

Norway ranks No. 1, Afghanistan last, in quality of life for over-60s

October 3 2014, by Carol J. Williams, Los Angeles Times

No country takes better care of its seniors than Norway, where those over 60 enjoy social security bankrolled by the nation's oil wealth and are well represented in politics and the work place, a global study on aging reported this week.

By contrast, the 2014 Global AgeWatch Index found, the worst place in the world to grow old is Afghanistan, where per capita GDP is a mere \$1,100 and [life expectancy](#) only 50 years.

The annual rankings based on income security, [health care access](#), social benefits and community involvement reflected the generally greater affluence of Northern Hemisphere countries over those below the equator, with nine of the 10 best places for the elderly found in Northern Europe, North America and Japan. The geographic outlier was New Zealand, which ranked No. 10.

The study by HelpAge International, a London-based global coalition of organizations committed to improving living standards for the world's rapidly expanding over-60 population, examined the circumstances in which older people live in 96 countries-up from 91 included in last year's survey.

The aim of the rankings, the authors said, was to encourage governments worldwide to take action now to ensure adequate support for those living into their seventh decade and beyond-who will account for more than 20 percent of the world population by 2050 and already constitute that share

in many developed countries.

"Longer lives are a triumph of human development and are contributing to growing numbers of older people worldwide," the study summary observed in urging governments to prepare for a future where as many as four in 10 citizens will be relying on pensions or retirement investment proceeds for their wellbeing.

Those over 60 comprise 20.1 percent of the population of the United States, which was ranked 8th in quality of life for the aging. By 2030, that share will rise to 25.6 percent of the population and to 27 percent by 2050.

Over-60s already account for at least one in five citizens of the 10 top-rated countries, except for Iceland (18.3 percent) and New Zealand (19.7 percent).

Japan is experiencing the most dramatic rise in the number of elderly, with nearly 33 percent of the population over 60 now and an expected expansion by 2050 to a staggering 42.7 percent. That is largely the result of the country having the longest expected life spans on the planet, which other studies attribute to the lean and fish-intensive national diet.

Life expectancy at age 60 is one of the key measures of living standards in the HelpAge study, and Japan topped that indicator with the average 60-year-old expected to live another 26 years.

Income security factored significantly into the top-ranked places for aging, with Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany, Netherlands and Iceland providing pensions to 100 percent of seniors. Japan and New Zealand provide [social security](#) to 98 percent of their citizens over 60, with the figure for Canada 97 percent and the United States 92 percent.

The researchers praised governments like Mexico, which ranked 30th among the countries studied, for policy adjustments that have boosted living conditions for the elderly. Mexico rose 26 places in the rankings from last year, it was noted, as it now provides pensions for 88 percent of its citizens over 65.

Turkey, on the other hand, was ranked 77th, in spite of having greater per capita national wealth than Mexico and about the same percentage of its citizens guaranteed some sort of pension. The study, published Wednesday, observed that the income provided many of the elderly is inadequate or outpaced by the cost of living.

"For too long, older people have been excluded from international and national development planning and programs," HelpAge International chief executive officer Toby Porter noted in the study's foreword. "This approach is outdated and unsuited to the reality of people living longer all over the world."

Failing to address the demands of aging populations threatens "pernicious consequences for [older people](#)," potentially leaving them with neither a voice in public life nor the means to ensure a dignified end-of-life existence, Porter warned.

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