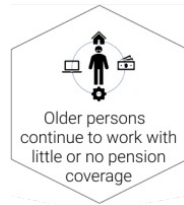
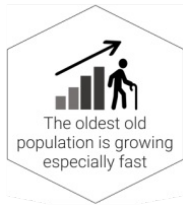


2021 ESCAP population data insight

POPULATION AGEING

Population Data Insight: Population Ageing



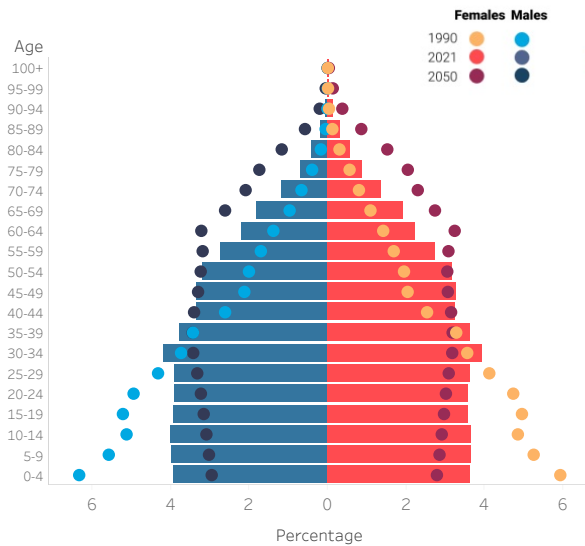
Populations are becoming “older”

This brings about both challenges and opportunities

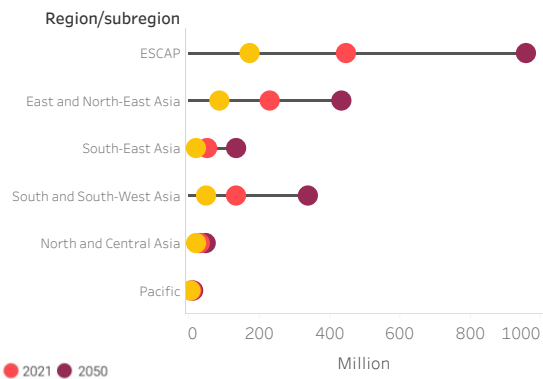
The population in Asia and the Pacific is becoming older. Since 1990, the region's population pyramid has changed in size and shape, with fewer younger people and more older persons (figure 1). This trend is expected to continue in the foreseeable future, both for women and men, bringing sizable changes in labour markets and demand for goods and services, as well as in family structures, intergenerational relationships and support systems of societies.

The number and share of older persons aged 65 years or older living in the region have increased over the last few decades, as a result of reduced fertility and increased longevity. Figure 2 indicates that, in 2021, older persons comprise 9.5 per cent of the total population, around 445 million people. This number is 2.6 times bigger than in 1990 (171 million), and is expected to double to 958 million in 2050, comprising 18 per cent of the total population.

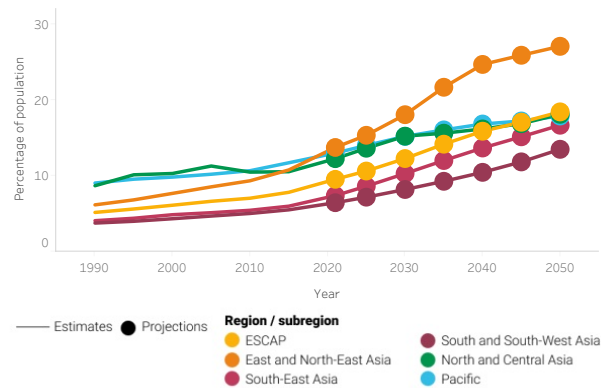
By subregion, East and North-East Asia will continue to have the highest share of older persons and the fastest speed of ageing (figure 3). In 2021, the share of older persons aged 65 or over represents around 14 per cent of its total population; it is expected to reach 27 per cent by 2050, with one in four of the total population being older persons. By 2050, the Pacific (including Australia and New Zealand) and North and Central Asia would see the share of older persons reaching 18 per cent. South-East Asia and South and South-West Asia, despite currently having the lowest shares of older persons, are to experience rapid population ageing; in particular, South-East Asia is to potentially catch up with the Pacific and North and Central Asia in the next few decades.



Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

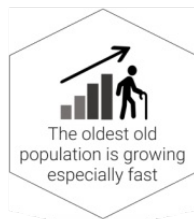


Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.



Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

Population Data Insight: Population Ageing



The oldest old population is growing especially fast, although at differing rates in the subregions
Older persons are not a homogeneous group; hence, they need tailored attention

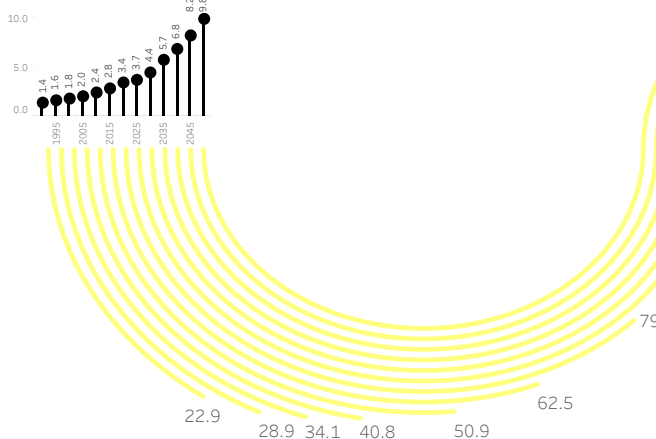


Figure 1 Oldest old population (80+) in Asia and the Pacific (in millions and as a percentage)
 Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

The oldest old population (80 or over) in Asia and the Pacific is growing rapidly in both number and proportion. As shown in figure 1, the number of oldest old persons in the region is about 80 million in 2021, representing 1.7 per cent of the total population. By 2050, the number and proportion are projected to triple, to around 255 million and 4.9 per cent of the total population. The oldest old population is increasing faster than other groups of older persons, going from 13.4 per cent in 1990 to 17.9 per cent in 2021, and is projected to reach 26.7 per cent in 2050 (figure 2).

The largest number of the oldest old population resides in East and North-East Asia (figure 3). In 2021, about a half of the oldest old population in Asia and the Pacific are living in this subregion, and the number is projected to increase in the coming decades. At the same time, about 25 per cent of the oldest old reside in South and South-West Asia, with 11 per cent in South-East Asia, 9 per cent in North and Central Asia and less than 2 per cent in the Pacific.

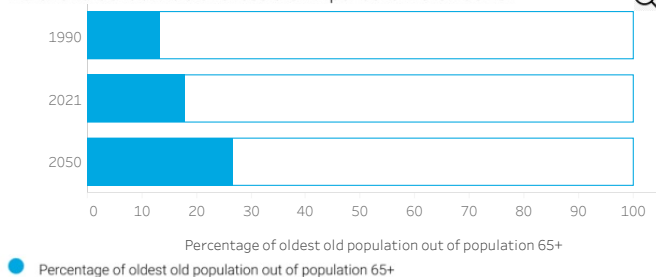


Figure 2 Oldest old (80+) population in Asia and the Pacific (as a percentage of population 65+)
 Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

Australia; Japan; Hong Kong, China; New Zealand; Republic of Korea; and Thailand have experienced sharp growth of their oldest old populations (figure 4). The ratio of the oldest old population relative to the population aged 65 or older, despite being varied and fluctuating across countries and economies, displays an upward trend in general. In Japan, for example, it rose from less than 20 per cent in 1990 to over 30 per cent in 2021 and is projected to continue to increase to 40 per cent within a decade. Hong Kong, China experienced a sharp increase in the ratio from 16 per cent in 1990 to 28 per cent in 2021, and this is projected to reach 43 per cent in 2050. A further increase in the number of the oldest old has important implications for policymakers with regard to the provision of appropriate health care, long-term care and special care, as well as the need to secure a stable income source.

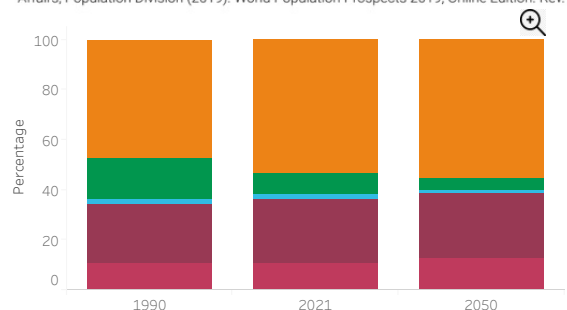


Figure 3 Oldest old (80+) population by subregion, 1990, 2021 and 2050 (as a percentage of Asia-Pacific total)
 Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

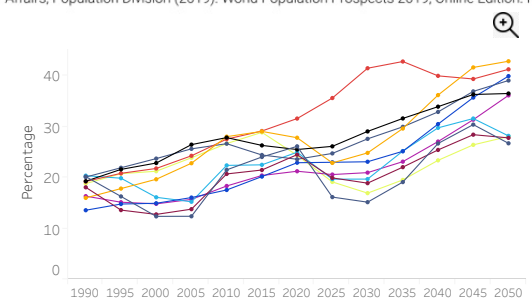
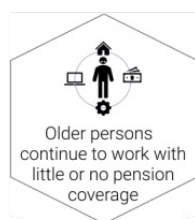
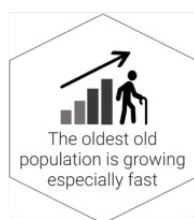


Figure 4 Top 10 Asia-Pacific countries in which the proportion of the oldest old (80+) to the population 65+ is the highest
 Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

Population Data Insight: Population Ageing



Women are living longer than men, but many of these extra years are spent living with disease/injury

Gender differences should be considered when addressing the needs of older persons

Older women account for a greater share of the total older population than older men. In 2021, approximately 54.3 per cent of older persons in the 65-70 age cohort are women (see figure 1). This disproportionate sex ratio is more visible in older age cohorts; for example, the proportion of women is 60.9 per cent or above among the oldest-old population in 2021. While the mortality risks of women are greater in lower-age groups, risks are higher for men among older persons, partly as a result of unhealthy behaviours and nutritional habits, such as tobacco and alcohol consumption, and mental and physical health issues.

Longer life for women unfortunately does not mean that they are healthier than men in their later years. As presented in figure 2, older women who are aged 60 or older are exposed to more years of unhealthy living conditions, as indicated by the gap between healthy life expectancy and life expectancy. Both increased for men and women in most countries of the Asia-Pacific region in the past years. However, life expectancy grew faster than healthy life expectancy, meaning that, while people live longer, they also spend a longer period of their life with health problems and/or disability. Moreover, considerable numbers of older women, particularly the oldest-old, are widowed because of the tendency of men to marry younger women in many cultures in the region. Reducing the gap between life expectancy and healthy life expectancy among older persons, therefore, is one of the main challenges for policymakers and other stakeholders in the region.

[View figure 2](#)

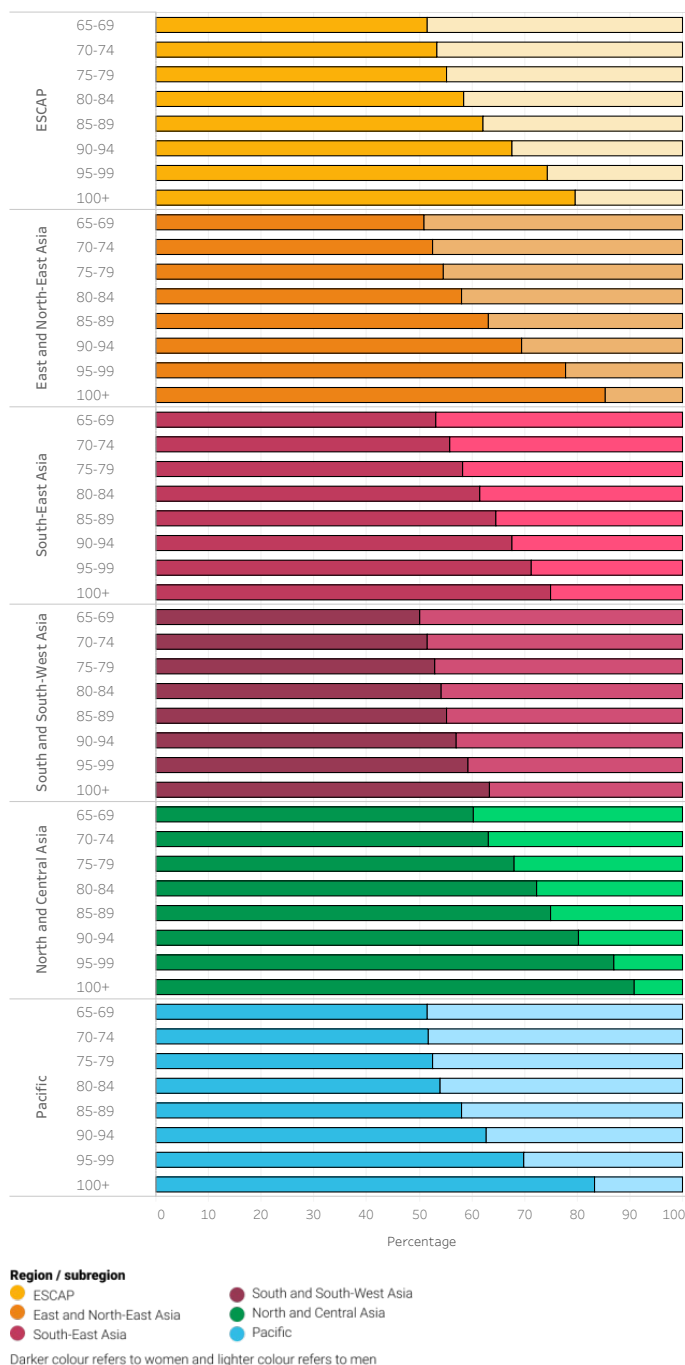


Figure 1 Percentage of older female and male population 65+ in Asia and the Pacific, and by subregion, 2021

Source: ESCAP calculations based on United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1.

Population Data Insight: Population Ageing



Population ageing is very rapid in Asia and the Pacific

The speed of ageing gives governments less time to address its challenges and opportunities proactively

As many countries are getting old before they get rich, urgent action is needed to create jobs and enhance social protection

The speed of ageing refers to the number of years taken for a country to move from an ageing society to an aged society (namely, for the share of the older population aged 65 or older to increase from 7 to 14 per cent). The speed of ageing varies across the region, ranging from 13 to 64 years (see figure 1). However, more than half of the countries in the region are ageing or projected to age very fast, taking less than 30 years to transition from an ageing to an aged society. For example, Singapore, the Republic of Korea and Japan took only 17, 18 and 23 years, respectively. It is projected that, in the next few decades, many countries across the subregions – including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, China, French Polynesia, Guam, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Malaysia, Maldives, New Caledonia, Thailand and Viet Nam – will become aged societies in less than 25 years. This is much faster than observed in countries of other regions, such as France (115 years), Sweden (85 years), or the United States of America (69 years).

Rapid ageing has considerable economic, social, cultural and political implications, creating pressure for policymakers to find quick solutions to support the growing numbers of older persons with health care, sustainable old-age employment and social protection, including pensions. This is critical considering that many countries in the region are still developing.

In the region, the old-age support ratio, defined as the proportion of working age persons relative to older persons, has declined from 11.9 in 1990 to 7.1 in 2021 and is projected to decrease further to 3.5 in 2050 (see figure 2). Japan faces the lowest potential support ratio, with only 1.9 workers aged 15-64 years for every older person aged 65 or over, in 2021. The ratio is projected to fall to 1.2 in 2050. This trend raises questions regarding government capacity to maintain economic growth and fiscal sustainability, as well as general welfare for all ages, considering a smaller labour force and lower tax revenue base, but larger expenditures to support older persons.

Although population ageing is more advanced in wealthier countries, in general, several countries in the region are becoming old before they get rich. For instance, countries with proportions of older persons at 11 per cent or higher, such as Armenia, Georgia and Sri Lanka, had GDP per capita of less than US\$5,000 in 2020 (see figure 3). Thailand's GDP per capita stood at around US\$7,200, while nearly 13 per cent of its population was aged 65 or older. Brunei Darussalam is an exception, as it had a relatively younger population, with older persons aged 65 or over comprising less than 6 per cent, while GDP per capita was around US\$26,000.

View figure 2 and 3

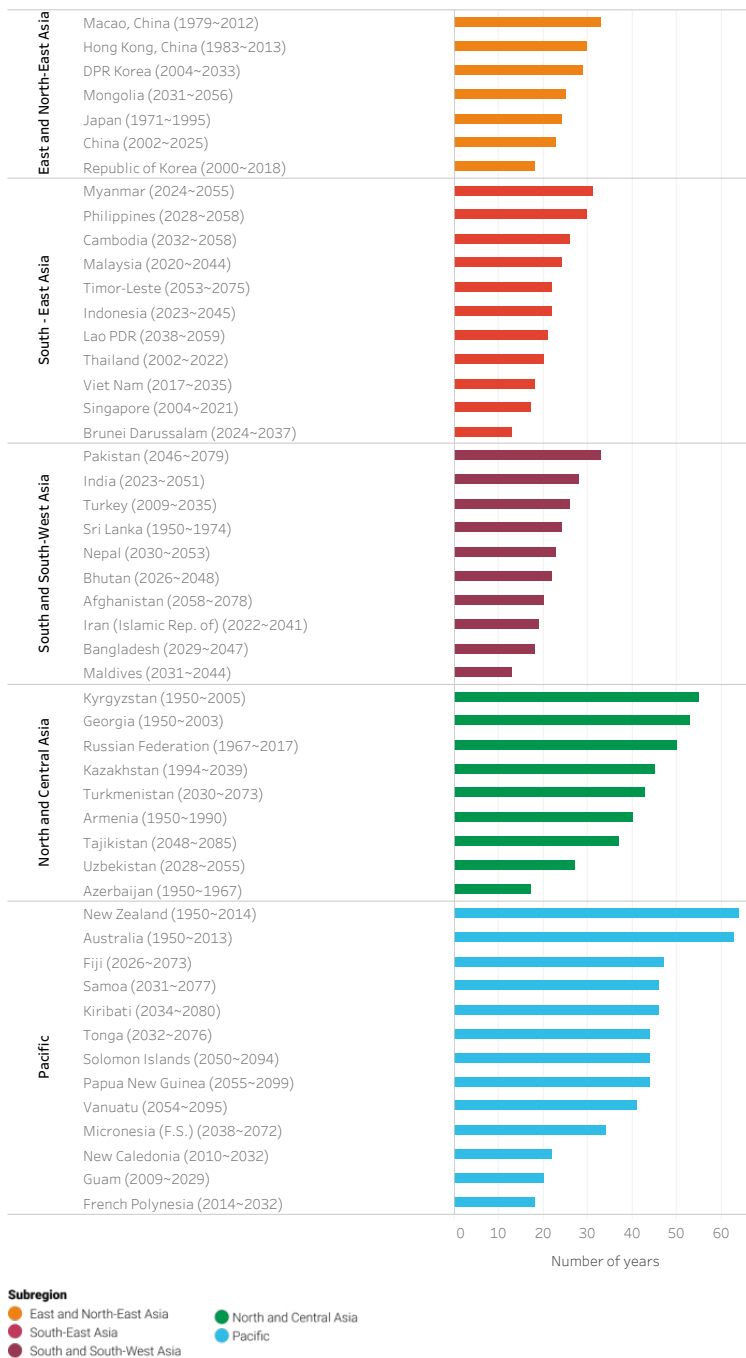
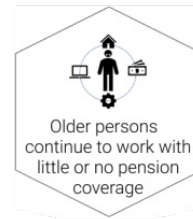


Figure 1 Speed of ageing = Number of years required or expected for percentage of older population 65+ to increase continuously from 7 to 14 per cent, in Asia and the Pacific by subregion, measured from 1950 onwards.

Source: ESCAP calculations based on: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2019). World Population Prospects 2019, Online Edition. Rev. 1 and Kinsella, Kevin and Wan He (2009). "An Aging World: 2008". International Population Reports, issued June 2009. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The increase from 7 to 14 per cent is generally referred to as the transition from an "ageing" to an "aged" society.

Population Data Insight: Population Ageing



In many countries, older persons continue to work, and many work out of necessity

The attainment of universal and adequate pension coverage for both women and men is essential

Focusing on the formal sector of the economy, participation in the labour force by older persons is not a new phenomenon in Asia and the Pacific, where around one fifth of older persons aged 65 or over were still working during the period 2015–2019 (see figure 1). Yet, variations exist across countries and subregions. For instance, during 2015–2019, in South-East Asia, 32 per cent of older persons worked (with as many as 55 and 56 per cent in Cambodia and Indonesia, respectively). On the other hand, only 7 per cent of older persons worked in North and Central Asia (4 and 9 per cent in Armenia and Azerbaijan, respectively).

Labour force participation rates of older persons in the region exhibit different dynamics across countries. For example, in Cambodia, New Zealand, Republic of Korea and Singapore, there was an increase in such rates between 2000 and 2019, while the rates decreased in Bangladesh, Islamic Republic of Iran and Turkey.

Again, focusing on the formal sector of the economy, older women participate less in labour activities compared to older men in the region. Around 32 per cent of older men were working in 2019, compared to 14 per cent of older women. The gender difference varied significantly across countries depending on culture and socioeconomic variables, and was sizable in many countries of South and South-West Asia.

The coverage of contributory pension schemes is still modest in the Asia-Pacific region, though subregional differences exist (see figure 2).

Coverage is relatively high in countries of East and North-East Asia and North and Central Asia. Yet, it is relatively low in countries of South-East Asia, South and South-West Asia and many Pacific island countries, with less than one third of the working-age population covered by a contributory pension scheme in 2019. Pension scheme coverage for women is lower than for men. Due to women's lower labour force participation, they have less access to pension benefits and thus are even more likely to have no income when they are old.

As a result of low pension coverage and generally low benefit levels, many older persons must continue to work even after retirement, especially in developing countries. A large share of older persons work in the informal sector in jobs that are hazardous, insecure, low paid and with no appropriate social protection (see figure 3). Therefore, establishing a proper social protection system should be a policy priority of utmost urgency.

View figure 2 and 3

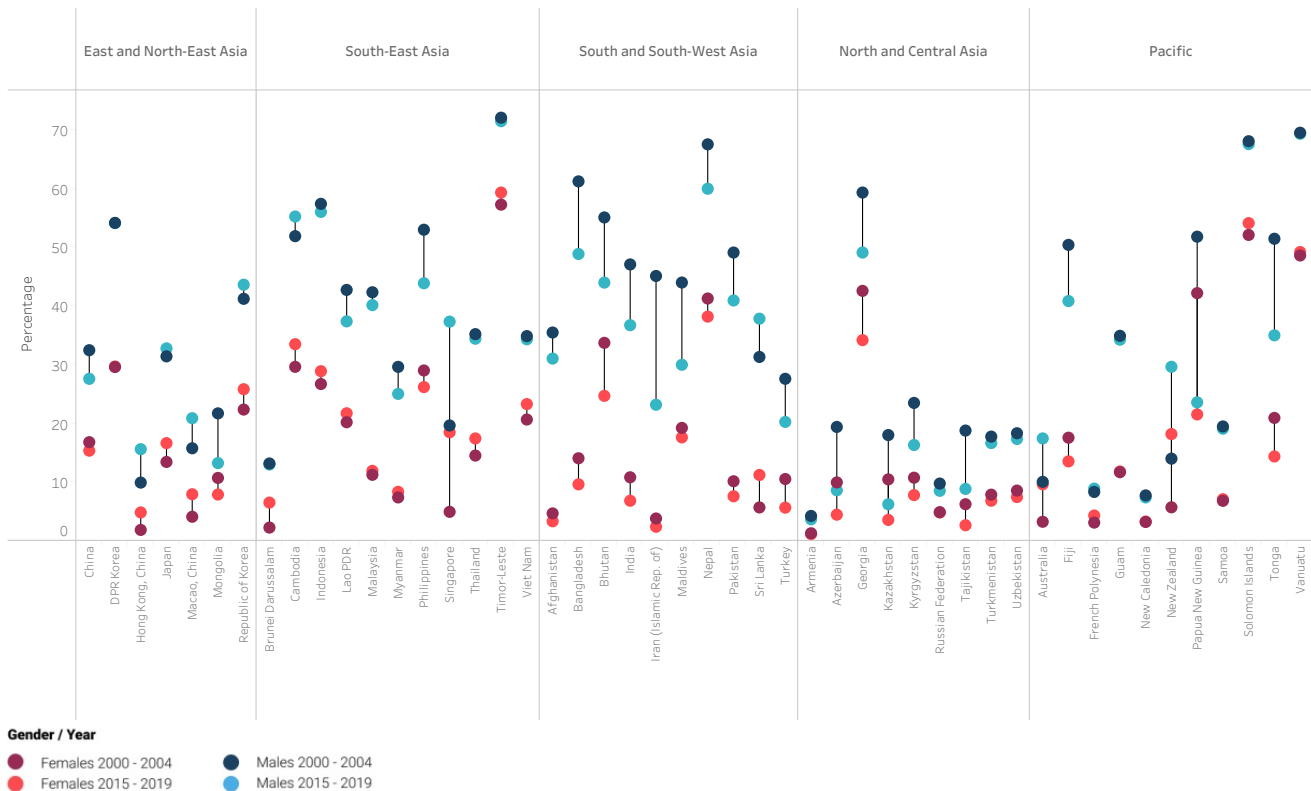


Figure 1 Labour force participant rate of older persons 65+ in Asia and the Pacific, by sex, 2000-2004 and 2015-2019
Source: International Labour Organization (2020), ILO STAT.