

Ageing as an economic asset: policy priorities for the Arab region's silver economy



Shared Prosperity Dignified Life



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Introduction: from demographic pressure to economic potential

The Arab region is ageing fast. The silver economy,¹ the expanding market shaped by longer lives and ageing populations, is emerging as a major economic force.



Longer, healthier lives

are expanding demand for healthcare, financial services, digital tools and lifelong learning.



Changing family structures and rising care needs

are accelerating growth in tech-enabled support systems, age-friendly housing, and long-term care services.



A more experienced workforce

can be unlocked by extending working lives and investing in accessible upskilling, especially digital skills.

Together, these shifts position the silver economy as a strategic opportunity to convert demographic pressure into sustained economic

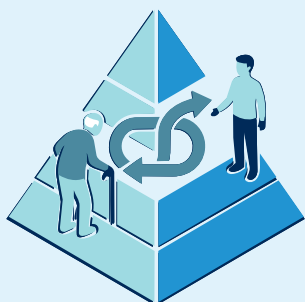
value, while advancing a human-rights-based approach that supports autonomy, inclusion, and wellbeing for older persons (box A).

Box A. The Silver Economy and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

The emergence of the silver economy in the Arab region presents a strategic opportunity to accelerate implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).

Leveraging the silver economy directly advances the three MIPAA priority directions:

1



Integrating ageing into development frameworks:

mainstream ageing in economic, social and sectoral policies to build inclusive and sustainable societies for all.

2



Ensuring enabling environments that support autonomy and participation:

create age-friendly societies where older persons can participate fully in community, social and economic life.

3



Strengthening health and social protection systems:

ensure accessible, quality health care and social protection across the life course.

By treating older persons as active contributors to economic life, Arab Governments, working alongside the private sector, can put MIPAA commitments into practice.

This approach reinforces the MIPAA call to recognize the rights, capacity and economic potential of older persons, ensuring that ageing is fully integrated into inclusive and sustainable development.

Global examples of the silver economy

Europe's ageing population driving growth and jobs

The European Union silver economy is thriving:

- Expanded by about 5% per year over the past decade,
- Estimated size of European Union silver economy is €5.7 trillion in 2025.



- **Creating millions of jobs:**

supporting an estimated 10 million jobs across sectors linked to Europe's ageing population.

- **Examples of key sectors driving the silver economy:**

health and social care, assistive technologies, age-friendly housing, mobility and wellness.

Investing in the silver economy means investing in jobs, innovation and a better quality of life for all.

Sources: European Commission, *The silver economy study: how to stimulate the economy by hundreds of millions of euros per year*, 2018.
European Commission, *Silver Economy - Research and Innovation*, 2025.

In the United States, businesses are recognizing the opportunity of an ageing world



31% of firms consider **global ageing** in their marketing.



15% have **strategies** targeting older adults.

The silver economy is a growing market.

Businesses that understand and invest in older adults today will lead in a rapidly ageing future.

Source: Joseph F. Coughlin, *The Longevity Economy: Unlocking the World's Fastest-Growing, Most Misunderstood Market*, 2017.

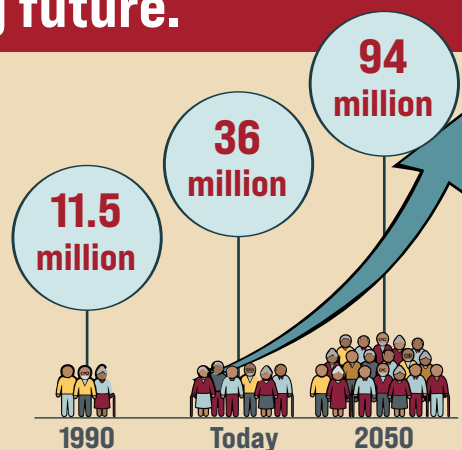
Silver economy: untapped potential in the Arab region

In the Arab region, the number of older persons is growing exponentially, transforming not only patterns of consumption but also the labour market. Demographic trends position the silver economy as an increasingly relevant source of opportunity today and a major driver of growth in the years ahead.

Ageing offers Arab economies a concrete path to diversify by building new value chains in health, finance, housing and technology, sectors driven by demographic demand rather than commodity cycles. This shift can also strengthen older people's ability to participate fully and live with dignity.

An ageing population, a growing future.

The Arab region's 60+ population has surged from 11.5 million in 1990 to 36 million today, and is projected to reach nearly 94 million by 2050, rising from 5% to 13% of the total population.



Source: ESCWA calculations using United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects*, 2024.

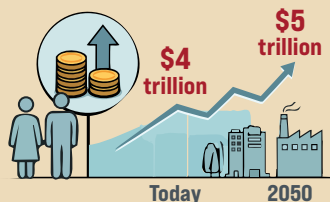
A trillion-dollar silver economy in the Arab region by mid-century

Total spending by older persons in the Arab region could range from \$752 billion to \$940 billion by 2050.

Overall economic impact could range from \$827 billion to **\$1.22 trillion**.

The scale of potential growth underscores the urgency of preparing now.

Countries that invest early in silver-economy ecosystems will be best positioned to capture the gains.



If current growth trends continue, Arab regional GDP, almost \$4 trillion today,² could reach \$5 trillion by 2050,

meaning the silver economy could account for roughly 20% of total economic activity in the region.

Source: ESCWA calculations (see methodology).

Roadblocks to realising the opportunity

Unlocking the silver economy requires confronting a set of persistent challenges. Many are structural, rooted in how societies organize work, care and community life, while others stem from market frictions,

unclear value chains, and a lack of coordinated strategies for serving older consumers. Together, they slow innovation and limit the full participation of older adults in the economy.



Limited long-term care and health infrastructure

- With older persons far more likely to live with some type of disability,³ weak long-term care systems leave a large share of the population at heightened risk, especially during health crises.
- Shrinking family support and outmigration are leaving many older persons without nearby caregivers, creating a growing care gap. Even with migrant workers helping to fill some roles, insufficient investment and preparedness of formal long-term care systems cannot meet rising demand.
- Shortages persist in professional caregivers, home-care services, assisted living and geriatric specialists.
- Fragmented regulation and limited quality standards make it difficult for private providers to scale reliable long-term care services.



Low labour force participation of older adults

- Mandatory retirement, age bias and limited lifelong learning push older adults out of work.
- Economies underuse the skills and mentorship potential of experienced older workers.
- Workplaces often lack flexible arrangements, ergonomic adaptations, and re-skilling pathways that would enable older adults to remain productive.



Financial insecurity in later life

- Limited social protection, especially weak pension coverage for informal workers, women and rural populations, undermines financial stability in later life and exacerbates inequalities among and between generations.
- Limited financial security, especially among older women, reduces purchasing power and weakens demand for age-related goods and services.
- Rising out-of-pocket health and care costs further strain household budgets, increasing vulnerability in old age and leaving fewer resources for other products and services that could stimulate age-related markets.



Digital exclusion

- Many older adults, especially older women, face barriers to digital access due to low literacy, affordability and connectivity gaps. These limitations reduce the size of the consumer base that can benefit from or drive demand for digital health, finance and service innovations.
- As services digitize, digital exclusion limits access to healthcare, finance, e-commerce, learning and flexible work. This not only restricts older people's ability to engage with emerging markets but also slows adoption rates and undermines the scalability of silver-economy solutions.
- Digital products and platforms often lack age-friendly design, making them difficult for older adults to navigate confidently. Poor usability reduces trust, uptake and sustained use.



Weak enabling environment

- Gaps in age-disaggregated data and market research hinder evidence-based policymaking and private investment.
- Few countries have mainstreamed ageing in development planning to align demographic trends with socioeconomic development priorities.
- High levels of informality limit the emergence of structured growth markets, reducing incentives for long-term investment and constraining the development of scalable silver economy services.

From challenges to catalysts

The gaps in today's systems create clear openings for innovation, investment and new models of service delivery. Viewing ageing through a silver-economy lens turns today's demographic pressures into tomorrow's growth markets. The unmet needs explored in the previous section reveal a broad and rapidly evolving landscape of market openings for firms prepared to innovate for an ageing population whose expectations, purchasing power, and diversity are expanding faster than most industries are adapting.

Care and healthcare systems

Sustained workforce development is essential for the silver economy. Building specialized skills in geriatric care, caregiving and other ageing-related professions ensures that the human capital needed to support an expanding silver economy is both available and well-prepared. The good news is that several Arab countries are investing in geriatric and caregiving skills.

Investing today in skills for a better tomorrow

Oman



- The Omani Ministry of Health has expanded geriatric-care training for nurses.
- Expanding training programmes for nurses.
- Strengthening quality geriatric care.
- Building skilled and prepared health workforce.

Source: Idris Aal Jumaa and others, *Evaluating the effectiveness of the national elderly care program in Oman: a cross-sectional study*, 2025.

Egypt



- The Egyptian National Council for Women partners with private providers to train women in home-care and assisted-living services, building a pipeline of skilled workers for a growing market.
- Participating with the private sector.
- Training women in home care and assisted living.
- Creating a pipeline of skilled workforce.
- Meeting demand in a growing market.
- Stronger training today means a stronger care workforce tomorrow, and better lives for older persons.

Source: World Bank, *Women Economic Empowerment Study*, 2018.

Gaps in healthcare infrastructure open space for investment in telehealth, mobile clinics, assistive technologies, and community-based wellness models that promote active ageing. The private sector is already moving quickly to tap into opportunities in the growing silver economy (box B).

experience and reliability of older workers becomes not just a social imperative but a strategic advantage. Ensuring that older adults can continue learning and adapting is central to this shift, making lifelong education a critical pillar of any age-inclusive employment strategy (box C).

Labour force participation

As employers confront tightening labour markets and shifting skill demands, tapping into the

Financial security

Despite widespread financial insecurities, older adults in the Arab region represent a rapidly

Box B. A scalable digital health platform supporting older adults in the Arab region

Altibbi illustrates how private-sector actors are beginning to respond to the growing demand for services tailored to older adults, offering teleconsultations, AI-supported triage, and remote-monitoring tools that help bridge gaps in access to care. Operating across Gulf countries, Egypt and Jordan, the platform provides medical advice at relatively low cost, which can be especially valuable for older people facing mobility challenges or limited availability of geriatric specialists. Its subscription model, insurer partnerships, and Arabic-language digital interface show how emerging business models can adapt to ageing populations and expand service delivery in a scalable way.

Source: [Altibbi](#).

Box C. University for Seniors in Beirut

The University for Seniors was created to address high levels of loneliness, depression and social isolation among older adults in Lebanon, where demographic shifts and migration have weakened traditional family support structures. The programme offers adults aged 50+ the chance to engage in peer-learning, join study groups, attend lectures, and participate in cultural and intergenerational activities on campus. It offers older persons a welcoming space to stay mentally active and socially connected through shared learning and campus engagement.

Source: American University of Beirut, [University of Seniors](#).

expanding consumer group whose needs and preferences are increasingly shaping demand across sectors, including retail, tourism, banking, pharmaceuticals and home-based services. Recognizing older persons as rights-holders, rather than passive recipients of care, shifts the focus from vulnerability to agency, and highlights a largely overlooked market with significant spending power and unmet demand. Yet this emerging market is far from uniform.

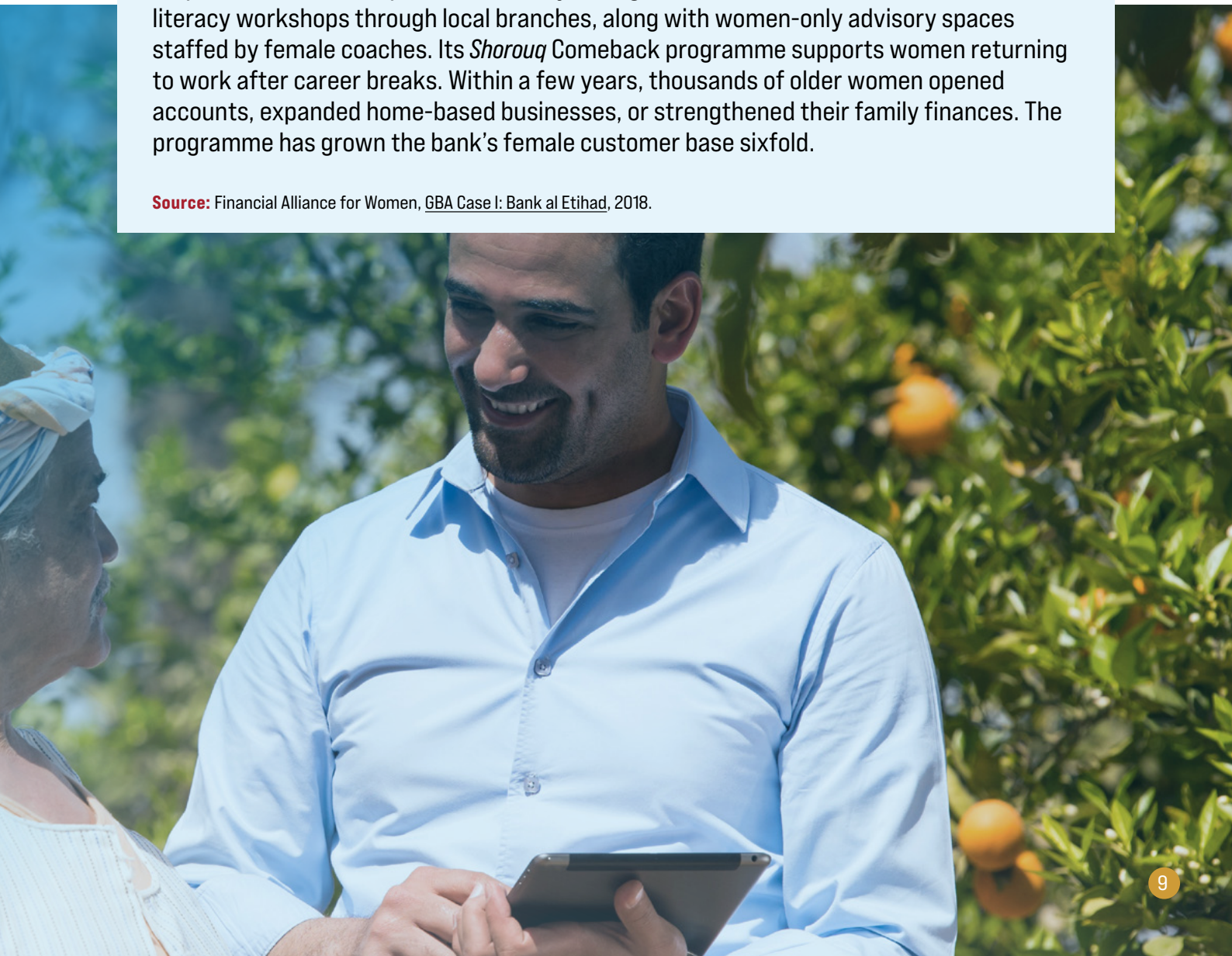
Persistent inequalities, most notably entrenched gender gaps, underscore the need for tailored

products, ranging from women-focused financial planning (box D) and accessible mobility solutions to inclusive, multigenerational housing models. These disparities do not just reflect social challenges; they signal market opportunities for providers willing to tailor products to groups historically underserved by mainstream markets. As populations age and household structures shift, the demand for solutions that meet the needs of older women, who often live longer, have lower lifetime earnings and face greater caregiving burdens, will continue to grow.

Box D. Gender-responsive financial innovation in Jordan

In 2014, Bank al Etihad in Jordan launched *Shorouq*, a women-focused banking programme that has been especially valuable for women over 50 taking on new financial responsibilities. *Shorouq* introduced easy savings tools, low-collateral loans, and financial literacy workshops through local branches, along with women-only advisory spaces staffed by female coaches. Its *Shorouq* Comeback programme supports women returning to work after career breaks. Within a few years, thousands of older women opened accounts, expanded home-based businesses, or strengthened their family finances. The programme has grown the bank's female customer base sixfold.

Source: Financial Alliance for Women, [GBA Case I: Bank al Etihad](#), 2018.



Gaps in social security and pension systems create additional pressure, and opportunity, for innovation. Many older adults, particularly women and informal-sector workers, face inadequate retirement income owing to fragmented contribution histories, low lifetime earnings, or limited access to formal pension schemes. For low-income groups with limited capacity to contribute, these gaps are most realistically closed through non-contributory and tax-financed programs such as *Karama* in Egypt.⁴

Within this landscape, there is still room for providers to design supplemental retirement products, micro-pension plans, and portable benefits that better reflect today's fluid labour markets, while recognizing that these instruments will reach only a segment of the population. There is also scope for public-private partnerships to modernize pension administration, improve service delivery and expand coverage, particularly when paired with publicly financed social protection floors that ensure minimum income security for all older persons.

Digital inclusion

The widening digital divide is driving demand for intuitive and age-friendly technologies, comprehensive digital-skills programmes, and

simplified interfaces that reduce friction for first-time or low-confidence users. Digital inclusion is becoming a strategic priority at the business level, reflected in initiatives such as *Mada* in Qatar (box E), which signal rising opportunities for private investment in age-inclusive innovation.

Enabling environment

A strong silver economy develops when several supportive conditions come together and reinforce each other. It begins with strong data availability and rigorous market research, which help Governments, investors and businesses identify the most promising sectors for age-related products and services. Arab countries have begun expanding national ageing surveys and household expenditure studies, enabling Governments and investors to identify high-potential sectors. Saudi Arabia provides a strong example of how expanding national ageing surveys enables better identification of high-potential sectors (box F).

Clear and forward-looking regulatory frameworks create an environment where competition can flourish and companies feel confident investing in solutions for older adults. For example, flexible licensing for home-care providers in Bahrain has encouraged private companies to enter the elder-care market with confidence (box G).

Box E. National model for accessible and age-inclusive digital transformation

The *Mada* – Qatar Assistive Technology Center, established in 2010, is a private institution that works closely with ministries, regulators and public agencies to embed accessibility standards into national digital-transformation efforts. Its programmes support inclusive education, employment and community participation, helping public entities adopt accessible platforms and services. Through its e-accessibility accreditation, it has contributed to the country's strong global ranking on the Digital Accessibility Rights Evaluation (DARE) Index. By improving access to assistive technologies and ensuring digital platforms work for people of all ages, *Mada* helps advance the silver economy by supporting ageing populations to stay active, connected and independent.

Source: Mada – Qatar Assistive Technology Center, [About Us](#).

Box F. Expansion of ageing data systems in Saudi Arabia

Since 2017, the Saudi National Elderly Survey has collected detailed data on older persons (60+). Its latest round covers 32,745 households and provides nationally representative insights, including levels of self-reliance in daily activities, technology use, and life satisfaction among older adults.

Combined with national household expenditure surveys, these datasets help policymakers and the private sector identify emerging needs in healthcare, home-based services, assistive technologies and age-friendly infrastructure, and design solutions that reflect the diverse realities of the ageing population.

Source: Saudi General Authority for Statistics, [Elderly Statistics Publication 2025](#), 2025.

Box G. Enabling environment for private homecare providers in Bahrain

Bahrain has created one of the region's more supportive environments for private home-care companies by allowing services to operate through multiple licensing pathways, rather than a single highly medicalized route. Health-related home-care providers are licensed through the National Health Regulatory Authority, while nonmedical support services, including companionship, daily-living assistance and household help, can register under social-care or commercial categories. This flexibility lowers entry barriers, reduces compliance costs, and enables a wider range of private operators to serve older adults who prefer ageing at home. As demand for in-home support grows, the country's adaptable licencing framework positions the private sector to scale quickly and diversify service offerings.

Source: National Health Regulatory Authority, [Professional and Facilities License Regulations](#).



Vibrant innovation ecosystems, including startups, incubators and accelerators, provide the space to experiment with new technologies, business models and service designs tailored to ageing populations. These ecosystems not

only encourage experimentation but also help translate promising ideas into scalable solutions. Recent initiatives in Morocco illustrate how such environments can catalyse age-responsive innovation (box H).

Box H. Digital innovation ecosystem in Morocco

In Morocco, Technopark Casablanca has supported digital-innovation startups developing smart mobility tools, accessible fintech services, and digital-literacy platforms that help older adults participate more fully in economic and civic life. Complementary programmes have also encouraged experimentation with inclusive service models, including age-friendly public-service apps and platforms that simplify access to social benefits, thereby strengthening the country's capacity to design solutions for an ageing society.

Source: Technopark Maroc, [Technopark Maroc – Le tremplin vers la performance](#).



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Policy recommendations



The present section outlines strategic actions that Governments and companies can take to capture emerging market segments, build age-inclusive value chains, and contribute to a more resilient economic ecosystem. Each recommendation is designed to support commercially viable solutions that align with broader societal goals, and is paired with a list of practical actions to help bring these opportunities to fruition. Silver-economy markets must also be responsive to differences in gender, disability, age, income and location to ensure that emerging opportunities reach all older adults, including the large share of older adults working in the informal sector. Ultimately, the Arab region is highly diverse, and these recommendations must be adapted to low-income countries and those affected by conflict, where institutional capacity and market conditions differ substantially.



Together, these recommendations create a dynamic, resilient and opportunity-rich economic landscape that can meet the needs of older adults while driving growth. Importantly, the silver economy should complement, not replace, the essential roles of Government, family and community in ensuring care, protection and social support. When approached in this balanced way, the silver economy becomes not just a niche market but a platform for sustained innovation and long-term value creation. By acting now, Governments and businesses can shape a future that is more economically resilient, inclusive and dynamic.



1. Invest in age-friendly healthcare and wellness solutions

Older adults are one of the fastest-growing consumer groups in healthcare. Companies that fill infrastructure gaps gain early-mover advantage in a high-growth market. Organizations that invest early in accessible design, integrated care pathways, and age-sensitive technologies position themselves to lead a sector where spending power and unmet needs are expanding rapidly. These investments should complement, rather than replace, public responsibilities for providing universal and equitable healthcare.

Scale telemedicine platforms to reduce costs and reach customers, especially in remote or underserved areas.

Develop home-based care services that create recurring revenue through subscription or membership models.

Offer preventive-care programmes (nutrition, fitness, chronic-disease management) that reduce strain on hospitals while generating new service lines.

Invest in assistive technologies (mobility aids, fall-detection devices) that meet rising demand for independent living.

Create national standards for geriatric care to guide hospitals, insurers and service providers in delivering age-appropriate, integrated care.

Invest in community-based health infrastructure (primary care clinics, mobile health units) that enable providers to scale services in underserved regions.

Strengthen social inclusion for older adults by expanding opportunities for community participation and social networking, recognizing that strong social ties support both mental and physical wellbeing.



2. Adopt flexible employment models and lifelong-learning initiatives

Older workers bring experience, reliability and institutional knowledge, reducing turnover costs and improving productivity. Their presence also strengthens organizations' ability to serve the silver economy, as they offer lived insight into the needs, preferences and pain points of older consumers. By embracing age-inclusive hiring and retention, companies gain a more stable workforce, deepen customer understanding, and build teams that reflect the full demographic landscape they aim to reach.

Mobilize underemployed older adults as community caregivers through peer-support roles that expand care services for less self-reliant peers.

Offer digital-skills training to expand the pool of employable older workers and reduce recruitment costs.

Partner with training centres to build tailored upskilling pathways, improving workforce adaptability.

Revise HR policies to eliminate age bias, widening the talent pipeline.

Update anti-discrimination laws and enforcement mechanisms to address age bias in recruitment, promotion and workplace culture.

Create pathways for informal-sector workers to transition into formal employment through certification programmes and simplified registration processes.

Support intergenerational workforce programmes through grants that encourage mentorship, apprenticeships and knowledge-transfer initiatives.



3. Develop innovative pension, insurance and financial products

Expanding financial security for older adults increases their purchasing power and supports their right to autonomy and protection. Given that many older persons face financial vulnerability rather than having surplus savings, especially those in the informal sector, the focus in the present section is on improving pensions, savings tools, and age-friendly financial services that help them build financial stability over time. As financial resilience and inclusion grow, so does the customer base for banks, insurers and fintechs.

Launch micro-insurance and low-premium products to tap into a large and currently underserved market segment.

Offer flexible pension top-ups via mobile payments, increasing customer retention and transaction volume.

Introduce longevity-linked products (annuities, reverse mortgages) that create long-term stable revenue streams.

Partner with employers and gig platforms to distribute portable retirement benefits, expanding market reach.

Use data analytics to personalize offerings, improving conversion rates and customer loyalty.

Modernize pension systems by enabling flexible contributions, micro-savings and portable benefits that follow workers across jobs.

Expand coverage of social pensions to reach informal-sector workers who lack access to contributory schemes.

Mandate age-friendly financial service standards to reduce fraud, simplify disclosures and ensure accessibility for older customers.



4. Conduct advertising and public-awareness campaigns to challenge stigma

Changing perceptions of ageing is essential not only for expanding markets but for advancing the rights and dignity of older persons. When older adults see themselves represented positively, they are more likely to engage with brands, purchase products, and participate in the economy. Shifting narratives towards capability, contribution and equal rights helps counter ageism, strengthens social cohesion, and creates an environment where policy reforms and market solutions can take root.

Feature older adults in marketing campaigns to promote inclusion and tap into a growing and loyal consumer segment with rising life expectancy.

Promote positive ageing narratives that position older persons as contributors, reinforcing rights-based approaches and reducing stigma.

Collaborate with media and influencers to normalize active ageing and highlight diverse experiences, including those shaped by poverty or disability.

Sponsor community events that build trust and brand visibility among older consumers.

Use targeted segmentation to tailor messages to different subgroups (active retirees, caregivers, older women).

Fund research on ageism and its structural drivers (such as poverty and social exclusion) to inform policy design, track public attitudes, and guide targeted interventions.



5. Design user-friendly technologies and support digital-literacy programmes

Bridging the digital divide expands the addressable market for tech companies, banks, telecoms and service providers. By investing in accessible design, digital literacy and affordable connectivity for older persons, including those in rural areas who often face the greatest infrastructure gaps, organizations can promote inclusion and position themselves to capture one of the most powerful demographically driven growth opportunities.

Develop intuitive interfaces (large fonts, simple navigation, voice commands) to increase adoption and reduce customer-support costs.

Create senior-friendly versions of apps to differentiate from competitors and boost market penetration.

Offer digital-literacy workshops that convert non-users into long-term digital customers.

Bundle products with onboarding support to increase customer satisfaction and reduce churn.

Co-design technologies with older adults to ensure usability and strengthen product-market fit.

Set accessibility standards for digital services, ensuring that public and private platforms meet usability requirements for older users.

Methodology

Depending on their financial situation, average annual consumption per older adult could range from \$8,000 to \$10,000 by 2050 in the Arab region, according to ESCWA calculations. The lower estimate reflects the reality that many older people have limited savings and constrained incomes, while the higher estimate assumes greater financial stability and surplus savings in later life. These figures build on current per-capita consumption levels of \$3,500–5,500, and assume household final consumption shares of 45–65% of GDP alongside modest real growth of 1.8–2.2% per year. Under these parameters, total spending by older adults would range from \$752 billion to \$940 billion by 2050. These figures are regional estimations; a more precise estimate would require analysing country-level data to capture the diverse population sizes, income profiles and expenditure patterns across the Arab region.

Applying economy-wide multipliers of 1.1 and 1.3 yields an overall economic impact in the range of \$827 billion to \$1.22 trillion. These multipliers capture the indirect and induced effects of spending: the additional activity generated when businesses expand supply chains, hire more workers, and when those workers then spend their incomes.

The lower-bound scenario reflects the status quo, assuming lower annual expenditure (\$8,000) and a lower multiplier (1.1). Older adults continue to face rising care needs, limited financial resources, and heavy reliance on low-cost migrant labour, family support and informal care systems. In this environment, consumption remains modest and spillover effects into the wider economy are relatively small.

By contrast, the upper-bound numbers assume higher annual expenditure (\$10,000) and a higher multiplier (1.3). They reflect a reform scenario where Governments and the private sector invest in formal care markets, creating new jobs and improving service quality. Immigration and labour policies shift to support a larger domestic care workforce. With more stable incomes and better access to services, older adults are able to spend more, and their consumption generates stronger supply-chain and employment effects.

Endnotes

1. European Commission, Farla, K., and others, The silver economy - Final report, 2018.
2. World Bank, World Development Indicators.
3. ESCWA, Population and Development Report, No. 9, 2022.
4. For more on Karama see ESCWA, Social Protection Landscape and Perspectives: Comprehensive National Review of the System and Reforms of Egypt, Edition 1, 2025.



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VISION: ESCWA, an innovative catalyst for a stable, just and flourishing Arab region

MISSION: Committed to the 2030 Agenda, ESCWA's passionate team produces innovative knowledge, fosters regional consensus and delivers transformational policy advice.

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