely tied to implementing projects to benefit informal workers. Without strong governments, countries are largely unable to even diagnose issues surrounding informal work.²⁵⁶ Being unable to offer justice and service to these individuals is what leads many of them into poverty and poor living conditions. The failure of the government to offer resources is a key reason for much of the suffering faced by these people.²⁵⁷ Ensuring institutions are properly developed will help prevent further catastrophes for the informal working

population.

The topic of informal work is tied to many SDGs beyond the most applicable SDG 8. It is important to understand the intersection of this issue with all the SDGs. The other goals also aim to improve the living conditions of vulnerable populations, including informal workers. This knowledge will help develop meaningful resolutions to the many issues faced by these individuals.

Bloc Analysis

Points of Division

The Asia-Pacific region is one of the most diverse parts of the globe. Each country has a unique history and culture that influences how work functions. While countries generally act in the best interest of the common citizen, this often has different consequences for the informal worker.

Under the reliance upon informal work, countries have differing stances on approaching policy toward these individuals. A major point of debate is the need for long-term versus short-term economic growth.²⁵⁸ While certain economies have been conducive to sustaining progress over the decades, many others require informal workers to act as a buffer between economic swings.²⁵⁹

Another key point of division is how economies can best balance the economic output and vulnerabilities of informal workers. Some argue that informal workers are at risk of many forms of abuse and tend to be associated with less sustainable

250 “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.” United Nations. Accessed August 11, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>.

251 “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls - Targets and Indicators,” United Nations, accessed September, 2024, <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

252 “Unpaid work in Asia and the Pacific,” United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, last modified December, 2019, <https://www.unescap.org/resources/unpaid-work-asia-and-pacific>.

253 “Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment.” United Nations.

254 “Infrastructure and Industrialization - United Nations Sustainable Development.” United Nations. Accessed August 11, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/infrastructure-industrialization/>.

255 “Infrastructure and Industrialization - United Nations Sustainable Development.” United Nations.

256 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.” United Nations. Accessed August 11, 2024. <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>.

257 “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.” United Nations.

258 Biryukova SS, Sinyavskaya OV, Kareva DE (2022) *Long-term dynamics of informal employment and its relationship with the poverty of the Russian population against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic*. *Population and Economics* 6(1): 14-25. <https://doi.org/10.3897/popcon.6.e78235>

259 Biryukova SS, Sinyavskaya OV, Kareva DE (2022) *Long-term dynamics of informal employment and its relationship with the poverty of the Russian population against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic*. *Population and Economics*.

economic progress. However, others underscore the value these individuals can bring to developing a country's economy. Many of these informal workers offer their communities unique, affordable, culturally significant goods.

Delegates will also find divisions in the approach to government intervention. The extent of government recognition of informal work is at the core of this issue.²⁶⁰ Some argue the importance of increasing legal recognition of informal work to standardize procedures better. However, others see greater regulation to ostracize further communities that are struggling to get by.²⁶¹ People who are already untrusting of governments may, in turn, decide to become even more unseen by the general public.²⁶²

The extent of social and economic protection is also greatly debated. Certain countries will argue for greater protections offered to the informal worker, but others will raise concerns regarding the economic feasibility of such maneuvers.²⁶³ The costs of running social programs prevent countries from fully supporting these movements.²⁶⁴

Delegates may also run into divisions amongst the best implementations of social programs. Whether it be the emphasis on technology, targeted assistance to vulnerable groups, or general policies for entire communities, a broad array of approaches exist to integrate best and protect the informal workers. Much of the nuances are found by examining the nature of one's own country and past policies on adjacent issues. Each country in this committee has a unique history and culture that shapes how they may respond to these contentions.

Countries with Long-Term Agendas on Informal Work

Countries tend to operate in the best interest of their most powerful financial actors. In many cases, this refers to large corporations. Despite consisting of a smaller subset of total individuals, these groups are often where most a country's wealth and power is situated. These countries are identified by their tendency to operate with lower percentages of informal workers and a more powerful established economy. This can be tracked via ILO statistics on the number of informal workers. It can also be measured by the presence of large enterprises (companies that typically employ over 250 individuals).²⁶⁵ Quantifying the market cap of these companies will also be valuable in best identifying.

Governments, though seeking to preserve the rights of all citizens, often drift more towards preserving business interests for this reason. In many cases, this can leave informal workers in a more precarious situation.

Governments can easily overlook the needs of the informal worker as they are somewhat secondary in an effort to appease business interests. To these governments, supporting the development of industry and formal forms of labor is the best way to lift communities out of poverty. When these large corporations succeed, the thought process is that other classes of society will have new jobs.

These policies tend to be long-term thinking. By considering the work of the informal laborer as a short-term burden to the economy, these countries prioritize the development of ways to pull these individuals out of informal work.²⁶⁶ They are also greatly interested in programs that seek to tip the balance in favor of economic output over the value that these informal laborers provide. Countries in this bloc will tend to consider

²⁶⁰ "Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience." International Labour Organization, February 1, 2024. <https://www.ilo.org/publications/extending-social-security-workers-informal-economy-lessons-international>

²⁶¹ "Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience." International Labour Organization.

²⁶² "Extending Social Security to Workers in the Informal Economy: Lessons from International Experience." International Labour Organization.

²⁶³ "Relief for Informal Workers: Falling through the Cracks in Covid-19." CGAP. Accessed August 11, 2024. <https://www.cgap.org/research/covid-19-briefing/relief-for-informal-workers-falling-through-cracks-in-covid-19>.

²⁶⁴ "Relief for Informal Workers: Falling through the Cracks in Covid-19." CGAP.

²⁶⁵ "Enterprises by Business Size," OECD, Accessed August 11, 2024, <https://www.oecd.org/en/data/indicators/enterprises-by-business-size.html>.

²⁶⁶ Gordon McGranahan, et al, "The Urban Informal Economy, Local Inclusion and Achieving a Global Green Transformation."

the output of the informal worker relatively insignificant in the broader schemes of the government and numerous industrial complexes.

These countries also tend to have a larger share of capital available because of their economies' positioning. Many companies can generate large profits, and public-private partnerships may be keyways of securing monetary support.

Countries with Short-Term Agendas on Informal Work

In many other parts of the Asia-Pacific region, large enterprises (as defined above) tend to be less prominent. In these economies, the informal workers often have the majority voice in personnel and influence. This has the inverse effect of the one described previously.

With so many individuals concentrated in the informal labor force, these countries must take a different approach. It is not as easy as simply supporting industrial development. This is because such efforts would greatly displace many individual workers. These countries, rather, emphasize the value of supporting and uplifting individual workers. The priority here is to safeguard these vital pieces of the economy.

Countries that fall in this block are typically reliant on informal work. ILO estimates of informal workers in these regions tend to be over 40-50 percent of the total working population.²⁶⁷ These countries also tend to be more dominated by small-medium enterprises. Looking at figures regarding the number of these companies can be key in identifying country positions. Further telling is the generally lower market cap of most companies in these regions. Market capitalization refers to the total value of a company's stock in circulation.

The result of such processes is the emphasis on short-term relief for many informal workers. Whether it be in the form of digital cash transfers or medical assistance, these countries

tend to focus on immediate benefits. However, a relevant point to remember is the cost of such efforts. Since many of these countries tend to have lower participation in formal employment and lower production from large enterprises, they don't have many of the resources available to make such commitments.²⁶⁸

These countries may also fight for more targeted policymaking. Rather than simply applying blanket statements for communities, they will seek to offer individualized assistance to each vulnerable group. Whether it be women, children, or persons with disabilities, keeping these communities in mind is very important to those in this bloc.

Ultimately, these countries see informal work not just as a safety net or a countercyclical force in the economy. It is a way of life and a key means of production for much of the region. This does not mean they are opposed to formal work; they are simply interested in properly implementing the informal workforce with more scrutiny.

Countries at the Crossroads of Informal Work

Finally, a subtle group of countries is at the intersection of these large subsets of countries. Many of these countries are transitioning either towards or away from informal work for a host of reasons. Whether it be because of internal issues (which causes more informality) or rapid industrialization (which causes more formality), these states have more fluid approaches to the topics at hand.²⁶⁹

These countries can be identified by major political and social events occurring locally. Those in this group are a somewhat small set of all countries in the Asia-Pacific region. As a result of major domestic developments, they are at the middle ground of the issue. They can also be identified by somewhat moderate levels of informal employment and a balance of different types of formal work.²⁷⁰

267 Ahmed, et al. "Revisiting Informality in South Asia: An Agenda for the Future." *Partnership for Economic Inclusion*, Accessed August 13, 2024. <https://www.peiglobal.org/sites/pei/files/article/2024-01/InFocus4%20Informality.pdf>.

268 *Handling Disputes Between Informal Workers and Those in Power*. n.d. <https://www.wiego.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/ICC5-Disputes-English.pdf>.

269 Bhaduri, Amit. 2024. "Rethinking Employment and Industrialisation in India." *The India Forum*, January 12, 2024. <https://www.theindiaforum.in/economy/rethinking-employment-and-industrialisation-india>.

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As a result, many of the governments in these areas tend to have equally powerful interests being voiced. This forces governments into compromise. However, delegates should remember that most countries do not fall into this bloc. All countries in the Asia-Pacific region do not accept the moderate stance because of national history/culture.

Committee Mission

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) was established in 1947 to protect the socioeconomic conditions of the region.²⁷¹ It is primarily concerned with implementing the 17 SDGs.²⁷² In addition, it allows countries to have a forum for discussion on relevant economic issues. The organization has been responsible for lifting millions out of poverty.²⁷³ The committee's goal in meeting on the status of informal workers is to understand better and begin proposing meaningful legislation to protect informal workers and the economic status of countries in the region.

In this discussion, there is a delicate balance between preserving economies and individual rights. Since informal work is often associated with economic stagnation, simply preserving the style of work may not be a successful approach. Likewise, removing informal labor as an option will likely cause irreparable damage to millions of workers.

It is necessary to consider many interests. Ensuring the rights of the informal worker is central to this topic, but countries have competing internal influences. This will greatly impact an individual's position on this topic. Additionally, delegates should consider how to approach long-term and short-term solutions.²⁷⁴ Since informal work plays a large role in both development processes, being aware of such movements is key.

Informal work is often done out of necessity to support one's family. As such, it is relevant to address many of the underlying economic issues that cause labor even to occur. It cannot be eliminated without providing an alternative.

Delegates should also consider how individual country context and history affect opinions toward informal labor. Whether it be political ideology or culture, many perspectives can vary immensely across borders. Delegates should also consider how the issue of informal work interacts with other social and economic problems within the Asia-Pacific region. Informal work in the Asia-Pacific region has many aspects. Considering each with a level of scrutiny will be key for this committee to succeed.

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Research and Preparation Questions

Your dais has prepared the following research and preparation questions as a means of providing guidance for your research process. These questions should be carefully considered, as they embody some of the main critical thought and learning objectives surrounding your topic.

Topic A

1. What are your country's demographics, and how are they projected to change in the coming decades? What are the current birth rates and death rates?
2. What cultural prejudices exist in your country about older people and aging?
3. What unique challenges will your country face as the number of older people in the population increases sharply in the coming decades?
4. How do older people receive healthcare and income support in your country? Does your country have a mandatory retirement age?
5. What is the economic, legal, and social status of women and girls in your country? How has your country's sex ratios changed in the past decade?
6. What strategies can help older people interact more frequently with others and their communities?
7. What policies can support working families in Asia and the Pacific so that they can take advantage of the demographic dividend?
8. What actions can be taken to ensure that older people are protected from the effects of climate change?

Topic B

1. How did your country's historical interactions with colonial powers during the colonial era influence the presence/absence of informal work as a key part of the economy?
2. What are the socio-economic implications of informal workers in your country, and what might be the effects of integration into the private and public sectors?
3. What kind of policy has your country taken regarding informal workers in the past? What kind of gaps can be observed in this policy, and how can they be filled?
4. How have specific marginalized groups of people (women, children, persons with disabilities, etc.) been affected by informal work in your country?
5. What effect has modern technological developments/infrastructure had on informal work in your region?
6. How has the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an impetus for change in informal work in your country and surrounding regions?

Important Documents

Topic A

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