



Achieving Equity in Healthy Aging: Global Insights from AARP's Aging Readiness & Competitiveness (ARC) Initiative

Vijeth Iyengar, Ph.D.

Director of Global Aging at AARP

November 22, 2023 | 16th Meeting of Standing Working Group on Ageing | Geneva, SUI



Presentation Objectives

- ❖ **Advance understanding** of the ways in which AARP works to enhance the quality of life for the 50+ population
- ❖ **Define and identify components** of equitable healthy aging
- ❖ **Articulate real world solutions to** help facilitate equity in healthy aging



THE AGING READINESS & COMPETITIVENESS INITIATIVE

Select a country



ARC 1.0 - 2017

Inaugural ARC Countries

The inaugural 2017 ARC report established a baseline understanding of the state of global aging policies, with in-depth assessments of a group of 12 countries that are geographically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse and that, together, represent 61 percent of the global GDP and nearly half of the world's population of people ages 65 and older. Read more.

[View Report](#)

[Report Download](#)



ARC 2.0 - 2018

Small, Innovative, Economies

For the 2018 ARC report, we shifted our focus to 10 small economies around the world that are leading their regions in responding to demographic change. These countries, each with fewer than 25 million people, were selected in consultation with global experts as the leaders in their respective regions in terms of aging policy innovation. They are Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, Lebanon, Mauritius, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Singapore, and Taiwan.

[View Report](#)

[Report Download](#)

LATEST

Innovative and Pioneering Practices for Supporting a Healthy Aging Population Worldwide

Aging Readiness & Competitiveness (ARC) 3.0





Achieving equitable healthy aging in low- and middle- income countries:

The Aging Readiness &
Competitiveness Report 4.0



Data and analysis by

**ECONOMIST
IMPACT**



Ensuring Inclusion in How and Where We Age

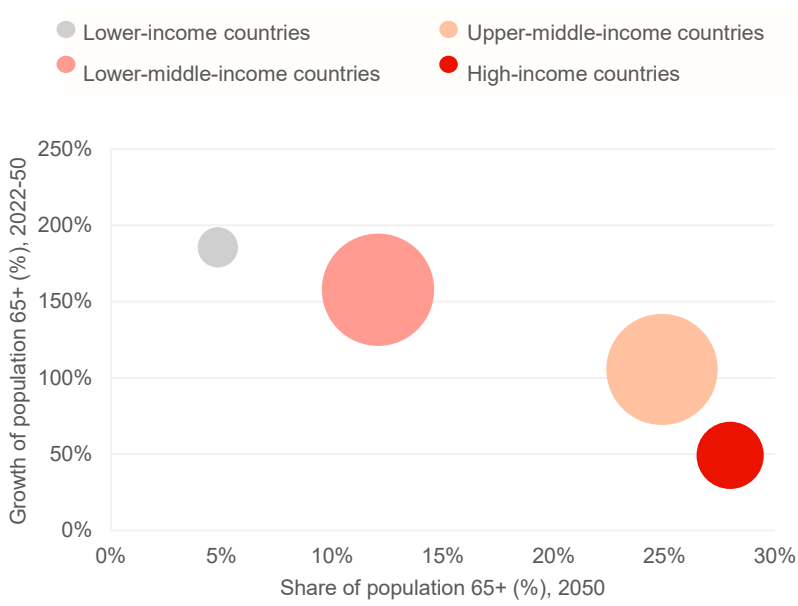
Equitable healthy aging – as operationally defined in the ARC 4.0 report – means that all individuals have a fair and just opportunity to **optimize health and wellbeing** at all life stages and fulfill their health potential to age well.

Achieving equitable healthy aging requires a life-course approach. In other words, **reducing or eliminating the social and structural disparities people experience** *throughout their lifetime.*

- Page 5 of the ARC 4.0 report

Why focus on LMICs?

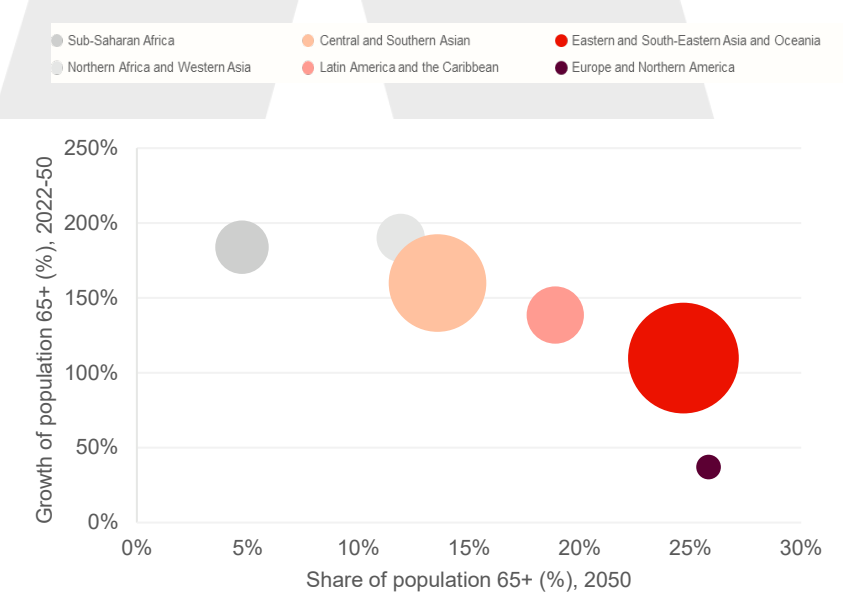
Percentage of population aged 65 and over in 2050; growth rate (%) and size increase (in thousands) of population aged 65 and over between 2022 and 2050; by country income level



Bubble size = Increase in population aged 65+ (thousands), 2022-50

Sources: World Population Prospects 2022, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Economist Impact.

Percentage of population aged 65 and over in 2050; growth rate (%) and size increase (in thousands) of population aged 65 and over between 2022 and 2050; by region



Bubble size = Increase in population aged 65+ (thousands), 2022-50

Sources: World Population Prospects 2022, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Economist Impact.

LMICs will drive rapid demographic aging in the coming decades → Sub-Saharan African countries will experience the fastest growth, while Asian countries will contribute to over 70% of the global increase of the older population.



Challenges (while shared)...More Acute in LMICs

Inequities are present in both HICs and LMICs

LMICs are unique in that:

- ❖ Large informal economies;
- ❖ Constrained financial capacity;
- ❖ Insufficient public institutions; and
- ❖ Lack of political will

The challenge of aging inequity is more acute and urgent in countries of lower income levels. This is particularly the case for those with the highest levels of inequality, due to their greater fiscal constraints and lack of preparedness of their social protection systems.”

Irene Hofman

CEO, IDB Lab (the Inter-American Development Bank Group's innovation laboratory)





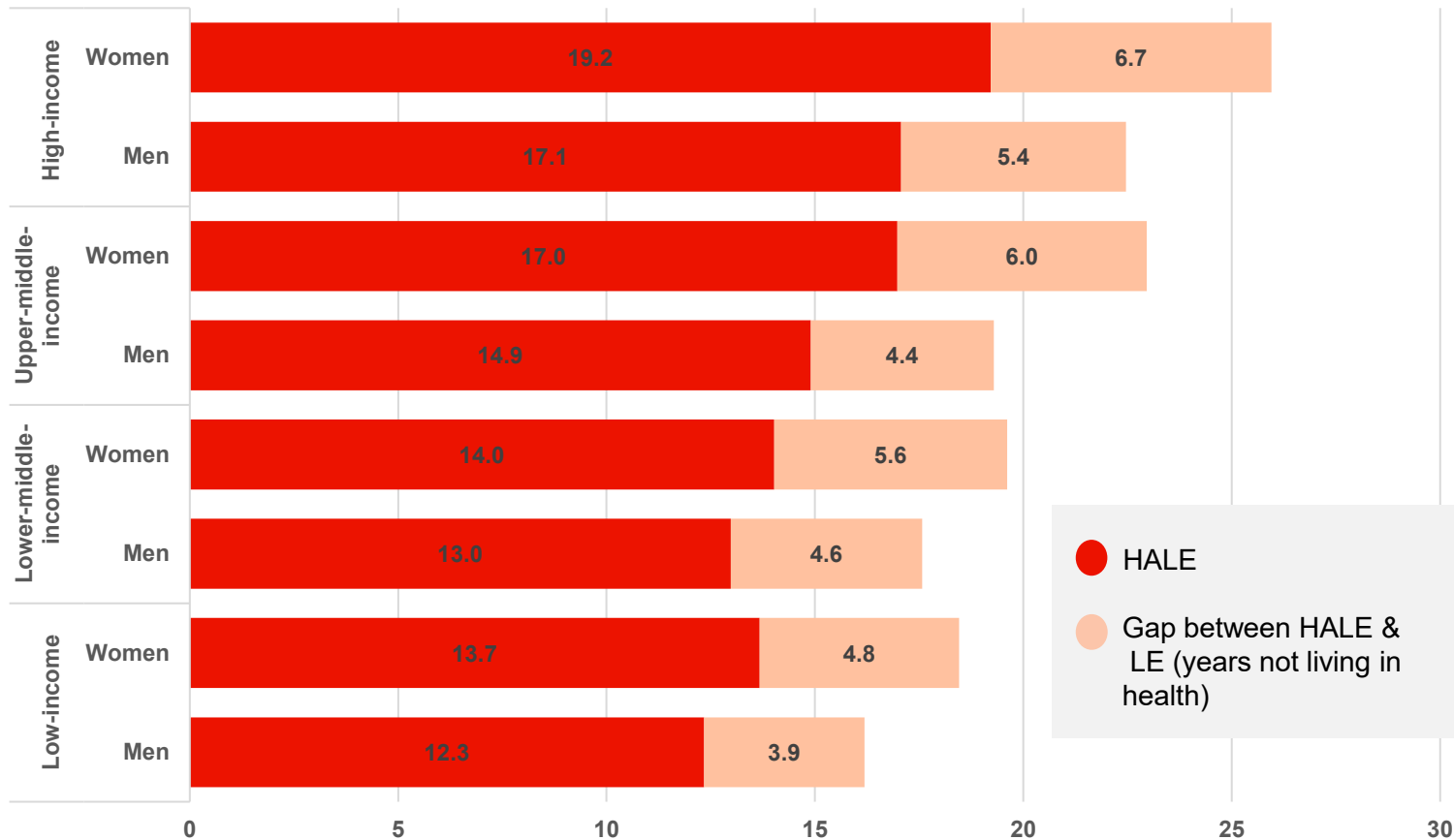
Goals of the ARC 4.0: Provoking Action and Amplifying Solutions

- ❖ Examine how **inequalities accumulate across the life course**;
- ❖ **Highlight solutions and leading practices** to combat aging inequity in LMICs; and
- ❖ **Recommend actions to address aging inequity** in the coming decades to help **fill knowledge gaps and promote solutions and good practices** to achieve equitable healthy aging around the world



The State of Play: Factors Driving Aging Inequities in LMICs

I. Gender disparities prevent equitable healthy aging



● HALE
● Gap between HALE & LE (years not living in health)

Accelerating economic empowerment

❖ SilverTech (Argentina)

- ❖ IDB Lab in partnership with Eidos Global piloted this digital training program for adults 50+
- ❖ Provides digital training, labor intermediation, and awareness and evaluation (partnered with Microsoft/Accenture/Red Hat/Salesforce)
- ❖ Priority to older adults with lower incomes and process or re-skilling

II. Rural-urban divide bifurcates the aging experience

- ❖ By 2030, over **3 billion of the world's population** will reside in rural areas – **95% residing in LMICs**
- ❖ **Factors contributing to the rural-urban divide:**
 - ❖ Unequal access to social protection and healthcare;
 - ❖ Divide in informal employment; and
 - ❖ Unequal access to educational opportunity



Solutions spotlight

Expanding healthcare access in rural areas

❖ National Health Extension (HELP) Program (Ethiopia)

- ❖ Dispatches trained government staff (HEWs) to community posts to deliver essential health services/education to rural villages throughout country

❖ Comprehensive Care Model for Rural Health (Colombia)

- ❖ Established 10 community networks to target health needs of different demographics (boosted UHC)



III. Data Deserts Drive Inaction for Policy Solutions

- ❖ Globally, **only 32% of countries have nationally representative, cross-sectional data** on older populations in the public domain
- ❖ Only **24% have nationally representative, longitudinal data** on the health status and needs of older population
- ❖ **Disaggregated data by age, race, and ethnicity are lacking** in most LMICs

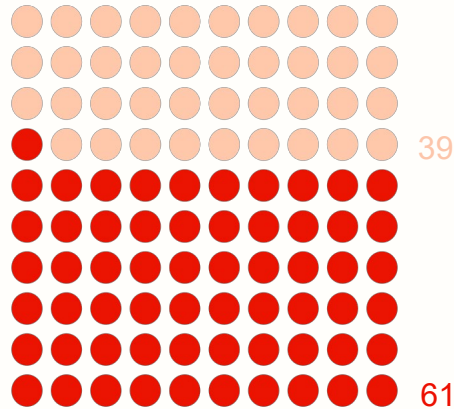


Barriers to Overcome to Unleash Progress in LMICs

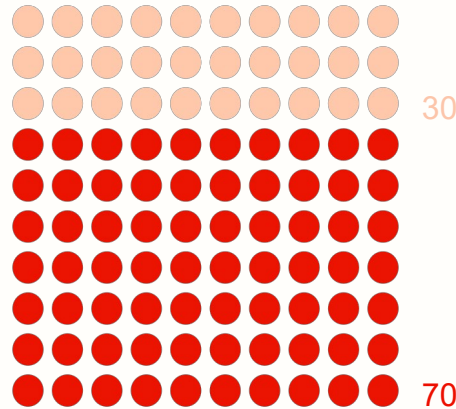
I. Large informal economies inhibit equitable aging

● Informal employment ● Formal employment

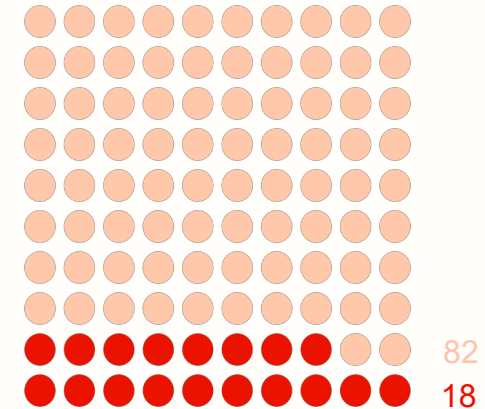
World



Low- and middle-income countries



High-income countries



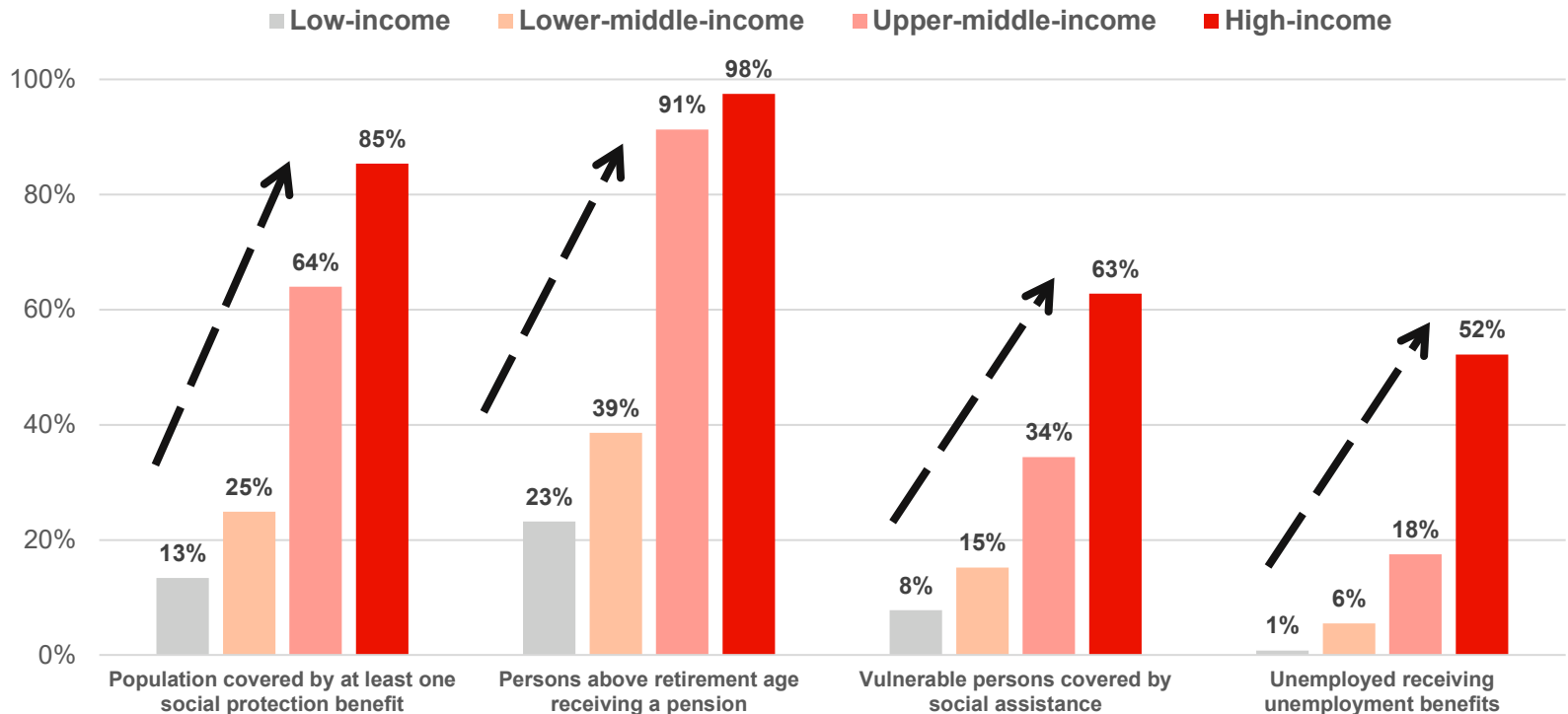
Informal versus formal employment (% of employed population aged 15 and over)

Sources: International Labour Organization, Economist Impact.

Worldwide, 78% of workers aged 65 and over are informally employed, and in LMICs, this figure stands at 89%, more than double the percentage in HICs.

Barriers to Overcome to Unleash Progress in LMICs

II. Social protect systems not as robust as they could be



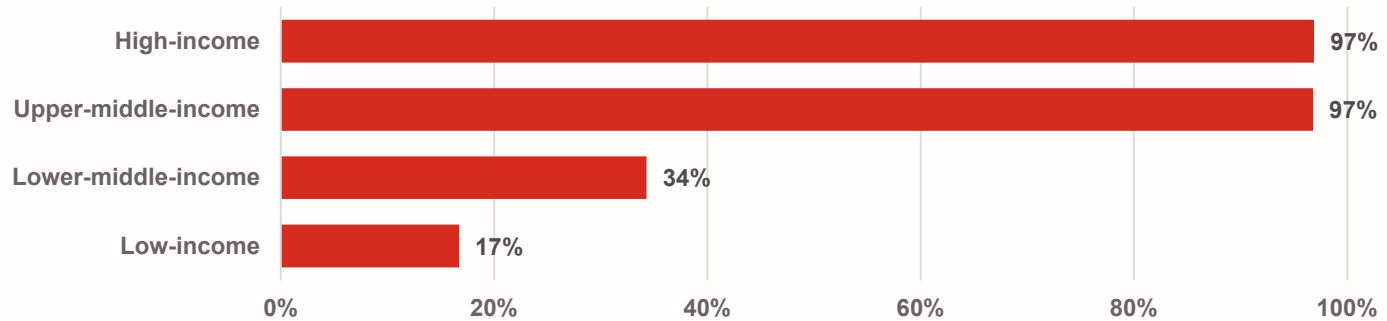
Sources: International Labour Organization, World Bank, World Health Organization, Economist Impact.

Substantial gaps remain in the coverage and adequacy of social protection systems, particularly in LICs and lower-middle-income countries.

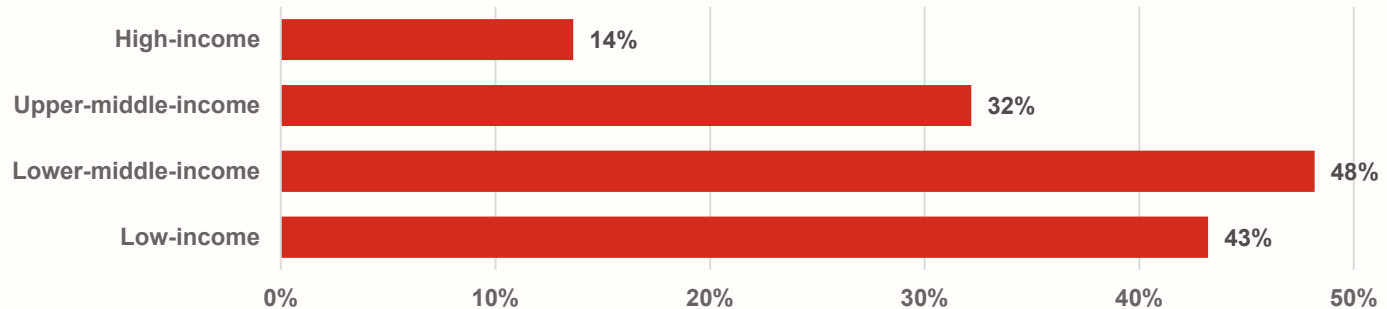
Barriers to Overcome to Unleash Progress in LMICs

III. Public health systems are underdeveloped

(a) Population covered by a social health scheme (%), by country income level, 2020



(b) Out-of-pocket expenditure as a percentage of current health expenditure, by country income level, 2020



Sources: International Labour Organization, World Bank, World Health Organization, Economist Impact.

LMICs overall see a significant gap in their health systems, including limited population coverage and financial protection.

Barriers to Overcome to Unleash Progress in LMICs

IV. Legislative policies lack imperative to support older adults

- ❖ **Lack of awareness and imperative among policymakers** mirrored by absence of comprehensive aging policy frameworks
- ❖ Even countries that have an aging policy framework **struggle to find political will for implementation or funding**
- ❖ **Lack of social awareness of legal protections for older adults** and aging programs and older adults **frequently lack a platform to have voices heard**





Barriers to Overcome to Unleash Progress in LMICs

V. Traditional informal networks of care are weakened

- ❖ With the global megatrend of urbanization, family structure and dynamics are changing
- ❖ Older adults in LMICs are facing a growing challenge in accessing care and support when needed, either from formal social programs and professional institutions or from informal familial

VI. Educational systems

- ❖ Barriers remain high for access to high-quality education, particularly in low-income countries (LICs) disproportionately affecting disadvantaged populations including women, rural, residents, and those living in poverty



What Are Some Points of Light?

Solutions spotlight

Empowering and mobilizing older adults

❖ Older People's Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in Serbia

- ❖ Offer community-based activities such as social events for retirees, or national networks that represent older adults' interests to policymakers
- ❖ SHGs have proven effective in increasing the political representation of older adults
- ❖ SHGs have also successfully advocated for adding bus stops, benches, trash cans to communities
- ❖ Helped people see older adults as active and enthusiastic organizers and advocates of their own rights




Translating Insights to Impact: Multisectoral Calls to Action


Public Sector

- 
- ❖ **Enhance national legislation** on protecting equal rights
 - ❖ **Design and implement stronger** comprehensive national aging policies
 - ❖ Expand and **refine existing physical and institutional infrastructure**
 - ❖ **Invest in and lead efforts to collect data** on older populations and healthy aging


Private Sector

- 
- ❖ **Design and provide products and services** that are inclusive of older adults
 - ❖ **Create income-generating opportunities for marginalized groups**, such as older women
 - ❖ **Incorporate age** into DEI policies
 - ❖ **Address employees' health and wellbeing** by improving work-life balance and paid-time off allocations

Civil Society

- 
- ❖ **Drive collaborative, grassroots and community-based efforts** to promote health equity for older adults

Individuals

- 
- ❖ Contribute **by helping to build an age-friendly society** by combatting ageism and reporting instances of elder abuse



Today's agenda

- ❖ **Snapshot of an Aging Demography**
 - Increasing (global) recognition of an ageing society

- ❖ **How does AARP meet the needs of the 50+ population?**
 - Goals and mission (**Who are we?**)
 - Programs and initiatives (**What do we do?**)
 - AARP International (**How do we engage globally?**)

- ❖ **Building a Healthier and Productive Future for All (ARC 4.0)**
 - What is equitable healthy aging?
 - The state of play: Aging inequities in LMICs
 - Challenges in tackling aging inequity in LMICs
 - Translating insights into impact: A multisectoral call to action

- ❖ **Closing Thoughts**



Key Takeaways

- ❖ **Rising inequality is a global challenge** that causes tremendous social and economic losses
- ❖ **Equitable healthy aging is achievable** – but requires sustained commitment from governments
- ❖ **Heterogeneity of disparities experienced by older adults requires targeted efforts** to meet specific needs
- ❖ **Adopting a life-course approach is imperative** to reduce aging inequity
- ❖ **Data collection and governance continue to remain critical** to catalyze policy action



Thank You!

Please Visit:

www.aarpinternational.org/ARC4

Please Reach Out:

viyengar@aarp.org

Twitter: @Vijethlyengar