

Toward More Age-friendly Cities: WHO Kobe Centre Announces New Indicators for Assessing Age-friendliness *Bilbao (Spain) leads by example*

Population ageing and urbanization are two very influential global trends in the 21st century. As urbanization progresses and the population over age 60 increases, there is growing attention to the role of older people in the family, the local community and the economy. Enhancing the age-friendliness of cities is essential to meet the needs of older persons. In order to do so, decision makers require evidence on the needs, effectiveness, and equity of such initiatives using clearly defined indicators and information.

The WHO developed the concept of an Age-friendly City – an urban environment that optimizes opportunities for health for everyone, regardless of age – and published the first guidance document on the topic, “Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide”, in 2007. Since then, it has established the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities, which currently has 287 members from 33 countries, and is still expanding.

The WHO Kobe Centre, in partnership with the WHO Department of Ageing and Life Course, has just released a new framework and guide for indicators for cities to assess age-friendliness: “Measuring the age-friendliness of cities: A guide to using core indicators” in English, Chinese, French and Spanish.

The new WHO guide is an important tool that aims to promote the practice of measurement and indicator assessments, globally.

There are a total of 16 indicators that are designed to assess the physical and social environment, such as access to transportation and social participation, as well as quality of life and equity. These indicators were developed based on international expert consultations, surveys of local government and community representatives and a pilot study with 15 communities from 12 countries.

One of the pilot sites, Bilbao city in the northern part of Spain, identified access to public transportation as one of their priorities. Taking into account the indicator assessment results they produced in the pilot study, the city announced that it aims to improve the proportion of households within walking distance (500 meters) from at least two public transportation networks from the current 84% to 100% (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Access to public transportation networks in Bilbao, Spain, 2015



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Note: Green areas are within walking distance (500 meters) of all 3 major public transit networks: urban bus and tram stops, subway stations and bicycle lanes. Yellow areas are within walking distance of 2 of the 3 transit networks. Orange areas are within walking distance of 1 of the 3 transit networks.

Results and Implications

The 15 pilot sites across 12 countries were each able to calculate several if not most of the indicators, although data availability and data collection methods varied. The ability to appropriately adapt the assessment method to the local context was found to be very important, and this required flexibility and innovation.

The pilot sites recognized the importance of assessing equity, that is the extent to which the features of an Age-friendly environment are fairly distributed throughout the area and population, but in practice, they found it very difficult to measure.

Furthermore, the study showed that the quality and practical value of the assessment is enhanced by engaging local residents including older people in the process to validate the data and also to link the assessment results to specific actions that can be taken.

Conclusion

Given the global demographic trends of urbanization and population ageing, it will become increasingly important to enhance the age-friendliness of cities. In order to do so, it is necessary to build the evidence base on the needs, effectiveness, efficiency and equity of such initiatives using clearly defined indicators. The new indicator guide published by the WHO is a tool that aims to promote the practice of indicator assessments, globally, and the pilot site results suggest that it has utility across diverse contexts.

References

Measuring the age-friendliness of cities: a guide to using core indicators. Kobe: World Health Organization; 2015 (http://www.who.int/kobe_centre/publications/AFC_guide/en/; accessed 8 February 2016).

World report on ageing and health. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2015 (<http://www.who.int/ageing/events/world-report-2015-launch/en/>; accessed 8 February 2016).

Global age-friendly cities: a guide. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2007 (http://www.who.int/ageing/publications/Global_age_friendly_cities_Guide_English.pdf; accessed 8 February 2016).

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WHO Kobe Centre

http://www.who.int/kobe_centre/ageing/age_friendly_cities/ja/ (Japanese)

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Global Age-friendly Cities: A Guide

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