In the context of Asia-Pacific, what do we mean by an ‘ageing society’ and what are the demographic trends in the region?

Mr Roncarati explained that an ageing society was a society which experienced a shift from higher to lower fertility rates and an increase in life expectancy. There were about 450 million older people in Asia and the Pacific, about one in ten of the population, which was projected to grow to 1.2 billion by 2050. This would result in larger cohorts of older people with fewer young people. According to Mr Roncarati, the number of young people in Asia-Pacific peaked in 2005 where 18 per cent of the population were between the ages of 15 and 24.

What are the implications of an ageing society for youth employment?

Mr Roncarati said that there might be a squeeze on young people due to older workers staying longer in employment because of economic needs and the pressure on pension systems. He stressed, however, that this could be avoided with the right public policies in place. He added that with higher investments in young people and skills, countries in the Asia-Pacific region could gain from the ‘demographic dividend’.

Mr Roncarati further explained that older and younger workers were not necessarily competing for the same jobs. Older workers often moved into voluntary or advisory work and could act as mentors. Younger people, according to Mr Roncarati, sought more active work, such as jobs in the service sector, where their skills were more relevant. He emphasized that there were enough opportunities for all in this region given the correct policies in place. In terms of the quality of employment, Mr Roncarati said that an ageing society might have a positive impact on the quality of employment but that this would depend very much on the country context. In East Asian countries, which were further along the demographic transition and with smaller groups of young people joining the labour market, the quality of work for young people had improved. In South Asia, however, improving the quality of work would take longer.
Mr Roncarati also addressed the issue of a society with fewer young people which had to pay pensions for more older people. He said that the transition from informal to formal employment would ensure that there were more income tax being paid which could in turn help finance increased spending on older people. Mr Roncarati added that if people had good jobs and contributory pension systems they would have wealth when they are older which made them less reliable on the state.

Mr Cognac emphasized that we should look at ageing societies in a positive way. For once, younger workers and society at large could capitalize on the wealth of knowledge of older workers. This was reflected in the increasing number of older people who continued working as trainers and mentors past their retirement age. On the other hand, he stressed that occupations were evolving and created a demand for new skills. Nowadays, according to Mr Cognac, there was a tendency to change careers multiple times throughout one’s working life compared to past generations where the majority of workers remained within one occupation for life. Mr Cognac added that these more dynamic modern careers created a need for lifelong learning and providing skills training to workers of all ages, including those who are above 40 and 50 years old. Mr Cognac cited the example of the telecommunications and banking industries where the skills needed to perform the same job were constantly evolving due to technological change.

**What is the link between youth employment and an ageing population in Japan?**

Mr Chatani said that Japan had the highest life expectancy in the world which resulted in an ever smaller number of young people which had to support more old people. This demographic trend had already created fiscal pressure on the government and older workers were encouraged to remain longer in the labour market. Mr Chatani added, however, that these older workers did not necessarily block new labour market entrants since they were usually not competing for the same jobs. Certain jobs required certain training or experience which gave older workers an advantage in those jobs. Mr Chatani stated that youth unemployment in Japan had been declining for the past decade and that there was no empiric evidence that Japan’s ageing workforce had negatively affected youth employment. Mr Chatani explained that a big issue for Japan’s ageing workforce was the issue of skills succession as companies were trying to find ways to pass on the skills that older workers had accumulated during their careers to the next generation of younger workers.

**What are the economic opportunities for youth in ageing societies?**

Mr Cognac said that there were economic opportunities which could be capitalized on through promoting ‘intergenerational dialogue’. In terms of making use of new economic opportunities in ageing societies, young people needed access to career guidance including opportunities on entrepreneurship. Mr Cognac added that the solution to youth employment in ageing societies was through finding ways to enhance communication between the generations as well between young people and the social partners. He stressed that societies could create growth by making the generations work together. Mr Roncarati added that to a large extend governments in Asia-Pacific were making the right policies to capitalize on the economic opportunities resulting from an ageing population. However, according to Mr Roncarati, a critical issue remained the squeeze on social security systems which had to accommodate a growing number of older people.