



Improving the visibility of older persons in global statistics

Review of ageing-related statistics in the global sustainable development goals indicator framework

1st October 2024

Summary report



Introduction

In an era characterised by significant demographic changes, the proportion of the global population aged 60 years or older is rapidly increasing.

This demographic shift underscores the urgency for more granular data disaggregation strategies that can accurately reflect the diverse needs and contributions of older persons. This will involve collecting data from clearly defined age groups (age-disaggregated data) from the age of 60 years and onwards, harmonised across countries.

This report addresses this imperative by examining the availability and gaps in age-disaggregated data for older persons against priority indicators identified within the UN Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicator framework across 13 diverse countries.

Policy priorities and indicators

The Titchfield Group on Ageing conducted a comprehensive assessment of data related to 56 SDG indicators, focusing on five critical policy priorities for ageing and older persons: Health and Care; Financial Security; Violence, Abuse, and Safety; Participation; and Enabling Environment.

The Group's analytical approach was multi-faceted, beginning with a global review of data gaps across all countries, using the UN Global SDG metadata repository. This was complemented by a targeted survey of 13 national statistical offices (NSOs) from countries chosen to reflect a diverse range of income levels, regional locations, and demographic characteristics. The survey provided valuable insights into current practices and identified persistent data gaps.

Additionally, the Group conducted three in-depth case studies, which included semi-structured interviews with NSO staff responsible for SDG reporting, offering a deeper understanding of the challenges and successes experienced at the national level.

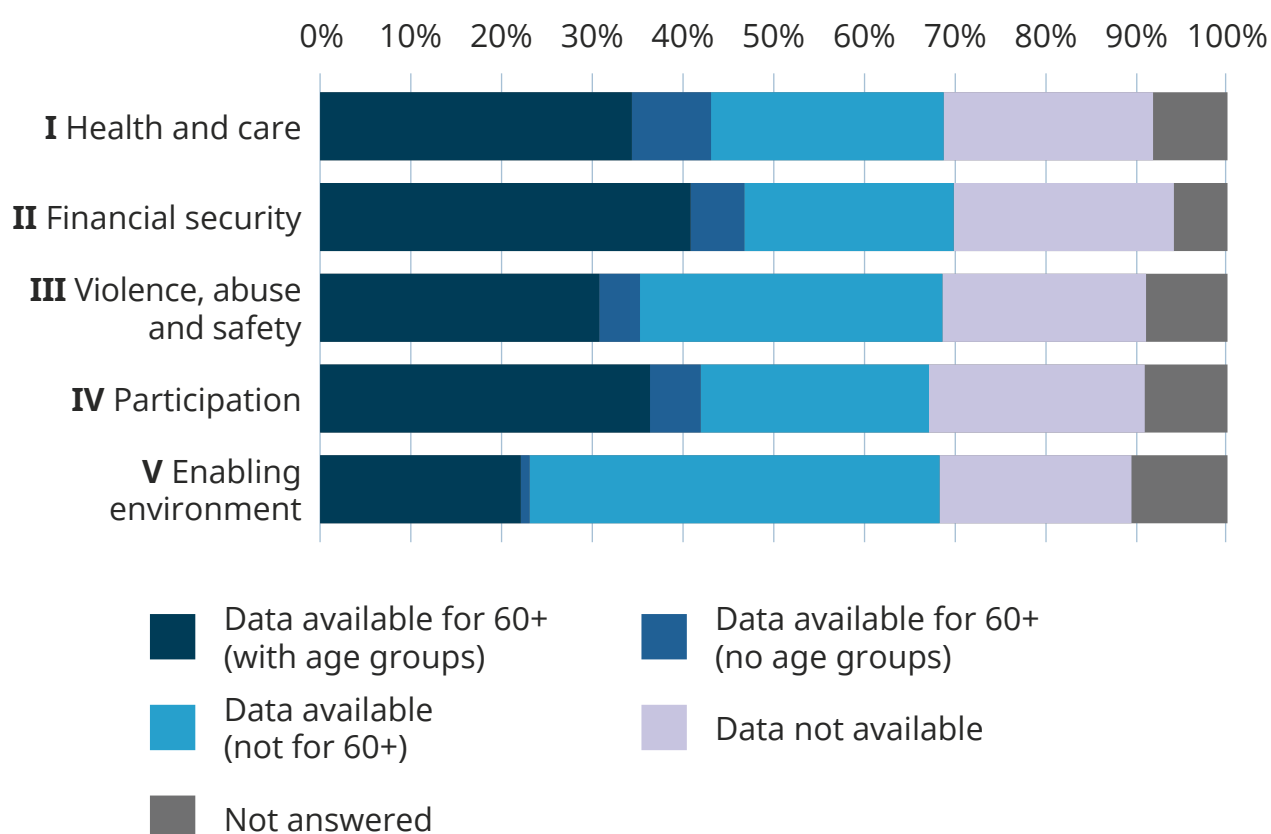
Through this rigorous analysis, the Titchfield City Group aimed to uncover the nature and root causes of data gaps, which is essential for crafting a long-term strategy that ensures the needs and contributions of older persons are fully represented in the global pursuit of sustainable development.



Study results

The key findings of this report reveal a varied landscape in the use of age-disaggregated data. Data was available for almost all the selected indicators for an average of 60% of countries worldwide, and for 69% of indicators in our survey. Age-disaggregated data for older adults was only available for approximately one third of indicators in both our global review and our survey. However, the availability of such data was not consistent across the policy priorities. While the survey showed broadly similar availability across priorities (Figure 1), the global review found that health and care had the highest availability of age-disaggregated data (47%), whereas no data was available for the enabling environment priority.

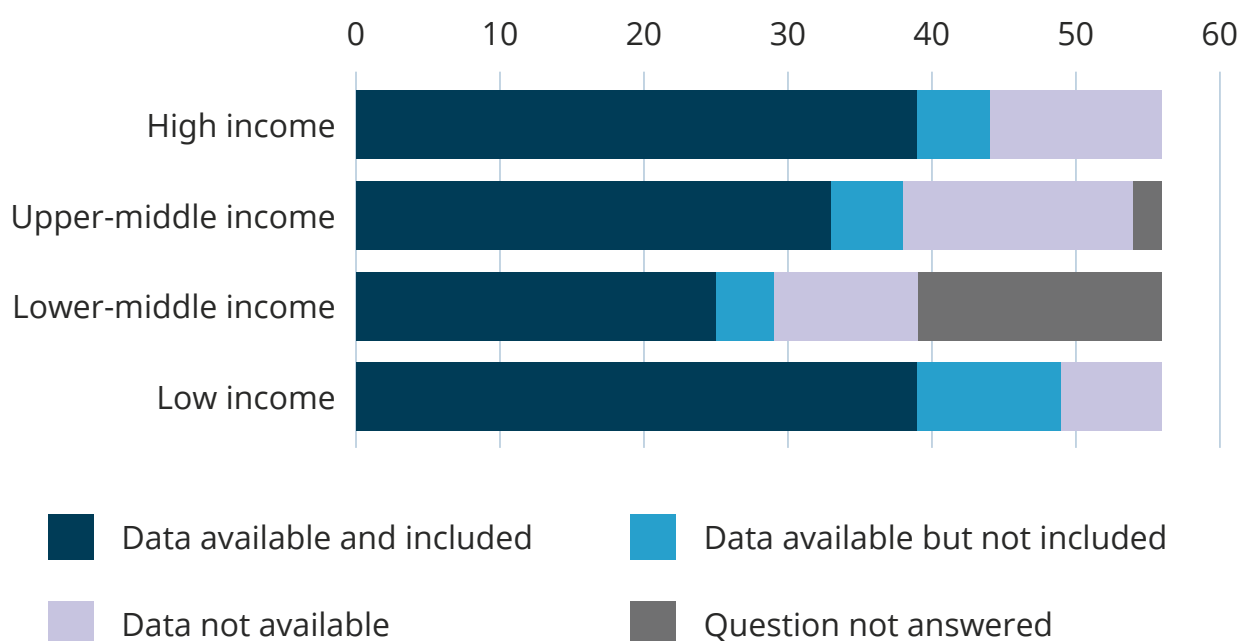
Figure 1: Percentage of indicators across all 13 surveyed countries for which data was available by policy priority



Examination of data underlying survey responses showed that the accessibility of data to users was often lower than the self-reported availability of this data. With all but one exception, high-income countries showed higher rates

compared with lower-income countries. There was also a marked disparity in data collection capabilities between higher and lower income countries (Figure 2). Higher income countries on average had data available for more indicators. Note that only one responding country was classified as low income. While many countries employed harmonised data that aligned with international standards, this practice varied significantly across countries.

Figure 2: Participating countries that reported availability of data for the 56 indicators by income level



Harmonisation and policy recommendations

This report highlights critical data policy recommendations to address the identified gaps and ensure that the needs of older persons are fully represented in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. One key recommendation is the expansion and diversification of data sources, particularly through the use of administrative registers and census data, which can offer richer insights and enable finer age-disaggregation. Alongside this, there is a pressing need for the harmonisation of definitions and data collection methods across countries, which will help establish more consistent and reliable datasets.

To improve the representation of older age groups in national statistics, existing sample surveys must undergo revisions and modifications, ensuring they capture a broader and more accurate picture of this demographic. However, these efforts will require substantial investment in national statistical systems. Strengthening these systems will be vital to developing the infrastructure necessary for robust data collection and reporting. Additionally, fostering greater collaboration and mutual learning between countries and international organisations is essential. Such partnerships will not only enhance the comparability and accessibility of data but also ensure that the global commitment to inclusivity and leaving no one behind is realised. By integrating these approaches, we can ensure that the SDG frameworks more accurately reflect the realities of ageing populations, thereby supporting more effective policy-making and sustainable development.

The report makes the following policy recommendations:

- 1. Leverage Diverse Data Sources:** Expanding the use of administrative registers and census data can fill critical gaps and provide more detailed insights into older populations.
- 2. Standardise Data Collection:** Harmonising definitions and methodologies across countries is essential for consistent, reliable, and comparable age-disaggregated data.
- 3. Revise and Enhance Surveys:** Modifying existing sample surveys will ensure that older age groups are accurately represented, capturing a fuller spectrum of their needs and experiences.
- 4. Invest in National Statistical Systems:** Increased financial and technical support is crucial for strengthening the infrastructure needed to produce high-quality, disaggregated data.
- 5. Foster Global Collaboration:** International partnerships and mutual learning will enhance data comparability and accessibility, supporting inclusive SDG implementation.

Key references

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