



Ageism is Everywhere... It's time for change

Rationale

Age is one of the first things we notice about other people. Ageism arises when age is used to categorize and divide people in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage and injustice and erode solidarity across generations. Ageism damages our health and well-being and can be a major barrier to enacting effective policies and effective implementation of action to promote healthy ageing, as recognized by World Health Organization (WHO) Member States in the Global strategy and action plan on ageing and health and through the Decade of Healthy Ageing: 2021 –2030.

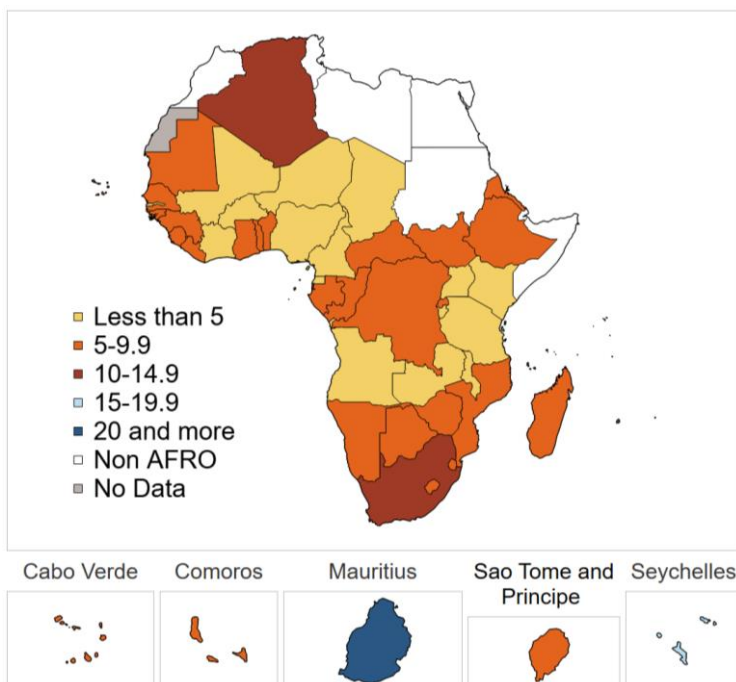
Key messages

- In 2021, the population of people aged 60 years represent **57.5 million** (an increase of about 22% compared to 2015) with about 31.5 million women (3% of the total population of the WHO African Region).
- In 2019, women aged 60 expected to live an average **19 years** (including 5 years in poor health) in the Region.
- In the Region, only **12 countries** developed laws, policies, strategies and dedicated interventions for awareness and actions against ageism.
- In the Region, only 3 to 4 countries implemented different types of programs (**professionals awareness campaigns, Residential care policies, Caregiver support, Public information campaigns**) on a larger scale to prevent elder abuse
- About **29%** of the people surveyed in the African Region reported having been **victims of ageist attitudes** (Crude prevalence of ageist attitude).

1. The nature of ageism

- Ageism refers to the **stereotypes** (how we think), **prejudice** (how we feel) and **discrimination** (how we act) directed towards people based on their age. It can be **institutional**, **interpersonal**, or **self-directed**.
- Ageism **starts in childhood** and is reinforced over time.
- Ageism often intersects and interacts with other forms of **stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination**.

Figure 1. Percentage of women aged 60 years or over in all population, in the African Region, 2021



- In the WHO African Region, between 2015 and 2021, the population of people aged 60 years and over increased from 47 million to 57.5 million (an increase of about 22%).
- By 2021, women aged 60 and over was about 31.5 million (3% of the total population of the Region).
- Mauritius had the highest percentage of women aged 60 years or over (20.7% of total population, see figure 1).
- Malawi had the highest percentage of older women living in rural areas (about 93.3%, see figure 2). Gabon had the lowest percentage (about 18.4%).
- More than half of the countries in the Region have not yet implemented specific programs against ageism.

Figure 2. Percentage of women aged 60 years or over living in rural areas, in the African Region, 2021

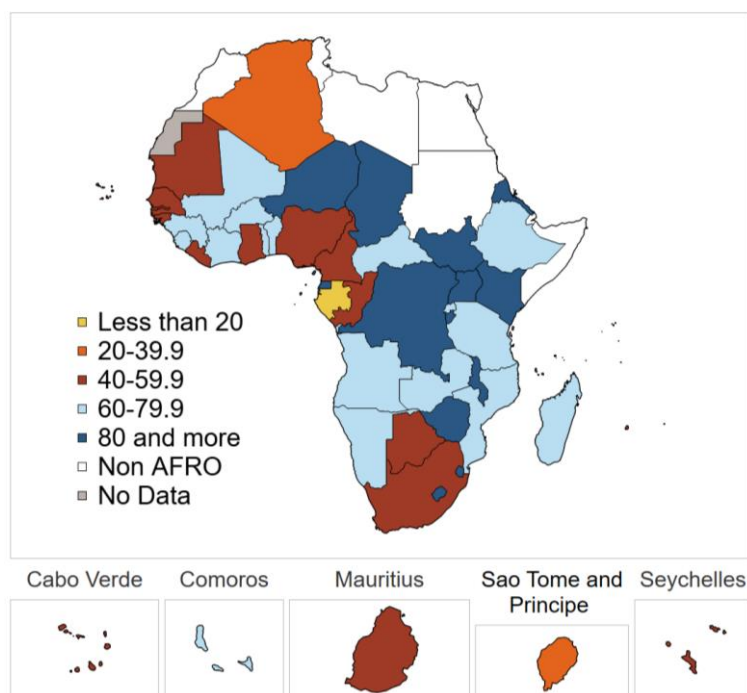
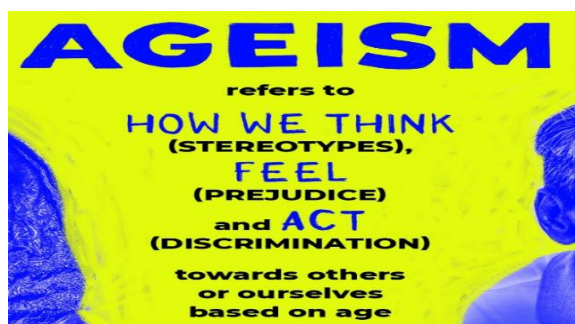


Table 1. Number of countries in the African Region with specific ageing programs, 2018-2020

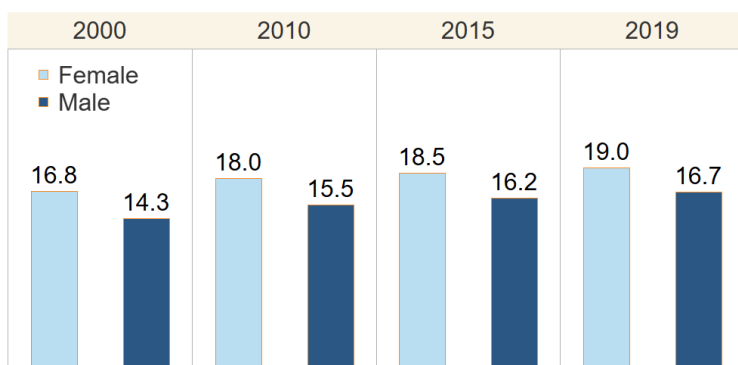
Availability of ageing programs	Year	Number of countries
Focal point on ageing and health in the Ministry of Health	2018	19
	2020	21
National plans, policies or strategies on ageing and health	2018	16
	2020	17
National legislation and enforcement strategies against age-based discrimination	2018	11
	2020	12



2. The impact of ageism against older people

- Ageism has serious and far-reaching consequences **for people's health, well-being, and human rights.**
- Ageism reduces older people's **quality of life, increases their social isolation and loneliness**

Figure 3. Average life expectancy at age 60 (in years), in the African Region, 2000-2019



- In 2019, women aged 60 expected to live an average of another 19 years in the Region, which was an increase of one year from 2010 (see figure 3).
- In 2019, Women aged 60 are at risk of living 5 years of poor health for the rest of their lives in the Region.
- For both indicators (average and healthy life expectancy at age 60), women live longer than men

Figure 4. Percentage of older people 60 years or over living alone (%) in the African Region, 2010-2016

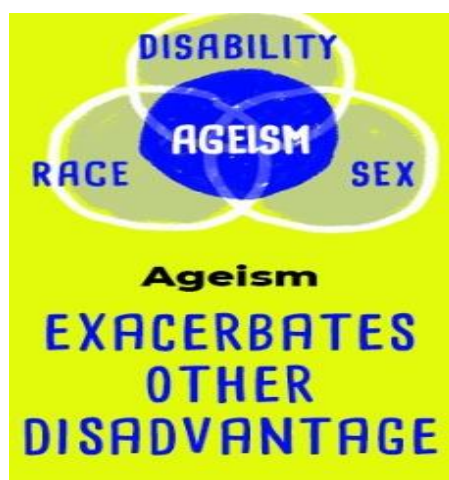
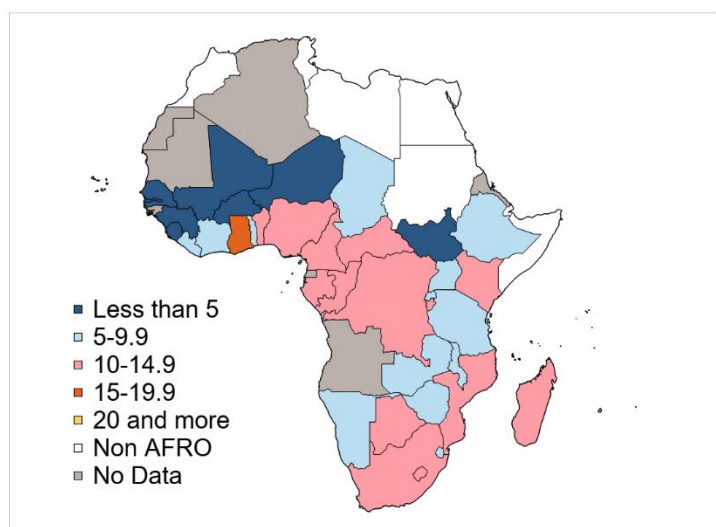
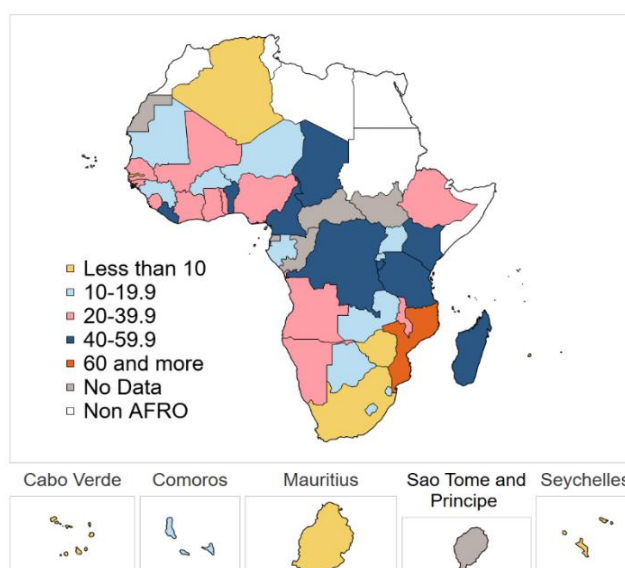


Figure 5. Labor force participation rate by older women (60 years and over) in the African Region, 2010-2020



- In the Region, Sao Tome and Principe is the place where the percentage of people aged 60 and over living alone was the highest (about 31.5%). Senegal had the lowest percentage (1.7%) (see figure 4)
- Mozambique was the place in the Region where the older women had the highest rate of the labor force during the period 2010-2020 (about 70% - see figure 5).

3. The scale of ageism against older people

- Ageism pervades many **institutions and sectors of society**, including those providing **health and social care**, the **workplace**, the **media**, and **the legal system**.
- Ageism often intersects and interacts with other forms of **stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination**.

Figure 6. Number of complete hearing loss older people (60-64 years) per 100,000 older people, 2019

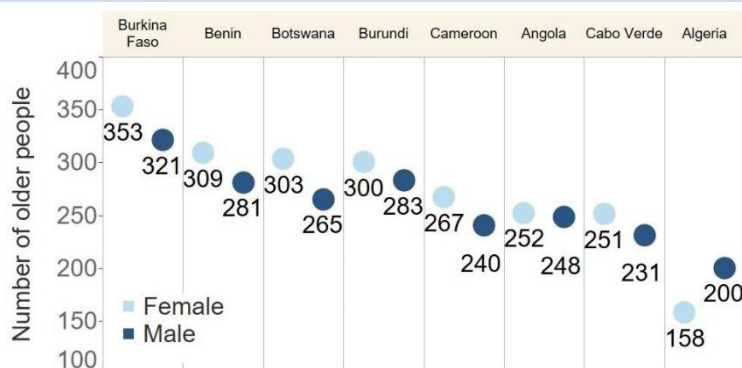
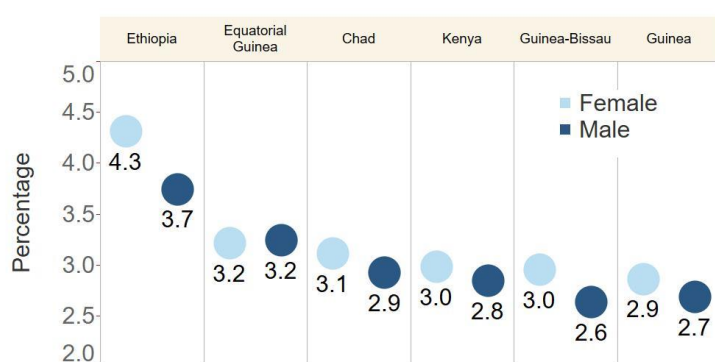


Figure 7. Top 6 countries with high blindness prevalence in older people (60-64 years) in the African Region, 2019



- About **29%** of the people surveyed in 2014 in the African Region reported having been **victims of ageist attitudes** (Crude prevalence of ageist attitude).
- Globally, around **18.8%** of older women surveyed in 2015 reported had **experienced any type of abuse** (physical, sexual, and mental).
- In 2019, in Burkina Faso, about 353 older women per 100 000 older women had complete hearing loss (See figure 6).
- In 2019, the prevalence of blindness in older people (60-64 years) in the African Region was in the range 0.85 - 4.31% (Minimum for Burundi and Maximum for Ethiopia), and women are more likely more affected than men (in the top 6 countries).

4. Tools to fight ageism against older people

- **Policies and laws** can be used to reduce ageism towards any age group.
- **Educational interventions** to reduce ageism should be included across all levels and types of education, from primary school to university, and in formal and non-formal educational contexts.
- Investments should also be made in **intergenerational contact interventions**, which aim to foster interaction between people of different generations.

Table 2. Number of countries implementing different types of programs on a larger scale to prevent elder abuse in the African Region, 2012

Types of programs	Number of countries
Professional awareness campaigns	3
Residential care policies	3
Caregiver support	4
Public information campaigns	4

- In the Region, in 2012, only 3 or 4 countries implemented different types of programs on a larger scale to prevent elder abuse (see Table 2).
- In the Region, Sao Tome and Principe is the place where the percentage of people aged 60 and over living alone was the highest (about 31.5%).

Table 3. Number of countries implementing policy and law against ageism in the African Region, 2018-2020

Availability of policy and law	Year	Number of countries
Legislation/regulations that provide older adults with access to assistive devices from the WHO Priority Assistive Products List	2018	6
	2020	6
National program to support activities in line with the WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities	2018	5
	2020	8
National policies in place to support comprehensive assessments of the health and social care needs of older people	2018	4
	2020	6
Long-term care policy/plan/strategy/framework (stand-alone or integrated within an ageing and health plan)	2018	11
	2020	13

- In the Region, in 2020, only 13 or less countries implemented policy and law against ageism (see Table 3).
- Mozambique was the place in the Region where the older women had the highest rate of the labor force during the period 2010-2020 (about 70%) while Algeria had the lowest labor force participation rate (1.27%).

AGEISM

Ageism refers to **HOW WE THINK (STEREOTYPES), FEEL (PREJUDICE) and ACT (DISCRIMINATION)** towards others or ourselves based on age

AGEISM IS EVERYWHERE

- 1 IN 2 PEOPLE** WORLDWIDE ARE AGEIST AGAINST OLDER PEOPLE and, in Europe, there is more ageism against younger than older people
- Ageism affects us **THROUGHOUT LIFE** and exists in our institutions, our relationships and ourselves
- Ageism **EXACERBATES OTHER DISADVANTAGE** (Disability, Race, Sex)

AGEISM IS HARMFUL

- Ageism has far-reaching **IMPACTS ON ALL ASPECTS OF PEOPLE'S HEALTH** (Physical Health, Mental Health, Social Well-being)
- Ageism takes a **HEAVY ECONOMIC TOLL** on individuals and society

AGEISM CAN BE COMBATTED

POLICY AND LAW
can protect human rights and address age discrimination and inequality

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES
can transmit knowledge and skills and enhance empathy

INTERGENERATIONAL INTERVENTIONS
can connect people of different generations

#AWorld4AllAges

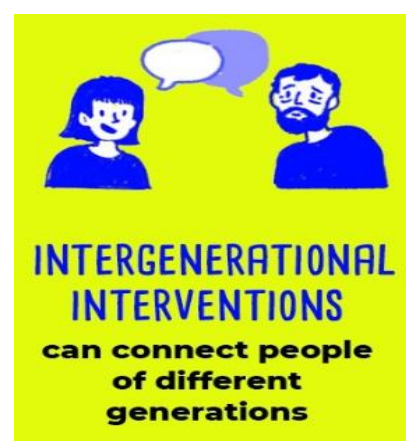
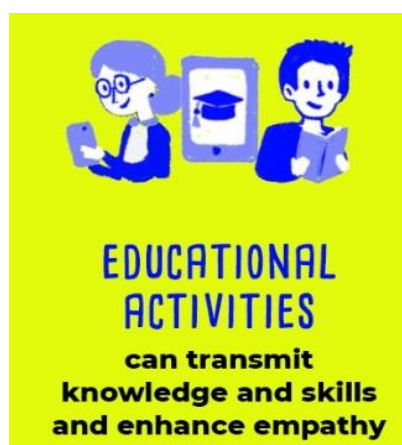
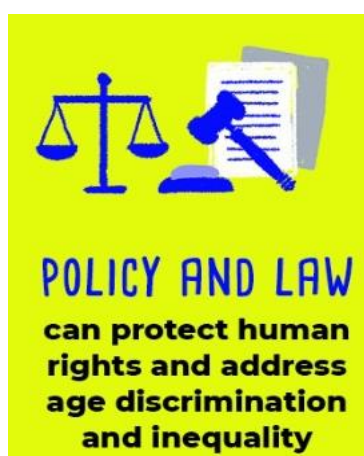
GLOBAL CAMPAIGN TO COMBAT AGEISM

5. Policy implications/Recommendations

- Invest in **evidence-based strategies** to prevent and tackle ageism.
- Improve **data and research** to gain a better understanding of ageism and how to reduce it.
- Build a movement to change **the narrative around age and ageing**.

Action-points

1. Priority should be given to the three strategies supported by the best evidence:
 - **enacting policies and laws** (adopting new instruments at the local, national, or international level and by modifying existing instruments that permit age discrimination)
 - **implementing educational interventions** (providing accurate information and counter-stereotypical examples).
 - **implementing intergenerational contact interventions** (fostering interaction between people of different generations)
2. Improving data collection across the African Region using valid and reliable measurement scales of ageism.
3. Marshalling efforts by coming together as a broad coalition, can improve collaboration and communication between the different stakeholders engaged in combating ageism.



References

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Sources

- Data are from WHO ([https://platform.who.int/data/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-ageing/indicator-explorer-new/MCA/total-population-\(thousands\)](https://platform.who.int/data/maternal-newborn-child-adolescent-ageing/indicator-explorer-new/MCA/total-population-(thousands))) and ([integrated African Health Observatory](#)).
- **Photography:** <https://who.canto.global/v/JMQ81O59Q3/album/MB00K?display=fitView&viewIndex=0&auth=sso&gOrderProp=name&gSortingForward>

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