Rapid Review of Healthy Ageing and Long-Term Care Systems in East and Southern Africa

Country summary reports

Kenya
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Kenya is an East African country which had a projected total population of 53.7 million in 2020, of which approximately 2.2 million (4.2 per cent) are people aged 60 years and older (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019), however the 2019 census data estimated that older people comprise a more significant proportion of the population (6 per cent of 47.5 million or 2.7 million people). Like elsewhere in the region, the population is experiencing rapid demographic change and the proportion of older people in the population is expected to more than double to 10.3 per cent by 2050.

The country’s health expenditure was 4.6 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2019 (World Health Organization, n.d.) Kenya is classified as a lower-middle income country and has a Human Development Index (composite index of life expectancy, education and per capita income) ranking of 143 of 189 with a score of 0.601 (low). Absolute poverty is high with an extreme poverty rate (those living under $1.90 per day) of 37 per cent in 2015, and has a GINI coefficient (a measure of degree of inequality) of 40.8 in 2015. The service coverage of essential health services is low at 56 per cent.

Kenya provides a good example of a country that is making considerable new policy commitments to addressing ageing, including the recent introduction of a universal pension.

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Overarching frameworks and plans in place around ageing and older people

Kenya’s approach to policy development is undergirded by Chapter 4 and Article 57 of the Constitution of Kenya (2010) and Bill of Rights. The Constitution recognizes the rights of older persons, including rights to social security, non-discrimination and education, and obligates the state to take measures to ensure older persons’ participation, personal development, dignity, respect, and protection from abuse; and together with the family, government has the obligation to provide care and reasonable assistance to older persons. The Kenya Vision 2030 sets out to make the socio-economic rights promised in the Bill of Rights a reality, including the right of vulnerable groups, such as older people, to social protection.

The National Policy on Older Persons and Ageing was revised in 2018, and policy, legal and strategic provisions now cover all of the 18 focal issues across the three strategic directions of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). The goal of the policy is to provide an environment that recognizes, empowers and facilitates older persons to participate in society and enjoy their rights and freedoms and live in dignity. The policy has 11 thematic areas with several interventions which are being implemented by both State and non-state actors.

The government has also developed a draft Action Plan on Older Persons and Ageing and a Draft Geriatric Bill has been tabled by private members and is currently under discussion in Parliament.

In February 2022, Kenya ratified and deposited the Protocol Rights on the Rights of Older Persons to the African Charter on Human and Peoples, along with the protocol on people with disabilities, making it the most recent country (among only four) to do so.
Coordinating mechanisms

There is a very active Unit for Older Persons and Ageing (Senior Citizens Affair Unit) within the Directorate of Social Development in the Ministry of Public Service, Gender, Senior Citizens Affairs & Special Programmes, which has the mandate to promote and coordinate government action on the issues affecting older persons and ageing in the country. The recent inclusion of “Senior Citizens” in the name of the ministry has increased the visibility of older persons within government. While taking a multi-sectoral approach, government officials indicate that coordination within government and integration of older persons into other policies and the department’s programming remains weak. There is a need to interrogate the systems on generation, analysis and utilization of data on ageing and older persons in the country, the state of which may be a cause of the gaps in integration of ageing and older persons issues into policies and development plans.

A Federation/Council for Older Persons is being developed to coordinate civil society responses to ageing and their interaction with government. In the interim, HelpAge International has been working closely with government on areas related to Healthy Ageing and Freedom from Violence, Abuse and Neglect; and civil society organizations (CSOs) focused on ageing contribute to the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Forum.

Social protection and development services

Older people in Kenya are vulnerable to poverty, and data from the baseline survey on Kenya’s older persons’ cash transfer programme shows that older people experienced high rates of food insecurity, with around half of respondents experiencing the most severe form of food insecurity on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (Government of Kenya et al., 2020). There are high rates of witchcraft-related violence against older women, particularly widows and those with dementia in some parts of Kenya (Kenya Human Rights Commission, 2021).

As part of the Kenya Vision 2030 plan and government’s efforts towards addressing poverty and implementing commitments around social protection in the Bill of Rights, the Kenyan Government introduced a Cash Transfer Programme for Older Persons (OPCT) to all persons over 70 years (Inua Jamii 70+ programme) in 2017, which as of November 2021 covered 833,129 of the 1.2 million people over the age of 70 years.

Constituency Social Assistance Committees and Beneficiaries Welfare Committees help to raise awareness and facilitate access to cash transfers. The government aims to expand the programme to progressively include those aged 60 years and above. While the amount paid to pensioners (ksh 2000 or approximately $17) is very small, it does support older people in informal income generating activities. This programme is government funded and the introduction of the Consolidated Social Protection Fund for cash transfers to vulnerable groups, including older people, attests to the government’s commitment to self-funding its social protection commitments.

To extend pension savings options to the large informal sector who previously had no access to contributory pension schemes, the Kenya Mbao Pension Plan was introduced in 2009 and is regulated by the Retirement Benefits Authority. The Mbao Pension Plan is a public-private partnership between government and the National Federation of Jua Kali Associations that target informal sector workers (although all workers can contribute) enabling them to contribute to pension savings on an individual voluntary basis.

Health and long-term care

Research in Kenya shows low demand for services among older people, especially among rural dwellers, socioeconomically deprived groups such as pastoralist communities, and those without formal education due to poor satisfaction, low trust, difficulties in accessing services, low system literacy and sociocultural beliefs (Alene et al., 2019).

The National Health Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2023 recognizes inequities in service provision for older people, and the “Development and promotion of access to integrated services for older people” is highlighted as a key area for action.

The Kenya Health Policy 2014-2030 includes the elimination of communicable conditions among vulnerable populations, including among marginalized older persons as a key policy objective. It also outlines a lifecycle-based structure for the Kenya Essential Package of Health with older people (60+ years) receiving a health package and delivery system specific to their health needs. Research on older persons is also identified as an important need to facilitate evidence-based interventions. This policy is supported by the Kenya Health Sector Strategic Plan 2018-2023, which identifies inequities in service provision to older people and includes the development and promotion of access to integrated services for older people as an area for action.

The 2015-2016 Kenya Household Survey showed that only 14 per cent of older persons have health insurance (in some counties less than 10 per cent). As part of its commitment to Universal Health Coverage (UHC), the Ministry State Department has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Health and National Hospital Insurance Fund (NHIF) to deliver health insurance to all OPCT beneficiaries in the National Safety Net Programme. Contribution to NHIF is kept low (ksh 500), enabling older people on the OPCT to access the programme. The government is aiming to offer coverage to all citizens 70 years and above (actual coverage unknown). The government is also in the process of piloting UHC for all (currently in four counties).

According to a submission to the United Nations Open Ended Working Group on Ageing (OWEG), the Health and Ageing Unit within the Ministry of Health is exploring the development of a community care strategy and has developed a Healthy Ageing Strategy for the country to decentralize, improve access to and strengthen, health care for older persons. This includes the rollout of the Integrated Care of Older Persons (ICOPE) package. Kenya is an ICOPE pilot country and training has been conducted in pilot sites.

The Kenya Mental Health Policy (2015-2030) acknowledges vulnerability of older people (especially those without social protection and social networks) to mental disorders. Over 1,800 Lay Volunteer Counsellors (LVCs) across the country have been enlisted and empowered to provide psychosocial support – guidance and counselling services including referral services to older persons and families in distress. Kenya has also been working to develop a Dementia Strategy being developed as part of the Strengthening responses to dementia in developing countries project (STRIDE).
In terms of health worker training, the Ministry of Health has a Division of Geriatric Medicine which identified the need to incorporate geriatric training into the curriculum, but it is unclear whether ongoing training does take place. The Kenya Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics has worked with the International Institute on Ageing and the African Population and Health Research Centre to arrange in-situ training for frontline health staff.

**Non-communicable diseases**

The Kenyan Health Policy recognizes the rising burden of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and aims to integrate services (which had not been widely available) within the established communicable disease infrastructure to leverage programmatic capacity. The Kenya 2021-2025 NCD Strategic Plan addresses NCDs throughout the life course and details plans to build a multisectoral response, reduce NCD risk among all age groups and strengthen service delivery across all levels (but with a particular focus on primary health care). Older people are not a particular focus in this plan, although targets are set for screening of certain diseases affecting older people such as colorectal and breast cancer.

**Sexual and reproductive health**

The sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of older people are recognized in the National Reproductive Health Policy (2007), which identifies older people and people with disabilities (PWDs) as vulnerable populations with poor access to health, and contains a section on reproductive health for elderly persons. The policy highlights inadequate reproductive health programmes targeting elderly people, a lack of data on reproductive health services and a lack of reproductive health indicators on elderly people. The National AIDS Control Council Strategic Plan and the Kenya AIDS Strategic Framework (KASF II) (2020/2021 – 2024/2025) do not make any mention of older persons.

**Long-term care**

Although there is a clear policy and cultural preference for family-based care, the State has recognized a growing demand for formal long-term care services. The number of facilities for providers to provision to older persons has increased between 2014 and 2020 to around 137 based on mapping research conducted in 2014 and 2020-2021 by the National Council for Population and Development (NCPD) in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and HelpAge International (National Council for Population and Development, United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge International, 2020). The government has national standards and guidelines on the Establishment and Management of Institutions of Older Persons (2018) to respond to unregulated and unstandardized services, but there are no resources provided for the provision of care. Kenya is also piloting a rescue home in Kirinyaga country for older people with no family-based care options, with the intention of a national rollout of these facilities (Wang’Ondu, 2021).

**Disaster situations**

Kenya is vulnerable to climate change and is currently being affected by prolonged drought which has led to high levels of food insecurity in arid regions. The National Policy for Disaster Management in Kenya (2009) includes a focus on older people and requires mainstreaming health-care services for older people and PWDs during and after disasters. It also makes provision for systematic management of cross-cutting issues in disaster management, including ageing. The policy also recognizes confusion around relief and evacuation in emergencies and the need to make special provisions for older people and PWDs, and requires monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of ageing as a cross-cutting issue. While much more inclusive than policies in many other countries in the region, there is no specific focus on older people’s contribution to planning or decision-making in the policy, which is essential in making sure disaster planning and responses are appropriate and well-targeted.

In terms of health systems security, the NCD Strategic Plan aims to strengthen the health system to ensure achievement of integrated people-centred services for people with NCDs and other vulnerable groups in emergency settings.