

## **PS 2.1**

### **NAVIGATING DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITIONS: IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HUMAN RESOURCES FOR HEALTH**

## | BACKGROUND

The global demographic landscape is undergoing a profound transformation characterised by ageing populations, declining birth rates, shifting dependency ratios, and migration. These trends are placing unprecedented pressure on health systems, particularly in workforce availability, distribution, and sustainability. As countries navigate the demographic transition, the demand for health and care services, especially for older adults and those with chronic conditions, is rapidly increasing. This reshapes population structures and places growing pressure on the health workforce in terms of supply, financing, and the ability to deliver culturally competent and age-appropriate care. Many countries face critical shortages of qualified health and care workers, exacerbated by internal maldistribution and international migration.

Migration of the health workforce has become a defining feature of the global labour market. While mobility can offer benefits, such as skills development and remittance flows, it poses serious challenges for source countries facing workforce depletion. The movement of health workforce from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) to high-income countries (HICs) often reflects global inequality and may compromise health system resilience and the achievement of universal health coverage (UHC).

Human resources for health (HRH) encompasses both professional and non-professional personnel involved in the delivery of health and care services.

This session will explore the impact of demographic transitions on HRH within countries and across regions. It will cover global and regional data on migration patterns, shrinking labour pools, and the implications for system sustainability. The discussion will unpack the "negative chain" of imbalances, such as out-migration, ageing workforce, declining tax bases, and increasing long-term care needs.

This includes consideration of the international recruitment code and often-overlooked challenges like the inflow of internationally displaced persons (IDPs). The session will feature innovative country responses, highlighting practical strategies, such as adaptation of systems to ageing societies, strengthening and retaining local HRH, fostering cultural competence, and leveraging technology and innovation.

By convening policymakers, researchers, international agencies, and frontline professionals, this session aims to promote sustainable, ethical, and equitable solutions for HRH challenges, particularly in LMICs facing significant HRH gaps. The goal is to identify actionable, evidence-based policy responses to ensure no country is left behind.

## | OBJECTIVES

- To explore how demographic shifts are reshaping the demand and supply of human resources for health.
- To identify what types of human resources for health are needed and how countries can develop and retain them.
- To share innovations, policies, and practices from a diverse set of countries and stakeholders.



Moderator

## Ritu Sadana

*Head, Secretariat for the WHO Council on the Economics of Health For All*

Ageing and Health Unit, World Health Organization  
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Dr Ritu Sadana is a global leader in public health who has shaped WHO's strategies on ageing, equity, and the life course. She currently leads WHO's coordination of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing and work on older people. She also leads efforts to align services and systems, and gather evidence needed, to connect optimal development and healthy ageing. She is the lead author of the first WHO Framework to Implement a Life Course Approach in Practice – a forward-looking initiative that bridges child, adolescent, adult and older people's health to improve health trajectories and reduce inequalities. As Head of Ageing and Health at WHO, Dr Sadana spearheaded the first WHO Global Strategy on Ageing and Health, conceived the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030—endorsed by the UN General Assembly—and led development of the Decade of Healthy Ageing: Baseline Report, documenting strategies to accelerate country-level progress.

She also headed the Secretariat for WHO's Council on the Economics of Health for All and coordinated a WHA resolution on aligning economies with health and well-being. Earlier in her career, Dr Sadana led a multi-disciplinary research team in Cambodia, contributed to the foundational Global Burden of Disease Study, led WHO's research on the social determinants of health and advanced equity-focused research policy.

She holds an MS in Public Health from UCLA, and a Doctor of Science from Harvard with training in economics, epidemiology and demography, bringing analytical depth to strategic global work. In 2025, UCLA honored her as a Lester Breslow Lifetime Achievement Award inductee, citing her deep, sustained commitment to science-driven policy and health for all.