



Position paper submitted to the High-Level Political Forum 2019

EMPOWERING PEOPLE AND ENSURING INCLUSIVENESS AND EQUALITY

Summary

Ageing is a global phenomenon which has clear implications for the Sustainable Development Goals and efforts to reduce inequalities which increase throughout life as the impact of discrimination accumulates and people experience new forms of discrimination in older age. The current 962 million people aged 60 and above is projected to rise to 1.4 billion by 2030, with the highest proportional growth in Africa and Asia. Global ageing and growing inequalities are two trends which must be addressed together. Societal systems and policies must adapt in the context of population ageing. This change process is critical to wellbeing for all, not older people alone.

Lifelong learning, decent work and employment opportunities, tackling economic and social inequalities, ending ageism and ensuring equal rights in older age are frequently raised by older persons as issues of concern.

Member States are obliged to uphold universal values shared across continents and cultures and to ensure the equal rights of all persons in their territories in line with the principles and standards of international human rights treaties. Older persons must be protected by public policies that are aligned with these human rights principles and standards and are implemented by programmes that take a life course approach, are age inclusive, tackle ageism and address older persons' rights and needs. However, policies for ageing are often uncoordinated, fragmented or non-existent and lack attention to human rights standards.

Member States can accelerate progress by acknowledging and confronting ageism, a key driver of social and economic discrimination and inequalities in older age, which restricts the potential of millions to contribute to sustainable development. Ageist attitudes stereotype, discriminate and exclude older persons. Successfully confronting ageism unlocks a wealth of economic, social and individual capacity, supporting sustainable development.

Recommendations

SDG4

1. Ensure life-long learning opportunities that respond to the rights and preferences of older persons. Reskilling, training and retraining equips older persons to be active agents in a complex and changing world.
2. Adapt learning opportunities, content and methodologies to the interests and preferences of older persons.
3. Ensure basic literacy and numeracy for all older persons and enable digital inclusion, a prerequisite to fulfilling the right of all to education and ensuring full participation in society.

SDG8

4. Provide social protection and flexible working arrangements in order to facilitate and improve conditions for older persons in the informal and formal labour markets.
5. Recognise the specific contributions of older people in both urban and rural settings. This includes paid, unpaid and volunteer work.
6. Remove age restrictive policies on access to microcredit, loans and financial investments.
7. Enact and enforce national and global anti-age discrimination legislation and review age-related exemptions in existing equality legislation.

SDG10

8. Ensure all people across the life course have age, disability and gender-equitable social protection and pension systems by means of the universal implementation of Target 1.3 on social protection floors and other measures.
9. Enact affordable, high-quality, person-centred and accessible social services, including universal health care including long-term care, for all older persons.
10. Ensure meaningful participation of older persons in all planning and decision-making processes, including through information on rights and entitlements.
11. Put in place a binding international legal instrument to protect the rights of older persons.

SDG17

12. Prioritise and finance the collection of age-disaggregated data at the national, regional and global level.
13. Support National Statistical Offices to gather, systematize and disaggregate age-related data.
14. Take notice of, finance and support the ongoing work of the Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data.
15. Ensure systematic inclusion of upper age groups in SDG monitoring and reporting.



Overview

For “leave no one behind” to be taken seriously, Governments and other stakeholders must be committed to addressing the implementation of the SDGs through a life-course approach. Whether in the context of education, employment, inequalities, partnerships or disaggregated data, older persons cannot be overlooked or ignored. The demographic trends, showing a huge increase of the numbers of older persons in the global population by 2030, requires urgent attention to ensuring that they are not left behind.

Lifelong learning, decent work and employment opportunities, tackling economic and social inequalities, ending ageism and ensuring equal rights in older age are frequently raised by older persons and ageing-focussed organisations as issues of concern¹.

It is not only a question of adequate economic and social policy for older persons but also a question of human rights, combatting persistent ageism and ensuring that all live a life of dignity in older age.

SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all

Target 4.3: By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.

Target 4.6: By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

Target 4.7: By 2030 ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development.

All older persons have a right to lifelong learning, to equal access to opportunities for all forms of learning and levels of education without discrimination based on age, gender, disability or any other grounds.

Even though none of the seven Goal 4 targets explicitly mentions older persons, they are implicitly included in the phrase “all learners.” Adults 60 years and older are the fastest growing age group, and by 2030, will constitute 16.5 percent of the world’s population.² Older persons must be included in the “substantial proportion of adults” referred to in the targets who have a right to, and need, affordable quality education to contribute their skills and knowledge and to maintain healthy lives.

Lifelong learning must provide older persons with access to technical and vocational education, allowing them to contribute to, benefit from and remain autonomous in all spheres of life, including economically productive activities, for as long as they wish. Older persons who have been denied education in their youth will need to acquire the necessary literacy and numeracy skills to enable them to contribute to and participate in a rapidly digitizing world. Illiteracy among older persons is a serious concern. Worldwide, an estimated 781 million people aged 15 and over remain illiterate. Nearly two thirds of them are women. Illiteracy rates are highest among older people and are higher among women than men. At age 65 and over, 30 per cent of women and

¹ Sources include consultations undertaken to inform the 2nd and 3rd review and appraisals of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2012 and 2017) and an SGA consultation with member organisation in April 2016.

² United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2015). Population 2030: Demographic challenges and opportunities for sustainable development planning (ST/ESA/SER.A/389). World population estimated to reach 8.5 billion by 2030. 1.4 billion older persons represents 16.5% of world population

See <http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/trends/Population2030.pdf>

19 per cent of men are illiterate. In Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, the vast majority of older persons are illiterate.³

“Lifelong learning for all” is a slogan that sets the international standard for all adults. Lifelong learning ensures that all persons across the life course, including those of older age, have the skills to participate fully in economically productive activities and in political and cultural affairs.

The right to lifelong learning is acknowledged in international law. The Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons (2015, Article 20)⁴ stipulates that states should ensure the effective exercise of the right to education for older persons including by promoting education and training in the use of information and communications technologies in order to bridge the digital literacy divide. As skills required for the workforce change rapidly, and the world is becoming increasingly digitized, lifelong learning is required for daily living and decent employment.

The commitments of the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (2015) to inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all, were designed to fill the gaps in Goal 4. Older people are included in the definition of lifelong learning and the framework recommends that university level education be accessible to older people.

Governmental, institutional and stakeholder voices must mobilize to provide appropriate guidelines and practical opportunities. UNESCO’s Institute of Lifelong Learning is a potential forum for continuing education of older persons and strategies to reduce adult illiteracy. The 2019 UNESCO Mobile Learning Week provided insights into the need for and limitations of assuring lifelong learning for all.⁵

“My illiteracy is creating problems in my daily life, especially regarding technology. So, I want to learn technological skills like using a mobile and a computer.”

65-year-old woman, Nepal

“We need more IT skills to be able to communicate digitally with public authorities.”

Group discussion, Denmark

Many participants said it was important to continue to learn, for a number of different reasons.

“Education helps to prepare for life in new conditions and participate in public life.”

Group discussion, Russian Federation

“There are many places you can go for training in clothes design, but they’re only for young people. I haven’t tried to go because of my age.”

80-year-old woman, Myanmar

“I want to learn skills and acquire knowledge but unfortunately there are no vocational centres or accelerated learning programme classes for older people.”

60-year-old man, Sudan

Quotes taken from *Living, not just surviving: Older people are being denied their right to social protection and education*, HelpAge International, 2019

³ UN Statistics Division (2015). The World’s Women 2015 Trends and Statistics. Chapter 3 – Education. Available at - <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter3/chapter3.html>

⁴ http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter_american_treaties_A-70_human_rights_older_persons.asp

⁵ <https://en.unesco.org/mlw>

Examples of good practice

- The Basic Literacy for Older Persons project of Ageing Nepal.⁶ This is a ground-breaking effort to teach illiterate older women to read and write. A curriculum and textbook have been designed to address the unique learning needs of older persons.
- University of the Third Age, first established in France. Often associated with local universities, this international movement provides opportunities for older persons to learn skills and mitigate social isolation. World University for 3rd Age Network.⁷
- The Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) harnesses the power of technology to change the way we age. Since 2004 OATS has developed in the USA and other countries programs that engage older persons as change agents — in the classroom, in the community, and at home.⁸
- ILC Singapore, Tsao Foundation with funding from City Bank runs a *Financial Education Programme for Mature and Older Women (40 and above)*. It aims to educate and empower low-income women to better manage their finances in older age. Following a pilot, 2007-2012, it became a national offering through 105 community clubs in Singapore. The programme was replicated in Indonesia and Malaysia. Financial education protects women from abuse and empowers them to be active in their communities.⁹

Recommendations

1. Ensure life-long learning opportunities that respond to the rights and preferences of older persons. Reskilling, training and retraining equips older persons to be active agents in a complex and changing world.
2. Adapt learning opportunities, content and methodologies to the interests and preferences of older persons.
3. Ensure basic literacy and numeracy for all older persons, a prerequisite to fulfilling the right of all to education and ensuring full participation in society.

SDG 8: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all

Target 8.3: Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial service.

The briefing paper by UNDESA on Economic Inequalities in Old Age clearly describes the need for robust implementation of this target. It states “Employment is crucial to older persons’ economic security, providing income and in some cases pension and other benefits. The range of benefits generated by decent work apply to older persons in much the same way as they do to other age groups. Yet older persons confront distinct barriers to both securing and retaining employment, reflecting and resulting in age-based discrimination and compounding inequalities among older persons.”¹⁰

The Stakeholder Group on Ageing concurs with UNDESA’s analysis and conclusions. They clearly take forward the recommendation of para 23 of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA); “Older

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhHNLidWEqs&feature=youtu.be>

⁷ <http://www.worldu3a.org/whoware.htm>

⁸ See <https://oats.org/>

⁹ <https://tsaofoundation.org/what-we-do/research-and-collaboration/programmes/Citi-Tsao>

¹⁰ UN DESA (2017) Economic Inequalities in Old Age - 60+ COUNTS. Page 9 https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2016/08/Briefing-Paper_Economic-Inequalities_Final.pdf

persons should be enabled to continue with income-generating work for as long as they want and for as long as they are able to do so productively.”¹¹

Many older persons work past retirement age out of financial need and/or a desire to remain active. But in many cases, those who would like to continue working are unable to find or retain jobs or are deterred by retirement incentives or by penalties on work-related income. The rights of older persons to work on an equal basis with others is not universally recognized.¹²

For example, some countries enforce mandatory retirement at a fixed age, often as part of efforts to ease high rates of youth employment. The claim that mandatory retirement for older workers opens up jobs for younger workers is not based on empirical evidence.¹³ Rather, the available evidence shows that early retirement of older persons does not lead to more jobs for youth, and policies that promote employment of older persons benefit workers of *all* ages.¹⁴

Older persons equal participation in the labour market is challenged by caring responsibilities falling on the shoulders of older workers, in particular older women, who may juggle paid work with caring at the same time for children, spouses, frail parents or relatives. A recent ODI study with data from 30 countries has not only revealed the significant gender inequalities between paid work and unpaid and domestic work between older women and men, but the time spent by older women on unpaid work, often in addition to paid work, with significant impacts on health and wellbeing.¹⁵ Data from Chile shows older women may be working a full nine hours on top of any paid work they have. Policies to acknowledge and reconcile the tension between work and family duties are therefore indispensable to advance age and gender equality in the labour market and within the family.

The recently adopted EU directive on work-life balance sets a new standard in this respect. The directive recognises for the first time in European legislation informal carers, who provide 80 per cent of the care work in the EU. The directive will introduce major improvements for informal carers, including older workers, such as a right to request carers' leave of five days per year or the right to request flexible working arrangements. The directive has also an important gender dimension as it encourages men to take up more family leave through the introduction of 10 days of paid paternity leave and the remuneration of two months of parental leave per parent.

Age-based discrimination affects workers along multiple dimensions, from recruitment to workplace culture, to employment regulations. In addition to mandatory retirement ages in some countries, older persons confront thresholds regarding compensation, income insurance and professional licensing.¹⁶

A 2012 Eurobarometer survey found that age discrimination was more prevalent in the workplace than in other contexts, with one of every five citizens reporting it as a personal experience or one they had witnessed.¹⁷ Negative perceptions of older workers by employers are a significant barrier to older persons' labour market participation.¹⁸ An OECD report showed that most employers in nearly all member countries had stereotypical views about older workers and their perceived weaknesses, affecting hiring and retention decisions.¹⁹

¹¹ United Nations. Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid 8-12 April 2012 (United Nations publication, Sales No.E.02.IV.4), para. 23.

¹² United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary General on Follow up to the International Year of Older Persons, Second World Assembly on Ageing, 24 July 2015 (A/70/185)

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ International Labour Organization, An Analysis: Young and older workers: two sides of the same coin, 2012, Rene Boheim, “the effect of early retirement on youth employment”, IZA World of Labour 2014. <http://wol.iza.org/articles/effect-of-early-retirement-schemes-on-youth-employment.pdf>

¹⁵ Lucia Rost with Abigail Hunt, Emma Samman and Fiona Samuels (2018). Older women's economic empowerment - a review of the literature. ODI Working Paper 540

¹⁶ United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on Follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 24 July 2016 (A/68/180)

¹⁷ European Commission, “Active ageing”, Special Eurobarometer, No. 378 (January 2012).

http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_278_en.pdf.

¹⁸ Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Live Longer, Work Longer (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2006)

¹⁹ Ibid.

A growing number of countries have adopted anti-discrimination legislation to promote equality in recruitment, retention, and training.²⁰ A 2008 ILO study identified approximately 50 countries worldwide with some form of legislation that prohibits age discrimination in employment. Bolivia and Serbia have recently approved such laws.²¹

The effects of such anti-discrimination legislation on inequality in national employment and judicial practices are variable. A civil society network that assessed application of the EU Directive found that, although it challenged ageist views of employers in many countries, employment discrimination persisted and in fact worsened amidst the recent economic crisis.²²

Access to financial services enables people of all ages to secure mortgage loans, and start or expand a business, providing insurance against poor health and travel risks. Yet, older persons continue to face unequal access to goods and services, including financial services, as a result of discriminatory practices and attitudes. Some insurance providers and financial institutions explicitly apply age restrictions and charge older clients higher fees.²³ Policymakers and researchers have paid little attention to inequality in this area.

AGE Platform Europe's 2011 study provided much needed insight into financial exclusion of older persons in the European Union.²⁴ It found widespread age discrimination particularly with regard to mortgages and loans, travel insurance, and complementary health insurance. Insurance companies in the region frequently limit coverage of older persons, and charge clients above a certain age (sometimes as low as 59) high, sometimes prohibitive, surcharges and penalties.

In developing countries, older persons are typically excluded from access to small business loans and microfinance services on the basis of age, despite evidence that they have above average repayment rates.²⁵ Initiatives in Canada and Kenya have expanded older persons' access to small loans and other supports in business development.²⁶

Approaches to addressing age inequality in employment vary. Australia and Finland have launched communications campaigns to encourage more positive perceptions of older workers.²⁷ Others, including France and Singapore, offer subsidies or tax reductions to employers who hire, rehire or retrain older workers.²⁸

Several countries, including Japan in 2008, have passed legislation or amended existing provisions to allow for more flexible working arrangements for older workers such as part-or flex-time. Flexible working arrangements improve working conditions for older workers, give them greater choice of work options and allow for smoother transitions from work into retirement.²⁹

Recommendations

4. Provide social protection and flexible working arrangements in order to facilitate and improve conditions for older persons in the informal and formal labour markets.
5. Recognise the specific contributions of older people in both urban and rural settings. This includes paid, unpaid and volunteer work.
6. Remove age restrictive policies on access to microcredit, loans and financial investments.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge International, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge* (New York and London, 2012).

²² United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 19 July 2013 (A/68/167)

²³ United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 26 Jul 2012 (A/67/188)

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 26 July 2012 (A/67/188) and United Nations Population Fund and HelpAge International, *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge* (New York and London, 2012).

²⁸ United Nations General Assembly, Report of the Secretary-General on follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing, 19 July 2013 (A/68/167).

²⁹ Ibid.

7. Enact and enforce national and global anti-age discrimination legislation and review age-related exemptions in existing equality legislation.

SDG 10: Reduce inequality within and among countries

Achievement of Goal 10 would not only narrow the widening gaps between rich and poor but would allow for greater realization of human rights and genuine potential of all human beings across the life course. Equality underpins the potential of every person to realise their human rights across their life course.

The Stakeholder Group on Ageing considers that achieving Goal 10 with respect to older persons is a prerequisite to realizing all the SDGs. The rate and scale of population ageing in all countries makes tackling inequalities in older age an even more urgent imperative. Between 2015 and 2030, the number of people aged 60 and over is expected to increase from 901 million to 1.4 billion³⁰, with the regions most disadvantaged by inequalities being those where most older persons live and where population ageing is projected to grow most rapidly. Societal systems and policies need to adapt in the context of population ageing and health, employment, education and training, and pensions are critical entry points for adaptation. This change process is critical to wellbeing for all, not older people alone.

While each constituency believes that their concerns warrant urgent attention, those of older persons are often among the most neglected.

Best practices that reduce inequalities in older age can be replicated. These include universal pensions/social security, advancement of social protection floors, anti-discrimination statutes in national employment and judicial practices, older person-centred health and social care, access to lifelong learning, decent housing and affordable transport. These efforts must be based on multi-stakeholder approaches that are person-centered, recognize the unique situations of older women and men, and are relevant to the national context.

Target 10.1: By 2030, progressively achieve and sustain income growth of the bottom 40 per cent of the population at a rate higher than the national average.

In most countries, the risk of poverty increases with age, with older women being at much greater risk than older men, given that access to social security in old age is closely associated with existing gender inequalities, including employment in the male dominated formal sector. Many older persons rely on small and precarious incomes and are unable to rely on private savings as their primary support in older age. This is particularly true for many older women who, after a lifetime of disadvantage, discrimination and low and unpaid work, have limited economic and social assets. In the European Union, the gap between men and women's pension income was almost 37 per cent in 2016. When combining this gap with women's higher life expectancy, as well as with the impact of national family law that might put women in a more difficult situation after divorce or widowhood and given the higher risk of living alone that women face in older age, older women are at a higher risk of poverty than older men.

Adequate pensions should be the right of every older person. Georgia³¹ and Latvia³² provide good examples of practice in these situations. Fewer than 16 per cent of older persons in low income countries have a pension, with fewer older women than men receiving one.³³ Near universal pension coverage exists in the Americas, Europe and Central Asia, whereas fewer than 30 per cent of older persons in Sub-Saharan Africa, Southern Asia and the Arab States receive pensions.

It is critical to extend pension systems as part of a wider effort to extend social protection and reduce poverty among older persons.³⁴ However, in many developing countries only a small proportion of the older

³⁰ UNDESA (2017) Economic Inequalities in old age. Page 1

³¹ Center for Retirement Research at Boston College (2015) The Challenge of Pension Reform in Georgia: Non-Contributory Pensions and Elderly Poverty. Available at

<https://crr.bc.edu/working-papers/the-challenge-of-pension-reform-in-georgia-non-contributory-pensions-and-elderly-poverty/>

³² OECD (2018) Latvia should raise basic pension to reduce pensioner poverty (07/03/2018) Available at

<http://www.oecd.org/social/latvia-should-raise-basic-pension-to-reduce-pensioner-poverty.htm>

³³ UN Women, "Protecting women's income security in old age" 2015

³⁴ AARP, HelpAge International, UNDP, Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2017

population is covered by old-age pensions mainly because most people work in the informal sector. The situation of older persons in developing countries is further undermined by the fact that governments make few resources available to fund pensions and public services.³⁵

Analysis of the actual situation of older persons is furthermore hampered by data gaps regarding poverty rates among older persons. For example, the Global Age Watch Index published by HelpAge International in 2015 was able to include only 96 countries owing to absence of poverty data in some of the poorest countries.³⁶

Social protection includes access to affordable health services. Health care in older age (Target 3.8), therefore, is a priority for achievement of 10.1. The prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), dementia and disability rise with age, with three quarters of NCDs, such as diabetes, heart disease and cancer, occurring in the over 60 age group. Dementia affects around 50 million people, the majority in LMICs, a figure projected to increase to 82 million by 2030. Public policies that support person-centred approaches for health promotion, prevention, and management of age-related conditions in the community, as well as basic palliative care, are needed.³⁷

Examples of good practice

- Renta Dignidad, which provides pensions for older persons in Bolivia, is an example of how developing nations can achieve and sustain income growth for the bottom 40 per cent of the population of older persons.³⁸
- Singapore has paid increasing attention in recent years to a range of interventions addressing the needs of people living with dementia as part of the wider older population, including appropriate public housing and transport, employment and support services.³⁹
- With around 4 per cent of its population above the age of 70, Lesotho has a larger share of older people than many countries in sub-Saharan Africa. All citizens of Lesotho over 70 years of age, with the exception of retired civil servants and war veterans, are entitled to a monthly pension benefit of 550 Lesotho Maloti (LSL), equivalent to US\$40. The OAP was introduced to lift older persons out of poverty and is the largest regular cash transfer in Lesotho, covering 83,000 persons (around 4 per cent of the population). While coverage of eligible persons is universal, it is estimated that many more benefit indirectly.⁴⁰ It should be noted that “The OAP has always been fully funded and administered by the Government, which is proof that even a country with limited financial resources can afford a universal programme.”⁴¹

Target 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.

Political participation of older persons varies greatly between countries, and is closely correlated with income and wealth, gender and levels of education. The effects of poverty, poor health, lack of education, disability, gender-based discrimination, and lack of influence, increase with age. These factors combine to limit and constrain older persons’ ability to participate fully in their communities.⁴² Many older persons are income-constrained through retirement, poor health, participation in the informal market on unfavourable terms, or unemployment. These factors in turn erect barriers to access to social protection, eroding rights to income,

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ HelpAge International, Global Age Watch Index 2015 <https://www.helpage.org/global-agewatch/>

³⁷ World Health Organisation (2018). Astana Declaration on Primary Health Care. Available at <https://www.who.int/primary-health/conference-phc/declaration>

³⁸ International Labour Office – ILO (2016) Universal Pensions for Older Persons – Plurinational State of Bolivia. Available at <http://www.social-protection.org/gimi/RessourcePDF.action?ressource.ressourceId=53696>

³⁹ Ministerial Committee on Ageing, I feel young in my Singapore: action plan for successful ageing, Singapore, Ministry of Health, 2016, pp.11-23

⁴⁰ World Bank Group and International Labour Organization (ILO). (2015) Universal Social Protection – Country Cases. Lesotho. Page 70

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² UNDESA (2007) World Economic and Social Survey 2007 - Development in an Ageing World. Page 42

health, and security. Effective and sustainable political and social participation by older people in their communities and their wider societies depends, on improving education, income and economic status.

A 2018 report on the health of older persons across 12 countries⁴³ shows that longevity has increased in lower middle income countries (LMICs) but often with preventable illness, disability, and lower quality of life. 'Older people are not enjoying their right to health' and 'the gap between healthy life expectancy and life expectancy is growing.'⁴⁴ The World Health Organization's concept of 'healthy ageing' emphasizes the need for action across multiple sectors and the importance of enabling older people to remain a resource to their families, communities and economies. The WHO sets out five key domains of functional ability that are essential for older people to meet their basic needs; to learn, grow and make decisions; to be mobile; to build and maintain relationships; and to contribute. These domains are rooted in a rights-based approach which requires that older persons be able to participate actively and make informed decisions about their health and well-being. To make this a reality policies and programmes are required "... which should empower older people to contribute to, and remain active members of, their communities for as long as possible, according to their capacity."⁴⁵

Participation is important at all stages of life. Consultations undertaken for the landmark publication, *Ageing in the 21st Century*, revealed that older persons are enthusiastic about participating in their own organizations. Engaging in such groups brings both economic and social benefits such as increased well-being and a sense of worth, as well as enhanced political recognition and greater community and family respect. In some cases, older persons report that they often felt lonely before joining a group and have been happier since joining. Some say that the activities of older persons' groups have increased their involvement in local decision-making. In a rural area of Serbia, for example, members of an older persons' group succeeded in obtaining home health care, a general practitioner, and a pharmacy for their village. Furthermore, many respondents said that voting was crucial to exercising their rights as citizens and constituted their opportunity to influence decision-making.⁴⁶

At the same time there was a degree of cynicism about politicians noticing them only at election time: "During the elections, older people voted in large numbers, thinking that the new leaders would help us. However, we are still awaiting assistance from them. We only get to see politicians during campaign time." (urban Kenya). "Only during the election campaigns do politicians pay any attention to the issues of the people living in villages." (rural Serbia).⁴⁷

Examples of good practice

- Janaseva Foundation (Pune, India) which employs many older persons and persons with disabilities both as salaried workers and volunteers. It created homes for older persons with living on the side of the road. Residents of the homes manage group activities, receiving honoraria even though residence is free of charge. A nurse with a disability who lives on the premises teaches nursing school students, while another older person with a disability manages an entire wing of children at their rehabilitation centre for destitute persons.⁴⁸
- In South Africa, grandmothers working as traders helped to improve their communities through developing responses to collective problems, including participating in savings groups that support HIV and AIDS-affected families or prayer groups.⁴⁹

⁴³ AARP/HelpAge International (2018) Executive Summary – Global Age Watch Insights - The right to health for older people, the right to be counted. page 13. Available at https://www.ageinternational.org.uk/globalassets/documents/global-agewatch-insights-2018_executive-summary.pdf

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.11

⁴⁵ World Health Organisation (2015). World Report on Ageing and Health. Page 15

⁴⁶ UNFPA (2012). Ageing in the 21st Century – A Celebration and a Challenge. Page 136

⁴⁷ Ibid. Page 138

⁴⁸ Information provided by Dr. Vinod Shah, MD, Chairman, Janaseva Foundation, Pune, India

⁴⁹ Chazan, M. (2008) 'Seven 'deadly' assumptions: unravelling the implications of HIV/AIDS among grandmothers in South Africa and beyond' Ageing and Society 28(7): 935–958. Cited in Lucia Rost with Abigail Hunt, Emma Samman and Fiona Samuels (2018). Older women's economic empowerment - a review of the literature. ODI Working Paper 540

- Age Demands Action is a grassroots movement of campaigners in 60 countries. Older people meet with decision-makers and lobby their local and national governments to push the issues most important to them, such as pensions and healthcare.
- Examples of good practice on economic inclusion include a business and economic model for economic inclusion of older persons⁵⁰ in Colorado in the United States.
- In 2016 the government of Vietnam approved a plan to roll out Intergenerational Self-Help Clubs throughout the country. This will eventually add 3,200 ISHCs in at least 65 provinces and cities to the 1,000 plus ISHCs, with 55,000 members, which are already functioning. The government has made budgetary provision to finance activities including project management, training, conducting activities such as health care and income generations. It is also seeking co-financing from provincial governments, private donors and communities themselves.⁵¹

Target 10.3: Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.

Promoting equal opportunities and reducing inequalities for older persons will likely result in reduction in overall levels of poverty, contribute to social cohesion, encourage greater economic participation in older age bringing economic returns to all.

Yet age discrimination and ageism are tolerated across the world, with older people experiencing discrimination and the violation of their rights, and increased inequalities, at family, community and institutional levels. These include discrimination in financial services, in social and civil participation, employment and health settings. Unprecedented demographic ageing means that the number of people who are likely to experience age discrimination and violation of their rights in old age will increase.

Countries, regions, and institutions need strong leadership and commitment to create and implement policies that benefit older populations. Policies for ageing and health are often uncoordinated, fragmented or non-existent and legal and policy frameworks that do not adequately protect older persons in all areas of life perpetuate ageism and structural discrimination. Meanwhile, ageism, which is stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age, is a powerful barrier to the development of good policy and practice.

To create effective policies for older persons, leaders need clear guidance and tools on best practices, based on the best available evidence. Governments also need to be aware of existing regional and international frameworks on ageing and health in order to coordinate efforts at different levels.⁵²

The World Health Organization has increasingly been interested in the negative impact ageism has on older people's participation, health and life expectancy. The WHO have been gathering the best available evidence on the three dimensions of ageism: stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination. Others have argued that legislation, however enlightened, must be founded on changed attitudes and, citing evidence from the United States, state that equal rights for other groups was not achieved solely through change in laws, but instead by a change in attitudes that usually predated legislation.⁵³ Eliminating ageism, reflected in discriminatory laws, policies and practices, therefore, requires actions by the public and private sectors and concerted efforts to change the attitudes that permit and reinforce discrimination.⁵⁴

Ageing exposes older people to new and distinct forms of discrimination and rights violations, against which existing human rights instruments provide insufficient protection. Currently no global instrument exists to articulate and uphold existing human rights standards in older age.

⁵⁰ <https://changingthenarrativeco.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CtN-Case-for-Age-Friendly-and-Multigenerational.pdf>

⁵¹ <http://ageingasia.org/vietnam-plan-to-expand-intergenerational-self-help-club-model-nationwide/>

⁵² WHO – What WHO is doing to foster commitment to action – <https://www.who.int/ageing/commit-action/en/>

⁵³ Chip Conley (2018) How Do We Combat Ageism? By Valuing Wisdom as Much as Youth. Harvard Business Review, June 21, 2018. Available at <https://hbr.org/2018/06/how-do-we-combat-ageism-by-valuing-wisdom-as-much-as-youth>

⁵⁴ For guidelines of the WHO Campaign to Campaign to Combat Ageism, see <https://www.who.int/ageing/commit-action/en/>

A global convention on the rights of older persons is long overdue to comprehensively and effectively address ageism, age discrimination and inequalities in old age. Such an instrument would provide a definitive, universal position that age discrimination is morally and legally unacceptable, provide legally binding protection with accompanying accountability mechanisms, give clarity for duty bearers and rights holders on rights and responsibilities with regard to older persons and redress the present imbalanced focus on the economic and social rights of older persons by aggregating all indivisible rights into one instrument. It would put age discrimination and older people's rights more centrally onto governments', donors' and NGOs' agendas, encourage a paradigm shift from the view of older persons as welfare recipients to one of older persons as rights holders, draw attention to, deepen understanding of, and provide redress for the complex, multiple forms of discrimination experienced by older women and men and, crucially, provide a framework to guide policy responses to demographic ageing trends based on rights, equity and social justice. According to the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People such a convention would:

- Provide a definitive, universal position that age discrimination is morally and legally unacceptable.
- Provide legally binding protection with accompanying accountability mechanisms.
- Provide clarity for duty bearers and rights holders on what their rights and responsibilities are towards older people.
- Bring together existing rights standards that are currently dispersed throughout various other instruments and interpretive documents.
- Redress the present imbalanced focus on the economic and social rights of older persons by aggregating all indivisible rights into one instrument.
- Put age discrimination and older people's rights more centrally onto governments', donors' and NGOs' agendas.
- Draw attention to, deepen understanding of, and provide redress for the complex, multiple forms of discrimination experienced by older women and men.
- Provide a framework to guide policy responses to demographic ageing trends based on rights, equity and social justice.
- Provide a powerful advocacy and education tool for older persons those that represent them for claiming their rights.
- Encourage a paradigm shift from the view of older persons from being considered as recipients of welfare to older persons as rights holders with responsibilities.⁵⁵

In the absence of a legally binding international instrument to set universal standards and obligations regarding older persons, the Universal Principles for the Rights of Older Persons⁵⁶ adopted by consensus in 1991, (General Assembly resolution 46/91 16th December 1991) and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing provide guidance for governments and full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) will provide protection for the many older persons living with disabilities.⁵⁷ It is also necessary to adhere to the cross-cutting principle of leaving no older person behind in national policies and to guarantee the full inclusion of older persons in the goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with adequate attention to data collection and data disaggregation.

Examples of good practice

There are various, albeit fragmented, laws and policies to address age discrimination in the European Union.

The Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons⁵⁸ and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons provide protection at the regional level, in the absence of an international instrument.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People – Why we need a convention. Available at <https://www.rightsofolderpeople.org/why-we-need-a-convention/>

⁵⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OlderPersons.aspx>

⁵⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

⁵⁸ http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/docs/inter_american_treaties_A-70_human_rights_older_persons.pdf

⁵⁹ <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-older-persons>

Recommendations

8. Ensure all people across the life course have age, disability and gender-equitable social protection and pension systems by means of the universal implementation of Target 1.3 on social protection floors and other measures.
9. Enact affordable, high-quality, person-centred and accessible social services, including health and long-term care, for all older persons.
10. Ensure meaningful participation of older persons in all planning and decision-making processes, including through information on rights and entitlements.
11. Put in place a binding international legal instrument to protect the rights of older persons.

SDG17: Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

It is essential to improve the collection of age disaggregated data and create matching partnerships. Establishment of the Titchfield Group on ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data,⁶⁰ ongoing efforts to develop conceptual and analytical frameworks for ageing-related statistics collected over the life course, and public private partnerships to develop life course responses to health and wellbeing, are positive responses to data gaps on ageing and older persons.

Target 17.18: By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.

One of the glaring omissions hampering the effective formulation of policies and implementation of programmes regarding older persons is the lack of reliable and accessible data. All too often, such data is either not collected or amalgamated in age bands too broad to be helpful. Data collection must reflect diversity among older persons, similar to that of other cohorts. Disaggregation of data by age and other dimensions is essential for implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly the mandate reflected in Target 17.18. Cohorts for age disaggregation should be consistent throughout adulthood and five-year brackets are recommended as a minimum but preferably there should be no brackets. In all cases age should be disaggregated by relevant dimensions and factors including sex, disability and geographic location, and support given for increased participation by National Statistical Offices on age related data processes.

One of these is the Titchfield Group on Ageing Statistics, endorsed at the 49th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission. Participation by a greater number of National Statistical Offices will ensure better results. It has a work programme until 2022 and will report regularly to the Statistical Commission.⁶¹

An important process also is the Inclusive Data Charter, a global network of governments, NGOs, philanthropists, and businesses, committed to strengthening data disaggregation data inclusivity across the lifespan.⁶²

Recommendations

12. Prioritise and finance the collection of age-disaggregated data at the national, regional and global level.
13. Support National Statistical Offices to gather, systematize and disaggregate age-related data.
14. Take notice of, finance and support the ongoing work of the Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age-Disaggregated Data.
15. Ensure systematic inclusion of upper age groups in SDG monitoring and reporting

⁶⁰ Titchfield Group on Ageing: <http://bit.ly/2Fy5ShY>

⁶¹ See <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/files/meetings/iaeg-sdgs-meeting-07/4.3%20UK%20-%20Titchfield%20Group%20on%20Ageing.pdf>

⁶² See <http://www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/inclusive-data-charter>