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Sustainable Development in the Context of Population Ageing: the Practice of the Russian Federation and Lessons for Vietnam[1]

Abstract. Population ageing has become a major demographic and policy challenge for both developed and developing countries, requiring long-term institutional adaptation rather than short-term sectoral interventions. This article examines population ageing and related policy responses in the Russian Federation and Vietnam from a comparative perspective, with particular attention to their implications for sustainable development. Russia has already entered a more advanced stage of demographic ageing and has accumulated considerable policy experience in fertility support, pension reform, healthcare modernization, social protection, and active ageing. Vietnam, by contrast, is undergoing a much faster ageing transition while still facing more limited fiscal capacity, uneven social security coverage, and incomplete long-term care institutions. Using a qualitative comparative approach based on secondary demographic data, official policy documents, and existing scholarly literature, the study analyzes the main ageing trends, policy instruments, institutional conditions, and development challenges in the two countries. The findings show that population ageing should not be addressed only through pronatalist incentives, pension adjustment, or welfare expansion. Instead, it requires an integrated policy framework combining social protection, preventive healthcare, long-term care, labour-market adaptation, intergenerational solidarity, age-friendly environments, and the development of the silver economy. The comparison suggests that early institutional preparation and cross-sectoral coordination are crucial, but that Vietnam should selectively adapt rather than mechanically replicate Russian experience. The study contributes to the development of socially sustainable policies in countries at different stages of population ageing.

Keywords: population ageing, sustainable development, Russian Federation, Vietnam, social policy, silver economy.

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Устойчивое развитие в условиях современного старения населения: опыт Российской Федерации и уроки для Вьетнама[2]

Аннотация. Старение населения стало одной из ключевых демографических и социально-политических проблем как для развитых, так и для развивающихся

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стран, требующей не краткосрочных отраслевых мер, а долгосрочной институциональной адаптации. В статье рассматриваются старение населения и связанные с ним меры государственной политики в Российской Федерации и Вьетнаме в сравнительной перспективе, с особым вниманием к их последствиям для устойчивого развития. Россия уже вступила в более продвинутую стадию демографического старения и накопила значительный опыт в области поддержки рождаемости, пенсионной реформы, модернизации здравоохранения, социальной защиты и активного долголетия. Вьетнам, напротив, проходит гораздо более быстрый переход к стареющему обществу при более ограниченных бюджетных возможностях, неравномерном охвате системой социальной защиты и недостаточно сформированных и устойчивых институтах этой защиты. В статье анализируются основные тенденции старения, инструменты политики, институциональные условия и вызовы развития в двух странах. Автор приходит к выводу, что старение населения не может рассматриваться только через призму пронаталистских стимулов, корректировки пенсионной системы или расширения социальной помощи. Оно требует комплексной политики, объединяющей социальную защиту, профилактическое здравоохранение, долговременную заботу о гражданах, адаптацию рынка труда, межпоколенческую солидарность, создание благоприятной возрастной среды и развитие «серебряной экономики». Сравнение показывает важность ранней институциональной подготовки и межведомственной координации, а также необходимость избирательной адаптации российского опыта во Вьетнаме. Исследование способствует разработке социально устойчивой политики в странах, находящихся на разных этапах старения населения.

Ключевые слова: старение населения, устойчивое развитие, Российская Федерация, Вьетнам, социальная политика, серебряная экономика.

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Introduction

Population ageing is increasingly recognized as a structural transformation with far-reaching implications for economic and social systems. While its demographic drivers, declining fertility and rising life expectancy, are well established, the ways in which countries respond to ageing differ significantly depending on institutional capacity, policy coordination, and development context. As a result, ageing is not only a demographic trend but also a critical test of long-term policy adaptability.

The Russian Federation and Vietnam represent two contrasting yet analytically connected cases. Russia represents a case of earlier demographic ageing accompanied by more established policy responses, including pension reform, healthcare modernization, and active ageing initiatives. Vietnam, in contrast, is experiencing a more rapid and compressed transition, placing increasing pressure on social protection systems that remain uneven in coverage and institutional maturity. This divergence raises important

questions about how countries at different stages of ageing can design effective and sustainable policy responses.

Although a growing body of research has examined ageing in both countries, most studies focus on specific dimensions such as pensions, healthcare, or demographic change. Comparative analyses that link ageing policy to broader development strategies remain limited. This gap is particularly relevant in the case of Vietnam, where the window for institutional adaptation is relatively short and policy choices made in the present will have long-term consequences.

This article addresses this gap by examining population ageing and policy responses in the Russian Federation and Vietnam from a comparative perspective. It analyzes how demographic change interacts with social protection, healthcare systems, and labour market adjustment, and considers the implications for sustainable development. Rather than treating the Russian experience as a model for direct policy transfer, the study emphasizes selective policy learning and context-sensitive adaptation. In doing so, it aims to contribute to a more integrated understanding of ageing as both a demographic challenge and a component of long-term development strategy.

Literature Review

Research on population ageing has expanded considerably in recent years, generally focusing on three main dimensions: the measurement of ageing, its socio-economic consequences, and policy responses. In most studies, ageing is operationalized through demographic indicators such as life expectancy, the proportion of the population aged 60 or 65 and above, and the old-age dependency ratio. These measures remain widely used because they enable systematic cross-national comparisons of the pace and scale of demographic change [World Population... 2024; Bussolo et al. 2015: 6]. However, this predominantly demographic approach has increasingly been questioned. While it provides analytical clarity, it risks reducing ageing to a statistical phenomenon. More recent research therefore emphasizes that ageing should also be understood as a multidimensional process embedded in labour markets, healthcare systems, pension sustainability, and broader development strategies. In this expanded perspective, ageing is closely linked to concepts such as active ageing, healthy ageing, and the silver economy, reflecting a shift from a narrow demographic interpretation toward a more integrated socio-economic framework.

A further demographic distinction is important for the present comparison. Population ageing may occur “from the bottom” when sustained fertility decline narrows the younger cohorts, and “from the top” when mortality improvement and longer survival enlarge the older cohorts. These mechanisms often operate together, but their relative weight matters for policy: ageing from the bottom is connected to fertility and future cohort size, whereas ageing from the top raises more immediate questions of healthy longevity, pensions, healthcare, long-term care, and participation in later life [Bonnet et al. 2021].

In the Russian case, the literature highlights the role of several long-term structural factors, including persistently low fertility, changes in mortality patterns, and significant

regional socio-economic disparities. Many studies agree that Russia has entered a relatively advanced stage of demographic ageing, although this process remains highly uneven across regions. The proportion of older persons has increased steadily since the 1990s and is expected to continue rising in the coming decades, driven not only by declining fertility but also by gradual improvements in life expectancy, despite persistent gender and regional inequalities [Mikhailova et al. 2018: 7—10].

A central debate in the Russian literature concerns the extent to which pronatalist policies can mitigate population ageing. Financial incentives such as maternity capital have influenced fertility behaviour, particularly the timing of second births [Slonimczyk, Yurko 2014], but their capacity to reverse long-term ageing remains limited. This limitation has contributed to a broader shift in policy thinking from attempts to counter demographic ageing through fertility stimulation toward adaptation to an ageing population.

Against this background, recent studies emphasize that although Russia's level of ageing remains moderate compared to some European countries, the ageing trend is structurally entrenched and likely to intensify. Moreover, the ageing process in Russia exhibits specific features, including wave-like demographic dynamics and a pronounced gender imbalance among older cohorts due to the early super-mortality of men [Reshetnikova et al. 2021: 7—8, 14].

Research from the Russian Academy of Sciences links demographic ageing with active longevity and the socio-economic potential of older generations [Dobrokhleb 2022: 66—76]. Studies from Lomonosov Moscow State University highlight regional differentiation, demographic waves, and the effects of pension reform and working-age boundaries on Russia's demographic dividend [Petrosian et al. 2019: 55—83; Kazbekova, Kalabikhina 2023: 68—82]. Higher School of Economics research based on National Transfer Accounts further connects age-specific income and consumption patterns with the effective economic support ratio and demographic dividend [Denisenko, Kozlov 2019: 6—35].

The situation in Vietnam differs in several fundamental respects. The literature consistently characterizes Vietnam as a country undergoing rapid population ageing at a relatively low level of economic development. Since officially entering the ageing stage in 2011, Vietnam has attracted increasing scholarly attention due to the speed and compressed nature of its demographic transition. A widely shared concern is that the country is "growing old before becoming rich," meaning that it faces rising demands for pensions, healthcare, and social services before achieving the level of welfare development observed in more advanced ageing societies [State of World... 2024; Nguyen et al. 2022: 2—3]. While some studies interpret this as a structural constraint on development, others emphasize that the shorter transition period also creates a window for more proactive and anticipatory policy design, provided that institutional adaptation occurs in a timely manner.

The demographic dividend further links population ageing to sustainable development. The first dividend arises from a favourable age structure with a higher effective share of producers relative to consumers, while the second reflects longer-term economic gains associated with longer lives and changing life-cycle behaviour. In Russia, National Transfer Accounts research shows how age structure and the effective

support ratio shape the demographic contribution to economic growth [Denisenko, Kozlov 2019: 6—35; Kazbekova, Kalabikhina 2023: 68—82]. In Vietnam, National Transfer Accounts evidence indicates a transition from the first toward the second demographic dividend, highlighting the importance of economic, health, and education policies for sustaining productivity and intergenerational welfare [Overview on Viet Nam... 2023].

A major debate in Vietnam concerns the sustainability of family-based care. Although family support remains central, urbanization, migration, smaller households, and changing intergenerational relations increasingly constrain this model, particularly in the absence of a comprehensive formal long-term care system [Dao et al. 2020: 381—387; Nguyen et al. 2022: 3, 13; Minagawa et al. 2023].

In Russia, this issue is closely linked to discussions of retirement-age reform, labour market adjustments, and responses to labour shortages. In Vietnam, similar debates are emerging, particularly in relation to extending working lives and promoting flexible employment arrangements. However, the literature also cautions against overly optimistic assumptions about active ageing. Continued labour market participation in later life depends on factors such as health status, job quality, labour market conditions, and the availability of supportive policy frameworks [Bussolo et al. 2015: 295—298]. Without these conditions, extending working life may exacerbate social inequality rather than mitigate it [Bussolo et al. 2015: 241—242].

UNFPA highlights Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs as an important mechanism for providing health monitoring, social participation, livelihood support, and mutual assistance among older persons [State of World... 2024]. Existing research indicates that Vietnam still lacks a comprehensive formal care system and continues to rely heavily on informal arrangements [Jackson 2026; Nguyen et al. 2022: 3]. Moreover, community-based models, while valuable, cannot fully substitute for state policy. Rather, the literature increasingly supports the development of a mixed system in which public provision, family support, community initiatives, and labour market participation are combined in a complementary manner.

Despite a growing literature, direct Russia—Vietnam comparisons remain limited, while existing studies often examine pensions, healthcare, fertility, or labour participation separately. Less attention has been paid to how ageing mechanisms, demographic-dividend dynamics, and institutional capacity interact within a broader sustainable development framework. The present study addresses these gaps.

Against this background, the present study examines population ageing and policy responses in the Russian Federation and Vietnam from a comparative perspective. It seeks to clarify how demographic change interacts with social protection, labour market adjustment, healthcare provision, and development strategy in the two countries. By combining these dimensions, the analysis aims to identify both the specific characteristics of each case and the broader lessons that can be drawn from Russia's experience for Vietnam. In doing so, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of ageing as both a structural challenge and a potential driver of long-term socio-economic development.

Methodology and Data Sources

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach, combining secondary demographic data analysis with a review of policy documents. The Russian Federation and Vietnam were selected because they represent two different stages of population ageing and different levels of institutional preparedness. Russia has a more advanced ageing structure and a more developed state-based social protection system, whereas Vietnam is ageing rapidly while still consolidating its welfare institutions. This contrast allows for the identification of policy lessons relevant to countries undergoing rapid demographic transition under resource constraints.

The study uses demographic indicators from Rosstat, the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO), the United Nations World Population Prospects 2024, the World Bank, and selected reports from UNFPA and ERIA. The study combines harmonized international datasets with national statistics to improve cross-country comparability while retaining country-specific detail.

This study distinguishes between two commonly used thresholds: persons aged 60 and above, widely used in Vietnamese policy discussions, and persons aged 65 and above, frequently used in international demographic comparisons. When cross-country indicators are compared, the 65+ threshold is prioritized for consistency; when discussing Vietnamese elderly policy, the 60+ threshold is also reported because it corresponds to Vietnam's legal and policy definition of older persons.

Policy analysis is based on official documents issued by the governments of Russia and Vietnam, including laws, national strategies, and programs related to demographic policy, pension reform, social protection, healthcare, and ageing. This approach enables the study to identify major policy orientations and differences in institutional responses to demographic change.

The comparison is organized around four dimensions: (1) demographic ageing trends and mechanisms, including fertility and longevity; (2) demographic-dividend dynamics; (3) social protection and pension arrangements; and (4) adaptation policies, including healthcare, long-term care, active ageing, and the silver economy. This framework supports a systematic assessment of how each country translates demographic challenges into policy responses.

The study relies primarily on secondary data and document analysis and does not attempt to measure the causal impact of specific policy instruments. Therefore, the findings should be understood as a policy-oriented comparative analysis rather than a quantitative evaluation of policy effectiveness.

Results and Analysis

Population Ageing Trends in Russia and Vietnam

A comparison of key demographic indicators shows clear differences in the stage and pace of population ageing between the Russian Federation and Vietnam. These differences are assessed primarily using the 65+ age threshold, with the 60+ threshold additionally reported to reflect the Vietnamese policy context.

Russia is already at a more advanced stage of ageing, whereas Vietnam is ageing later but more rapidly. Although Vietnam still has a younger population structure, declining fertility and a compressed demographic transition reinforce concerns about "growing old before becoming rich" [Nguyen et al. 2022: 2—3]. In both countries, longer survival contributes to ageing from the top, while Russia's pronounced gender gap in life expectancy creates additional pressures on pensions, social support, and long-term care.

Table 1. **Selected demographic indicators and ageing mechanisms in the Russian Federation and Vietnam**

Indicator	Russian Federation	Vietnam	Analytical relevance
Population aged 65+ (2024)	About 17 %	About 10 %	Russia is at a more advanced stage of population ageing
Total fertility rate (2024)	About 1.4 children per woman	1.91 children per woman	Low fertility strengthens ageing from the bottom in both cases
Life expectancy at birth	73.4 years (2023)	74.7 years (2024)	Longer survival contributes to ageing from the top; gender differences remain important
Ageing mechanism	Long-standing low fertility combined with improving survival; strong regional and gender differentiation	Rapidly declining fertility combined with increasing longevity in a compressed transition	Both countries face bottom and top ageing, but with different timing and institutional preparedness

Note: Percentages are rounded; years refer to the latest available data reported in the respective sources.

Source: compiled by author according [State of World... 2024; Russia... 2025; Thông cáo báo... 2025].

Viewed through the demographic-dividend lens, the two countries also occupy different positions. In Russia, age structure, the effective support ratio, labour participation, and retirement-age rules shape the demographic contribution to economic growth [Denisenko, Kozlov 2019: 6—35; Kazbekova, Kalabikhina 2023: 68—82]. In Vietnam, National Transfer Accounts evidence indicates a transition from the first toward the second demographic dividend, increasing the importance of human capital, health, productivity, and longer economic participation [Overview on Viet Nam... 2023].

Policy Responses to Population Ageing in the Russian Federation

In response to demographic ageing, Russia has increasingly shifted toward adaptation-oriented policies. The Strategy of Actions in the Interests of Older Citizens until 2030, approved by Government Order No. 830-r of 7 April 2025, prioritizes healthy and active longevity, healthcare and long-term care, social services, employment, income security, and age-friendly infrastructure; its implementation is linked to the national projects "Family" and "Long and Active Life" [Rasporyazhenie Pravitel'stva... 2025].

Nevertheless, important challenges remain. Gender disparities in life expectancy create imbalances in pension and care systems, while regional inequalities affect access to healthcare and social services. Thus, Russia has accumulated significant policy experience, but the effectiveness of these measures depends strongly on implementation capacity and broader socio-economic conditions [Mikhailova et al. 2018: 21—23; Sidorenko 2016].

Policy Responses to Population Ageing in Vietnam

Vietnam's response to population ageing has developed gradually but remains less institutionalized than Russia's. Vietnam's ageing-policy framework has been strengthened by the National Strategy on Older Persons to 2035, with a vision to 2045, approved by Decision No. 383/QĐ-TTg of 21 February 2025 [Quyết định số... 2025]. However, social protection coverage remains uneven, especially among informal workers, rural residents, and low-income older persons. Many older Vietnamese people still depend on family support, personal savings, or continued informal work [Dao et al. 2020: 381—387].

Healthcare and long-term care are also major challenges. Although Vietnam has expanded health insurance coverage, elderly-specific healthcare, chronic disease management, and formal long-term care services remain limited. Care continues to rely heavily on families, but this model is increasingly under pressure from urbanization, migration, smaller households, and changing intergenerational relations [Nguyen et al. 2022: 3, 13; Minagawa et al. 2023].

At the same time, Vietnam demonstrates potential for developing more adaptive ageing policies, particularly through community-based and preventive approaches. Community-based care, intergenerational self-help clubs, preventive healthcare, flexible employment, and the silver economy can help transform ageing from a welfare burden into a development opportunity. However, these initiatives need stronger institutional coordination and stable public support to become part of a coherent national ageing strategy [Nguyen et al. 2022: 3, 9—10; Reshetnikova et al. 2021: 15].

Discussion and Policy Implications for Vietnam

The findings highlight that population ageing is not only a consequence of demographic transition but also a structurally differentiated policy challenge shaped by timing, institutional capacity, and development context. While the Russian Federation and Vietnam share a common demographic trajectory, they differ substantially in their institutional readiness and fiscal capacity. Russia represents a more advanced stage of demographic ageing, with a relatively well-established social protection system. Vietnam, by contrast, is ageing more rapidly under tighter resource constraints [Nguyen et al. 2022: 2—3]. This asymmetry fundamentally shapes their policy options. Therefore, Vietnam cannot rely solely on gradual institutional adaptation but requires earlier, more coordinated, and cross-sectoral policy action.

From a demographic-dividend perspective, Vietnam should use the remaining favourable age-structure period to strengthen human capital, preventive health, productive employment and social-insurance coverage [Overview on Viet Nam... 2023].

One major lesson from the Russian experience is that population ageing cannot be addressed effectively through a single policy instrument. The broader Russian response has combined fertility support, pension adjustments, preventive healthcare, and active ageing strategies [Mikhailova et al. 2018: 21—23]. For Vietnam, the priority is not only to expand institutional coverage but also to address structural fragmentation between social insurance, healthcare provision, and local-level service delivery. Since a large proportion of older Vietnamese still do not receive pensions and continue to rely on family support [Dao et al. 2020: 387], strengthening institutional coverage becomes increasingly urgent. Furthermore, greater emphasis on preventive and primary care, including early diagnostics, can reduce the long-term costs of ageing [Bussolo et al. 2015].

Regarding long-term care, Vietnam should shift toward a mixed care system to address the growing vulnerabilities of the traditional family-based model. While family care remains culturally central, its sustainability is under pressure from urbanization, migration, and shrinking household sizes. A mixed approach combining family, public, and state support is therefore more realistic under fiscal constraints [Dao et al. 2020: 387—389]. Crucially, this system must institutionalize community-based models [Nguyen et al. 2022: 13], such as intergenerational self-help clubs, which have shown positive effects in health awareness and mutual assistance.

In terms of labour market adaptation, policies should promote active ageing while carefully addressing the risks of social and labour market inequality. Older persons can remain economically active through flexible work and reskilling opportunities [Bussolo et al. 2015: 299—302]. Extending working lives without complementary support risks shifting adjustment costs onto vulnerable groups, particularly women and informal workers, who may face health constraints or accumulated disadvantages over the life course. Therefore, any adjustment to retirement policies in Vietnam must be gradual and differentiated, and accompanied by stronger health and social protections to preserve dignity and income security.

Finally, as population ageing advances, the development of the silver economy offers new opportunities to link demographic change with innovation and service development [Reshetnikova et al. 2021]. Yet, in a country where many older people remain economically vulnerable, this sector must be carefully governed to ensure affordability and equitable access. Effective adaptation to population ageing requires moving beyond emergency responses toward a coherent strategy integrated into broader development planning. Such an approach is widely discussed in the literature on ageing and development [Bussolo et al. 2015: 25, 261]. In Vietnam, this implies building a more inclusive and resilient social policy framework to respond to rapid demographic and structural change.

Conclusion

Population ageing in the Russian Federation and Vietnam follows a shared demographic trajectory but unfolds under markedly different institutional and economic conditions. These differences reflect asymmetry in demographic timing and institutional capacity, which shapes each country's ability to respond effectively. The key challenge,

therefore, lies not in ageing itself, but in ensuring timely and coordinated policy adaptation. Distinguishing ageing from the bottom and ageing from the top, together with the demographic-dividend perspective, clarifies why neither fertility support nor pension adjustment alone can constitute an adequate response to population ageing.

The Russian experience suggests that ageing requires an integrated policy approach rather than isolated measures. For Vietnam, the main implication is not to replicate specific policies, but to adapt them to national conditions. Priority should be given to expanding social insurance, strengthening healthcare, and developing long-term and community-based care, alongside promoting active ageing. In this way, population ageing can become not only a challenge, but also a driver of more inclusive and sustainable development.

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