

# Aging Asia

## Trends and Transitions in the World's Most Populous Continent



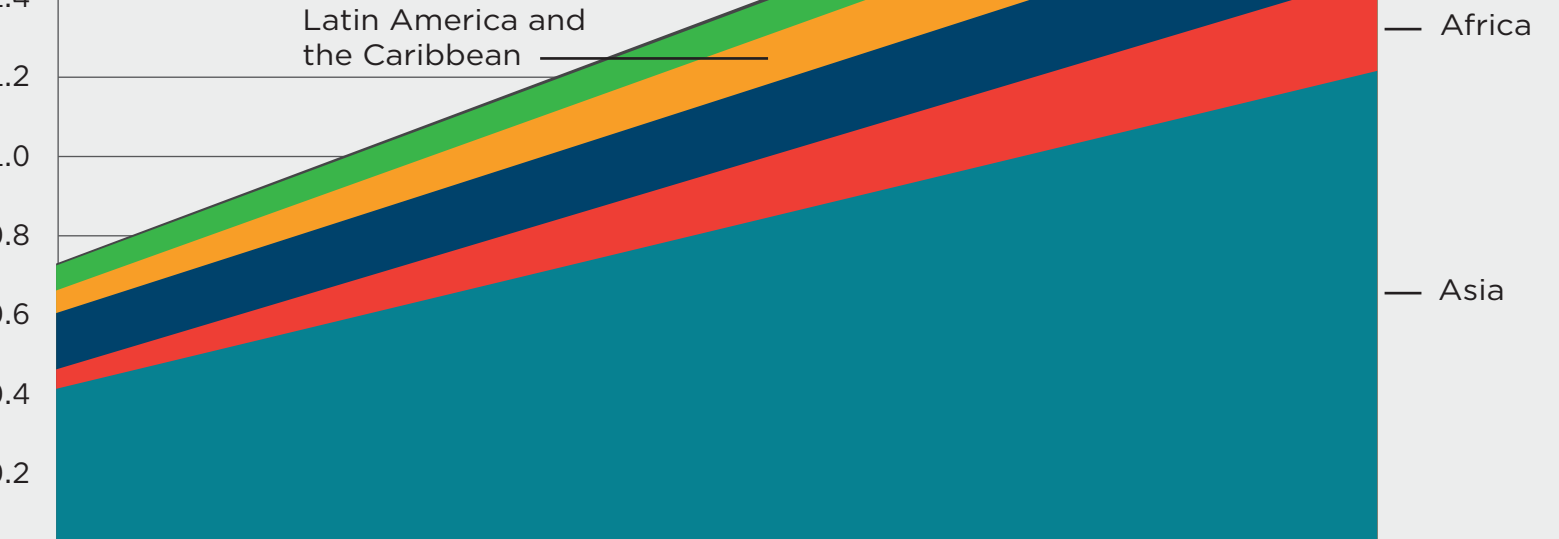
### 1 Asia's population 65 years and over is projected to triple between 2020 and 2060, reaching 1.2 billion by 2060.

Asia is home to more than 4.5 billion people, more than one-half of the world's total population, including two countries that are population billionaires: China and India. By far, the fastest growing age group in Asia is those age 65 and older, which is projected to triple from 414 million in 2020 to 1.2 billion by 2060, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Given this fast growth of the older population, Asia's share of the world's older population will increase from 56 percent in 2020 to over 61 percent in 2060. As a result, of the 10.2 billion world population projected in 2060, nearly 1 in 8 people will be an Asian person 65 years and older—in contrast to less than 1 in 40 who will be an older African person.

That large and growing share of Asia's older population deserves further attention. Yet, as the following panels will illustrate, the level and pace of aging in Asia vary widely by subregion and country.

**Figure 1.**  
**Population Aged 65 and Older in Asia Is Projected to Reach 1.2 Billion by 2060**

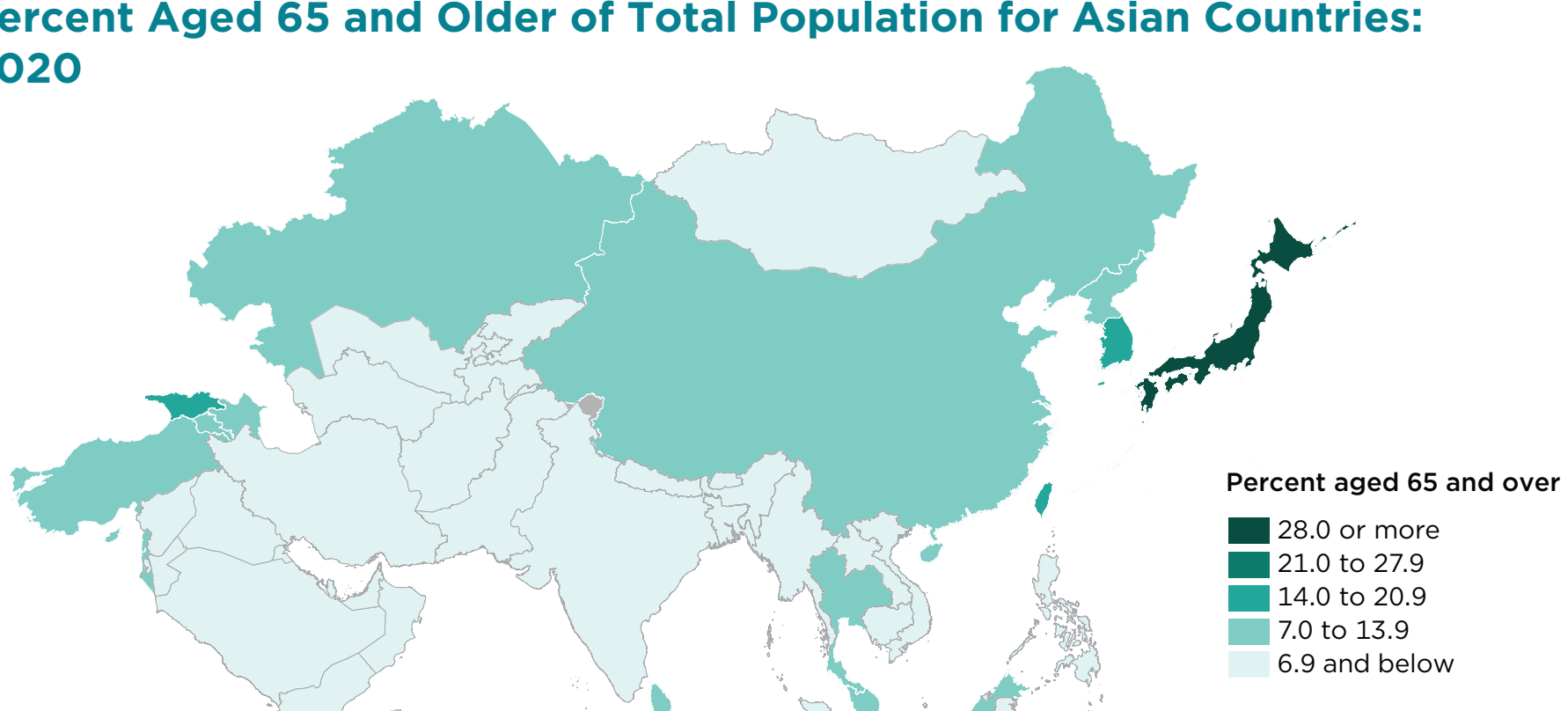


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Database, 2021.

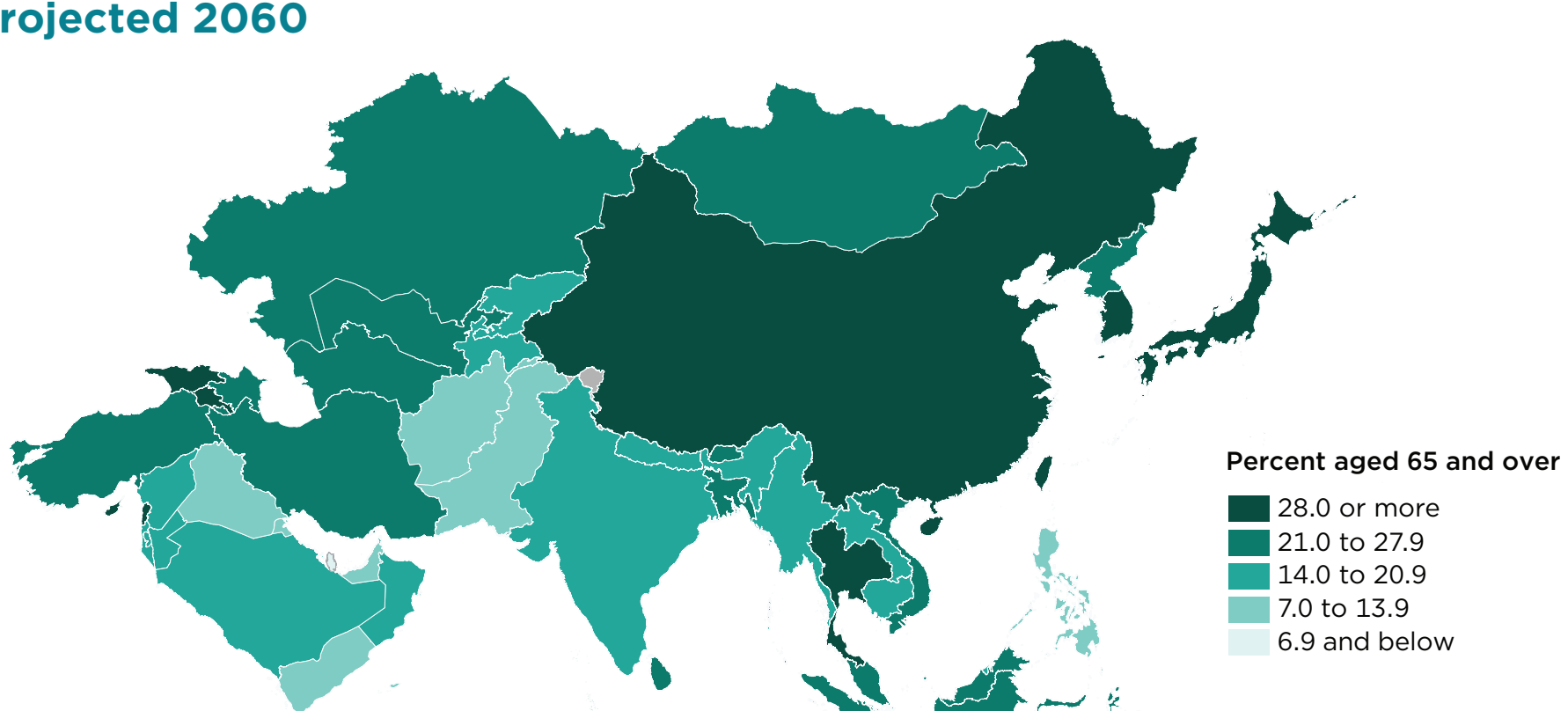
### 2 The size and projected increase of Asia's population at ages 65 and older varies considerably across Asia.

Age structure, or the proportion of people 65 years and older in the overall population, is one of the most common measures of global population aging. The maps below show these proportions in Asian countries in 2020 and population projections for 2060. At present, the oldest populations are in Eastern Asia, with the youngest in Southern and Western Asia. By 2060, all countries in Asia are projected to experience an increase in their 65 years and older populations, although regional and country differences (as observed in 2020) will largely remain.

**Figure 2a.**  
**Percent Aged 65 and Older of Total Population for Asian Countries: 2020**



**Figure 2b.**  
**Percent Aged 65 and Older of Total Population for Asian Countries: Projected 2060**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, International Database, 2022.

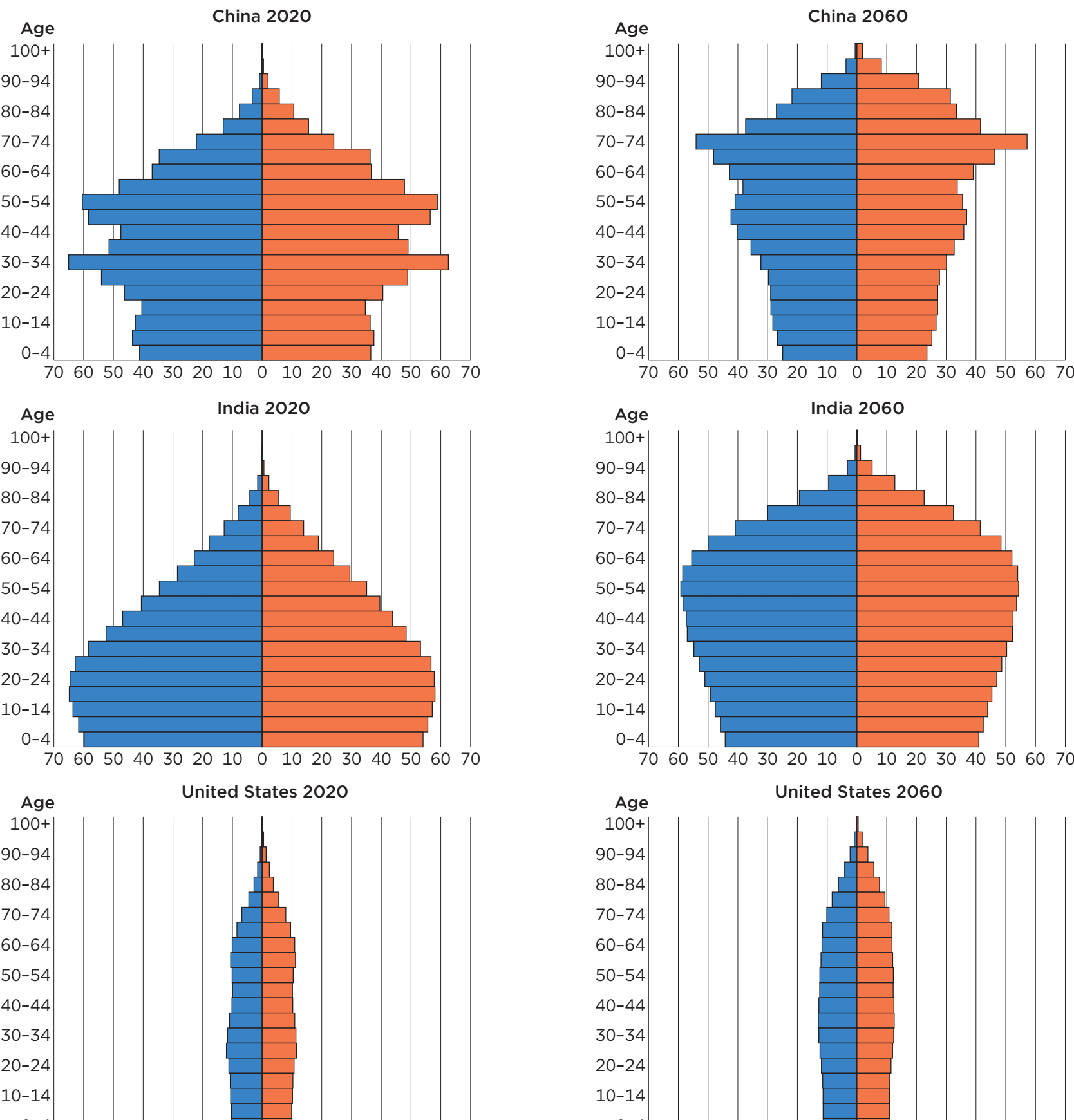
What causes population aging? The key elements occur when birth rates and death rates both fall at the same time. Falling fertility causes a decline in the portion of the younger population, while falling mortality gradually increases the proportions of those who live to older ages. Both of these demographic changes cause the classic "population pyramid" age structure to become more rectangular, or even vase shaped.

China and India both provide examples of age structures changing over time. Between 2020 and 2060, the number and share of those at older ages in each of these countries will increase substantially.

Of equal note is the outside share of older Asians in the world's population. The graphics in Figure 3 emphasize how China and India—the two most populous countries in the world—dwarf that of the United States, the world's third-most populous.

**Figure 3.**  
**Population Structure by Age and Sex in the World's Three Most Populous Countries: 2020 and 2060 (projected)**

(Vertical axis lines each represent 10 million people)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Asia Aging: Demographic, Economic, and Health Transitions," 2022. <www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p95-22-1.pdf>.

### 3 Health improvements and differentials in Asia.

A basic measure of the health of older populations is life expectancy at age 60 (LE60), or the number of additional years a person at age 60 can expect to live. As life expectancy has increased for all age groups in Asia, so too has the LE60 for older populations. The number of Asian countries where LE60 was 20 years or more increased from only 8 in 2000 to 17 in 2019.

As of 2020, Asian countries and areas with the highest LE60 (24 years or more) included Japan, Macau, Hong Kong, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Israel, and Taiwan. In contrast, LE60 was 16 years or less in Uzbekistan, Yemen, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Azerbaijan.

Changes in LE60 between 2000 and 2020 suggest that at least 3.0 years improvement and none below 2.4 years of improvement. Conversely, LE60 declined in seven of the ten countries and areas with the lowest life expectancies, where the very best improvement was only 0.7 years. The latter findings, perhaps a reflection of the estimated impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, suggests a notable widening of health disparities across the region.

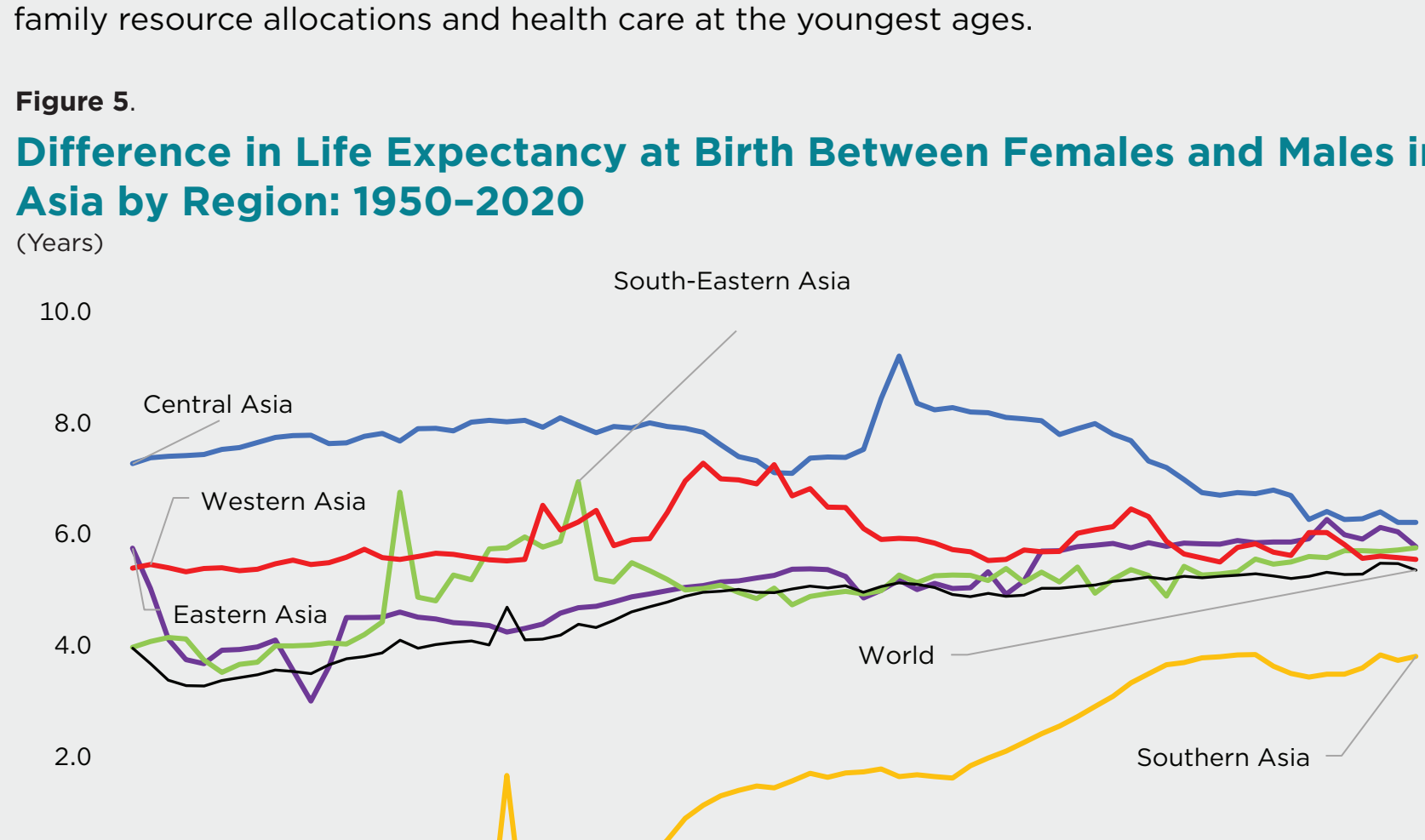
**Figure 4.**  
**Countries and Areas in Asia With the Highest/Lowest Estimated Life Expectancy at Age 60 (Both Sexes Combined): 2000 and 2020**

Country or Area	Highest LE60 in 2020		Country or Area	Lowest LE60 in 2020	
	2000	2020		2000	2020
Japan	24.3	26.9	Pakistan	16.5	16.4
Macau	23.7	26.8	Kazakhstan	15.6	16.3
Hong Kong	23.5	26.7	Kyrgyzstan	16.1	16.3
South Korea	20.8	25.9	Indonesia	16.5	16.1
Singapore	21.9	24.8	Iraq	16.8	16.1
Thailand	21.1	24.8	Uzbekistan	16.3	16.0
Israel	22.1	24.5	Yemen	16.5	15.9
Taiwan	21.0	24.4	Afghanistan	15.1	15.2
Cyprus	20.2	23.4	Tajikistan	15.9	15.1
Maldives	17.8	22.1	Azerbaijan	16.4	15.1

Source: United Nations World Population Prospects, 2022.

Women tend to live longer than men due to biological, behavioral, and social reasons, although the health advantage in life expectancy varies across time and geography. In general, as overall health conditions improve, the female advantage increases. At present, females tend to outlive males by about 5–6 years across most subregions of Asia. These differences are noticeably lower in Southern Asia, where the female advantage remains well below that of other subregions. This observation may be attributable to ongoing biases in family resource allocations and health care at the youngest ages.

**Figure 5.**  
**Difference in Life Expectancy at Birth Between Females and Males in Asia by Region: 1950–2020**



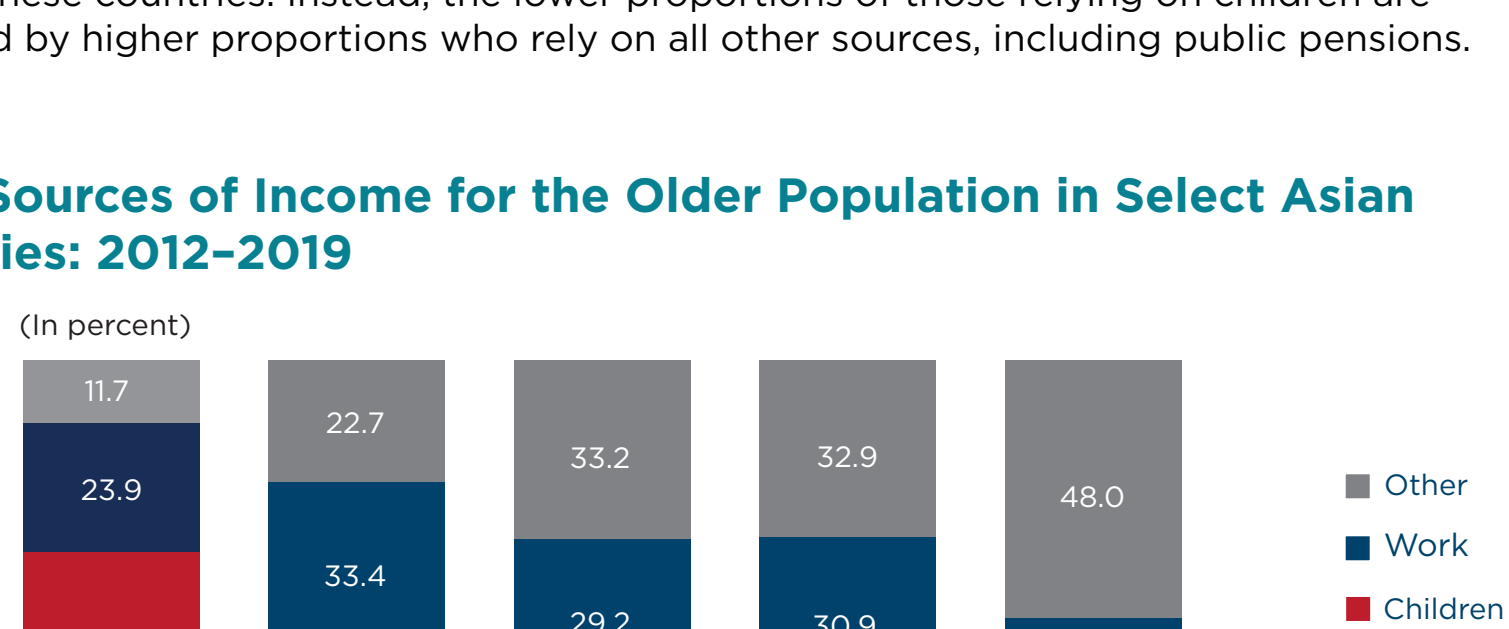
Source: United Nations World Population Prospects, 2022.

### 4 Economic transitions in responsibility for old-age care.

Across Asia, sources of economic support for the older populations vary depending on levels of economic development. The five countries in Figure 6 show the varying proportions of older people whose main source of income is provided by their children (a traditional form of old age security), from 64.4 percent in Burma to only 23.0 percent in South Korea.

The ordering of these countries is in line with average per capita income. The proportion reporting that their own work provides their main source of income does not vary much across these countries. Instead, the lower proportions of those relying on children are replaced by higher proportions who rely on all other sources, including public pensions.

**Figure 6.**  
**Main Sources of Income for the Older Population in Select Asian Countries: 2012–2019**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Asia Aging: Demographic, Economic, and Health Transitions," 2022. <www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p95-22-1.pdf>.

Nearly all countries in Asia provide public pensions, although the proportion of the population in India and Pakistan to over 90 percent in Japan. Once again, these sharp disparities reflect differences in each country's level of economic development. Coverage is very limited in lower income countries and typically only encompasses government workers, whereas in countries with higher income levels both contributions and coverage are extended to private sector employees as well.

In countries where public pensions cover a minority of the labor force, pensions tend to replace a higher percentage of the formerly earned wages. In India, Pakistan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, pensions replace over 80 percent of wages, whereas in Japan, where a far higher portion of the labor force is covered, pensions replace only about 40 percent. This difference reflects the fact that wages tend to be low in less developed countries and that alternative investments and sources of support are available in higher income countries.

**Figure 7.**  
**Percent Labor Force Covered by Public Pensions vs. Percent of Former Wages Replaced by Pensions in Select Asian Countries**



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, "Asia Aging: Demographic, Economic, and Health Transitions," 2022. <www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2022/demo/p95-22-1.pdf>.

Given improved health, longer lives, and fewer family caregivers as childbearing declines, who will care for the more than one billion Asians destined to reach older ages in the coming decades? And how will public pension and employment systems evolve to meet the needs of Asia's aging populations? Whichever strategies are chosen to address these challenges and opportunities, Asia's diverse regional and national contexts will offer a mix of approaches that other countries throughout the world may consider.

Production of this infographic was supported by the National Institute on Aging.