

# WHO efforts towards improving social connections of older people




**Empowering Futures  
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# Brief history

Till 2021 → hardly addressed issue of social connection

- COVID-19 pandemic - 2020
-  interest in SIL in HIC (e.g. UK, Japan)
- Launch of Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030

→ **2021:** WHO decides to increase its activities in this area, focusing on older people

- 1<sup>st</sup> Step: Advocacy Brief (summer 2021)
  - <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240030749>
- Evidence and gap map on digital interventions to reduce Sil among older people
  - <https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing/evidence-gap-map>

→ **2022:** WHO decides to address SIL across all age groups

→ **2023:** Launch of Commission on Social Connection



ADVOCACY BRIEF:

Social isolation  
and loneliness  
among older  
people



# Social connection: why is it a global public health priority?



**Scale of  
problem**



**Severity of  
consequences**

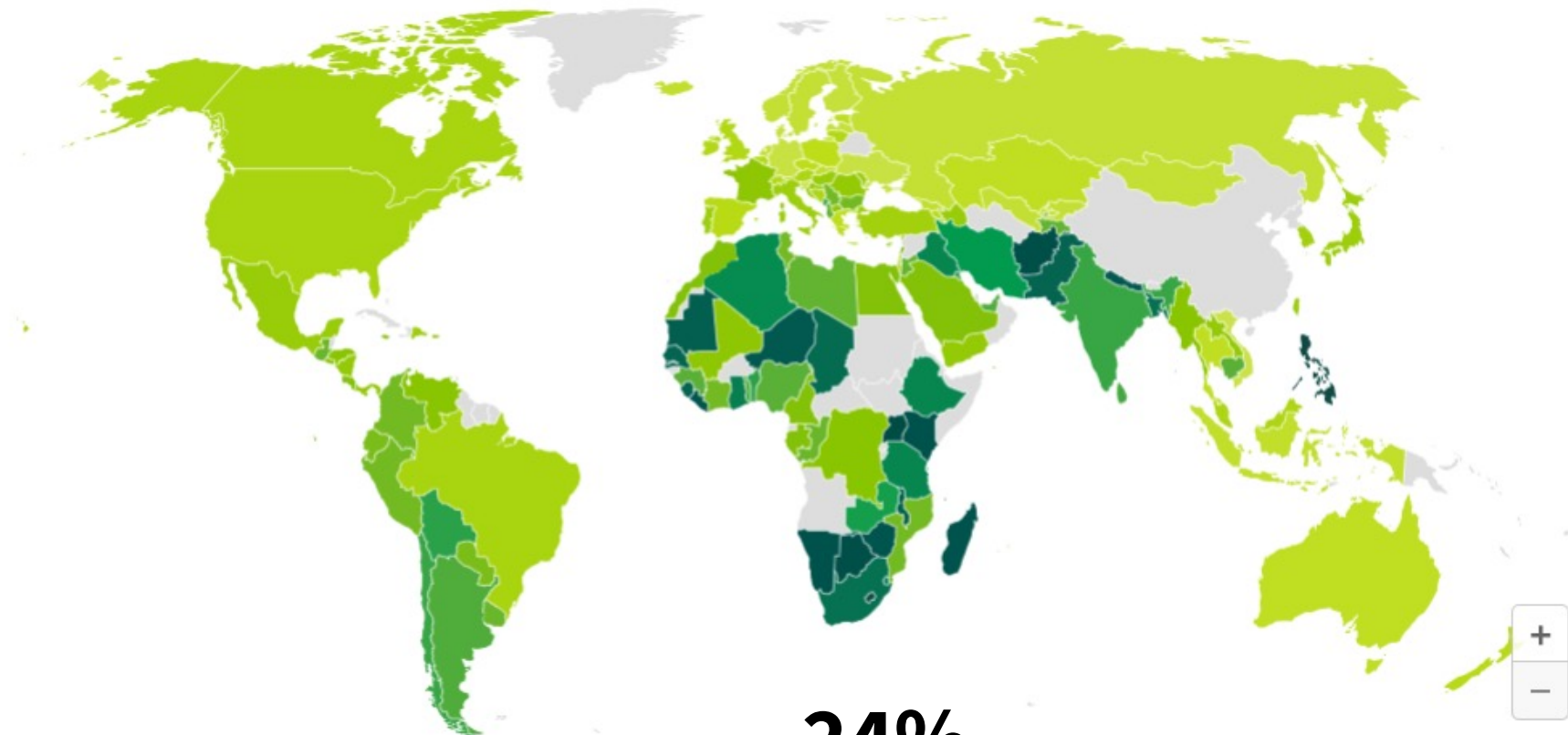


**Promising  
solutions**

# Scale of the problem – globally

Recent Gallup-Meta survey: “In general, how lonely do you feel?”

In general, how lonely do you feel?	
	Very + Fairly lonely
Age 15-18	25%
Age 19-29	27%
Age 30-44	25%
Age 45-64	22%
Age 65+	17%

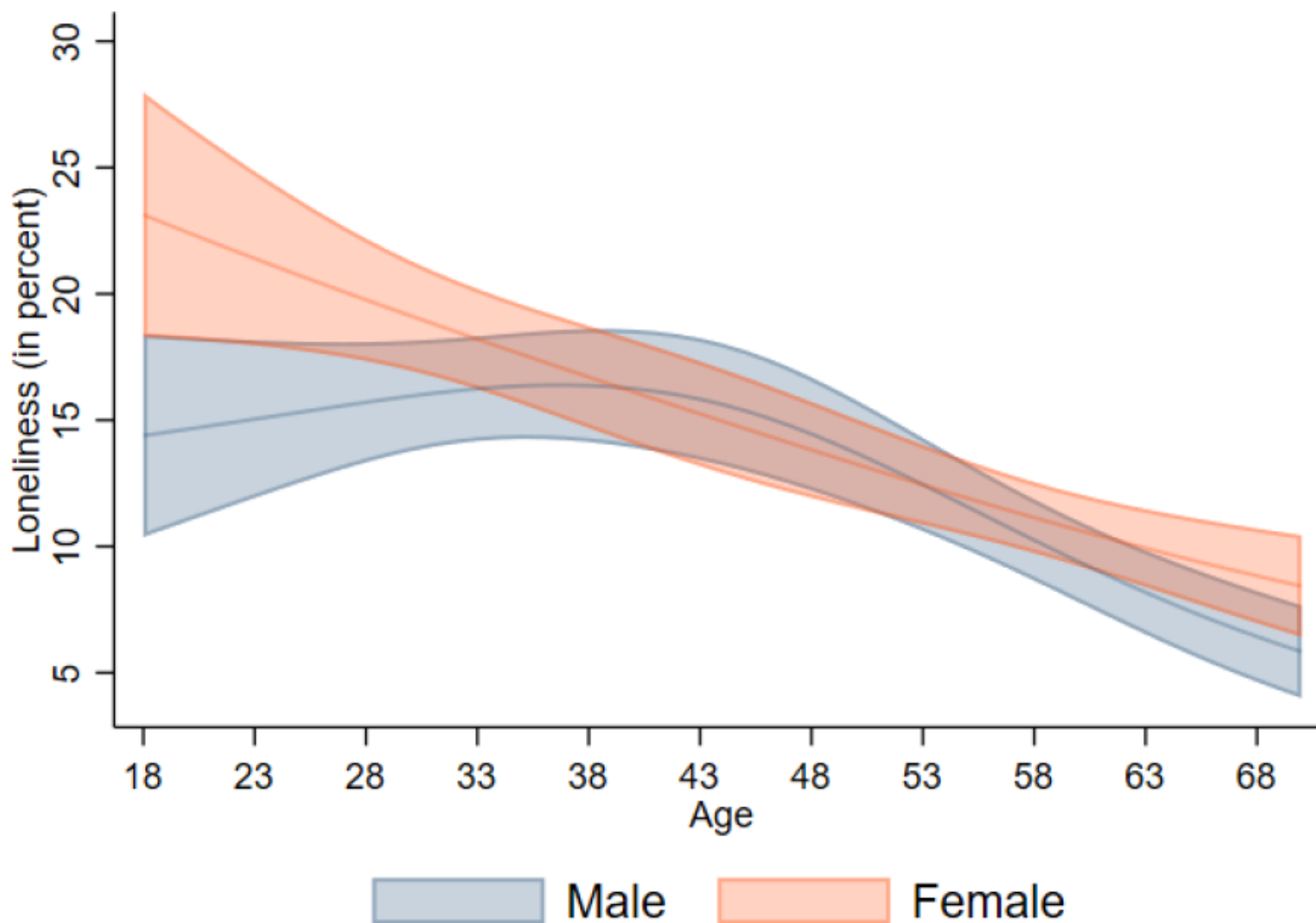


**24%**

of the global population felt "very lonely" or "fairly lonely".

# Scale of the problem – in EU by age and gender

**Figure 2** – Probability of being lonely by age and gender



# Consequences

Increased risk of early death

**14-32%**

## Similar to:

- **Smoking**
- **Excessive drinking**
- **Physical inactivity**
- **Obesity**
- **Air pollution**

# Consequences

## Health outcomes



# 3. Consequences

## Other outcomes



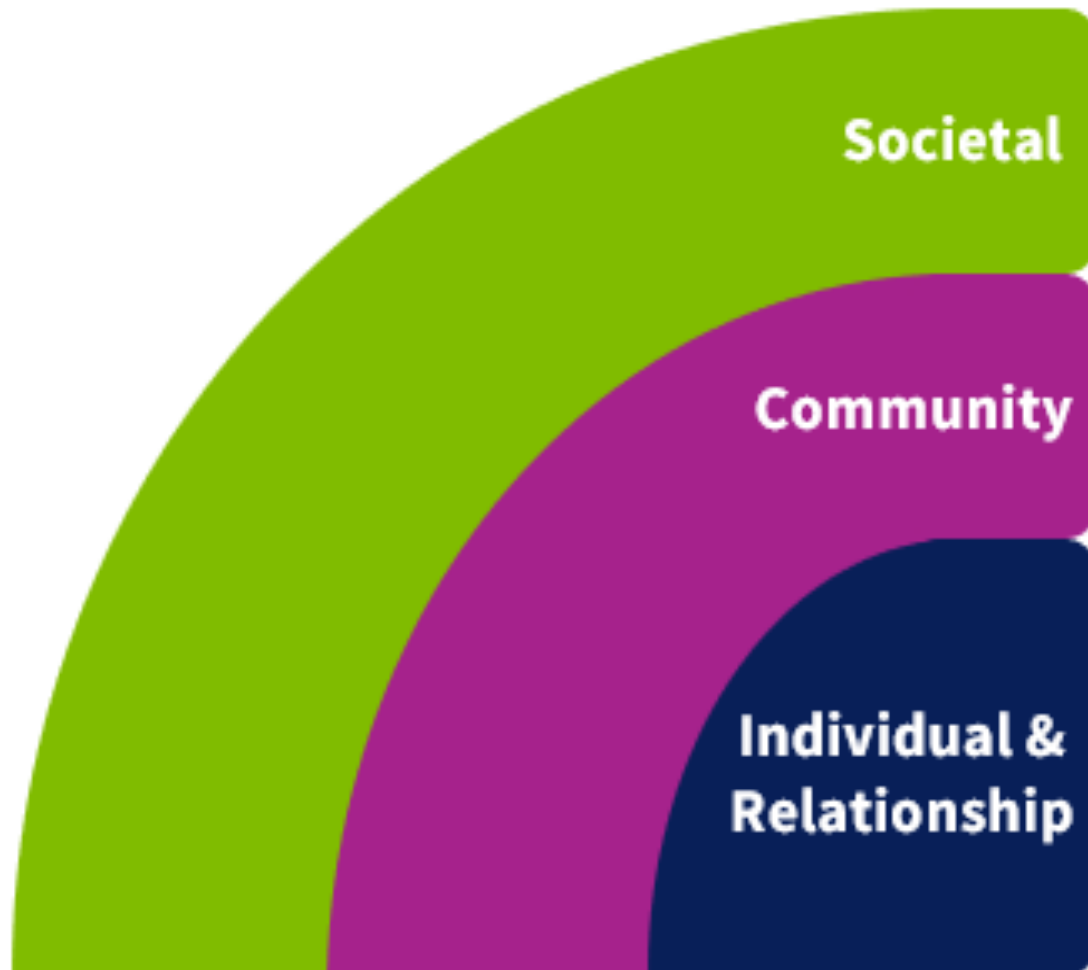
**Educational**



**Economic**



# Promising solutions



- **Laws and policies that address:**
  - **Discrimination and marginalization**
  - **Social cohesion and norms**

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- **Improving infrastructure**
- **Volunteering**

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- **Social prescribing**
- **Cognitive behavioral therapy**
- **Psychoeducation**



# WHO Commission on Social Connection

# Aims – 3-year tenure



**Increase  
visibility and  
priority**



**Reposition  
issue**



**Scale-up  
solutions**

# Composition



**Political:  
Commissioners**



**Secretariat:  
WHO**



**Technical:  
Advisors**

# Commissioners



1. Vivek Murthy (co-Chair), Surgeon General, United States
2. Chido Mpemba (co-Chair), Youth Envoy, African Union
3. Ayuko Kato, Minister for Loneliness, Japan
4. Khalid Ait Taleb, Minister of Health and Social Protection, Morocco
5. Jakob Forssmed, Minister for Social Affairs and Public Health, Sweden
6. Cleopa Mailu, Permanent Representative to the UN, Kenya
7. Ralph Regenvanu, Minister for Climate Change Adaptation, Energy, Environment and Disaster Management, Vanuatu
8. Ximena Aguilera Sanhueza, Minister of Health, Chile
9. Haben Girma, Deaf Blind Advocate and Activist, United States
10. Hina Jilani, Elder and Human Rights Lawyer, Pakistan
11. Karen Desalvo, Chief Health Officer, Google, United States



# Composition



**Political:  
Commissioners**



**Secretariat:  
WHO**



**Technical:  
Advisors**

# Main outcomes of Commission

## Commission Report (2025)

- Identifies priorities
- Sets agenda

**Measurement**  
Global Index

**Solutions**  
Intervention Accelerator

**Advocacy**  
Film → UNGA



**Thank you**



**WHO Commission  
on Social Connection**