unitar
United Nations Institute for Training and Research

United Nations
Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNFPA

IOM
UN MIGRATION

International Labour Organization

UN WOMEN

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

World Health Organization

UNITED NATIONS
HUMAN RIGHTS
OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

ITU

ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging Paths Towards Strengthening Protection and Participation

5 FREE EVENTS
5th Year
MAY - NOVEMBER 2026

## Economic and Employment Security for Older Persons

25 June 2026

9:30 EDT
15:30 CEST

AI generated-image

With the support of:

WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities

hpod
Harvard Law School Project on Disability

INPEA

ILC
GLOBAL ALLIANCE
INTERNATIONAL LONGEVITY CENTRE
Designing the Future of Ageing

NGO Committee on Ageing
GENEVA

GIA
Global Initiative on Ageing

cifal
Global Network

# 2026 Series for Mainstreaming Knowledge on Ageing

## Second Event Takeaways

This document has been prepared by the Division for People and Social Development at UNITAR, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Specialist in Human Rights and Good Governance, and Ms. Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team.

We hope you enjoy it!



**Moderator**

**Mr. Alex Mejía**
Director, Division for People and Social Development
UNITAR



**Coordinator**

**Ms. Analucía Jácome**
Specialist, Human Rights and Good Governance
Division for People and Social Development, UNITAR

# Focus: A Life-Course Approach to Economic Security in Ageing Societies



**Dr. Alejandro Bonilla-Garcia**
Chair, NGO Committee on Ageing
Representative to the United Nations in Geneva of the International Federation on Ageing

***"Ageing itself is not a crisis; rather, the failure to adapt to ageing is the real crisis."***

1. Our chances of reaching older age with health, economic security, and dignity are largely shaped by the opportunities, protections, and decisions accumulated throughout the different stages of life.

2. Firstly, economic security in old age does not begin in old age but at birth. Although this concept has become increasingly recognized, the underlying principle is straightforward: the situation of an older person today reflects the opportunities and protections, as well as the inequalities and exclusions accumulated throughout life.

3. Access to nutrition, education, healthcare, skills development, decent work, and social protection all shape outcomes in later life. If we wait until people reach old age to address insecurity, poverty, or exclusion, we are already too late. Economic security in old age is built across the entire life course. Therefore, ageing policy is not only about older persons, but also about children, young people, workers, families, and communities.

4. Secondly, the demographic train has left the station, and it is not coming back. Too often, debates continue as if societies were still operating within the demographic reality of the previous century. However, people are living longer, families are becoming smaller, and life courses are becoming increasingly diverse. While many older persons remain healthy, active, and productive well beyond traditional retirement age, others reach later life in vulnerable situations.

## Highlights on the NGO Committee on Ageing

The NGO Committee on Ageing (Geneva) works to advance the rights of older persons and ensure their full inclusion across the life course. From Geneva to the global stage, it gathers civil society, United Nations actors, and partners to promote a UN convention on the rights of older persons, advance rights-based and inclusive policies, strengthen participation and accountability, combat ageism, and support evidence-based action.



5. Old age is a multidimensional concept shaped by individual, local, regional, national, and global circumstances. Nevertheless, many societies, institutions, and legal frameworks continue to operate as if population ageing had not occurred and as if older persons represented a single, homogeneous group. Our economies, labour markets, social protection systems, pension systems, and healthcare services must adapt to the demographic diversity and realities of the 21st century.

6. Thirdly, economic security is a human rights issue. Economic and employment security are not simply economic matters, but also directly connected to the enjoyment of other human rights. When older persons lack income security, they may face barriers to healthcare, housing, participation, and autonomy, ultimately affecting their dignity.

7. The future of ageing is therefore also about all of us. Nobody wants to die young, and every young person hopes to grow older. Families hope that their loved ones will age with health, income security, and dignity. Every society benefits when all generations are recognized, visible, and included according to their respective life-course stages, allowing everyone to contribute to and benefit from development.

8. Economic and employment security for older persons is therefore not a special-interest issue. It is a cornerstone of social justice, human dignity, and sustainable development. The demographic transition is not a future prospect, but something already happening. The question before us is whether we will be able to adapt our societies and legal frameworks in time.

9. I believe that we can, but more importantly, I believe that we must. We have a shared responsibility to build societies that recognize ageing as a natural part of life, uphold the rights and dignity of older persons, and ensure that all generations can participate fully and benefit equally from development.



## To Bear in Mind

Adapting our societies to demographic change inevitably involves costs, as every transformation does. However, the more important question is the cost of failing to adapt. The consequences of inaction include labour shortages, lost productivity, increased poverty, and exclusion, with the burden ultimately affecting all generations.

## Important

The future legally binding instrument on the rights of older persons can build upon the important foundation established by ILO international labour standards. These include Convention No. 102 on Minimum Standards, Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, Convention No. 122 on Employment Policy, Convention No. 158 on Termination of Employment, and Recommendation No. 162 concerning older workers. It can also draw upon the ILO's global leadership through Recommendation No. 202 on social protection floors, which recognizes the importance of guaranteeing basic income security at all stages of life, including old age.

By bringing labour and social protection standards into the broader human rights framework, a future legally binding instrument can further strengthen protection for older persons. It can reinforce rights relating to economic security, participation, equality, care, and protection. In this way, legally binding human rights standards and ILO standards can complement and reinforce one another, contributing to the creation of societies for all generations. Most importantly, such an instrument can help ensure that older persons are recognized not as passive recipients of assistance, but as full holders of human rights.



## Useful Resources

- Learn more about NGO Committee on Ageing | Link
- Learn more about the International Federation on Ageing | Link
- ILO Convention No. 102 on Social Security (Minimum Standards) | Link
- ILO Convention No. 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) | Link
- ILO Convention No. 122 on Employment Policy | Link
- ILO Convention No. 158 on Termination of Employment | Link
- ILO Recommendation No. 162 Concerning Older Workers | Link
- ILO Recommendation No. 202 on Social Protection Floors | Link

# Focus: Closing the Five-Year Gap in Soth Korea' s Statutory Retirement Age Reform



**Ms. Youngjae Na**

Human Rights Officer, International Human Rights Division
National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK)

***"Old age poverty is not a market outcome; it is evidence of a state failing its positive obligations to guarantee income security."***

1. Economic security is not simply a matter of financial resources but is fundamentally connected to the ability of older persons to maintain their dignity and autonomy throughout their lives. When States fail to ensure income security in old age, this is not merely the result of market forces or individual circumstances, but rather a failure to fulfil their human rights obligations.

2. The situation in South Korea demonstrates the seriousness of this issue. While the average relative poverty rate among OECD countries is approximately 14%, the rate among older persons in South Korea is around 43.2%. A key factor is the mismatch between the statutory retirement age and the pension eligibility age. Although the statutory retirement age in Korea is 60, many workers leave employment much earlier, at around 49.4 years of age, due to workplace pressures and age-related barriers. With pension eligibility beginning at around 65, this creates a five-to-fifteen-year gap without employment income or pension support, described as an "income crevice" where older persons lack adequate protection.

3. This situation creates a significant paradox: South Korea has one of the highest employment rates among people aged 65 and above, yet also one of the highest levels of old-age poverty. Many older persons continue working not by choice, but because they lack alternative sources of income, often relying on low-wage and precarious employment. This reflects gaps in social protection.

4. In 2024, NHRCK formally recommended that the Prime Minister expand the statutory retirement age from 60 to 65. The Commission stressed that retirement and pension eligibility should better reflect older workers' capacity to remain economically active and called for broader systemic reform. The recommendation identified three key areas for reform.

## Highlights on NHRCK

The NHRCK was established in 2001 as a national advocacy institution for human rights protection in the Republic of Korea. It is committed to the fulfillment of human rights in a broader sense, including dignity, value and freedom of every human being, as signified in international human rights conventions and treaties to which Korea is a signatory.



5. First, it addressed wage-peak reform. Korea's seniority-based wage system means that wages generally increase with years of service, which can discourage employers from retaining or hiring older workers and may contribute to their earlier exclusion from employment. The Commission supported a wage-peak system that gradually adjusts wages as employment is extended. However, such reform should be based on a fair balance between employers and workers and should not be used merely as a cost-cutting mechanism.

6. Second, the Commission called for improvements to employment structures and greater support for employers. Extending employment periods inevitably creates additional costs, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises. Therefore, Government support measures, including tax incentives and direct subsidies, should be considered to encourage employers to retain older workers.

7. Third, the Commission highlighted the importance of ensuring that extending employment opportunities for older persons does not create intergenerational tension, particularly given the challenges related to youth unemployment in South Korea. Therefore, policies supporting youth employment should also be developed to promote balanced opportunities across generations.

8. Following the Commission's recommendation and subsequent discussions with the Government, in March 2026, the Government formally accepted the recommendation and committed to phased legislative reforms. A bill has since been drafted in the National Assembly, with ongoing discussions involving labour unions, employers, and other stakeholders.

9. The retirement age reform is a transitional measure rather than a final objective. The goal is to create a system in which individuals can choose to continue working based on their actual capacity, preferences, and circumstances. Achieving this requires further reform of pension systems, wage structures, and legal frameworks. Ultimately, the true objective is to ensure economic security for older persons, enabling them to fully exercise their autonomy, maintain their dignity, and enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with others.



## Food for Thought

The foundation of economic security in old age is firmly established in international human rights law. Article 7 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) recognizes the right to fair remuneration throughout working life, while Article 9 guarantees the right to social security. Furthermore, General Comment No. 6 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights emphasizes the obligation of States to ensure income security in old age.

These are not merely aspirational principles set out in international instruments; they give rise to legally binding obligations on States. The recognition of these rights therefore requires States to take appropriate and effective measures to ensure their realization.

## Curious Fact

According to the OECD's Report, "Pensions at a Glance 2025: OECD and G20 Indicators", the employment gap between prime-age and older workers remains substantial.

On average across the OECD, 65.5% of people aged 55-64 and 25.7% of those aged 65-69 are in employment, compared to 82.5% of those aged 25-54.



## Useful Resources

- Learn more about National Human Rights Commission of Korea | Link
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) | Link
- General Comment No. 6 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights | Link
- OECD, Pensions at a Glance 2025: OECD and G20 Indicators | Link

# Focus: Building Age Inclusive Labour Markets for Older Persons



**Dr. Dorothea Schmidt-Klau**

Chief, Employment, Labour Markets and Youth Branch, Employment Policy Department, International Labour Organization (ILO)

***"Longer lives and growing numbers of healthy older persons are both an economic and a human benefit, and we should ensure that societies are able to realize this potential."***

1. Economic and employment security for older persons is central to ageing societies. As populations age, labour markets are inevitably transformed. Appropriate policies are needed to ensure that societies can benefit from changes in the composition of the labour force.

2. First, discrimination must be overcome. Ageism remains a major barrier, reflected in recruitment practices, limited access to training, and misconceptions about the productivity of older workers. Strong legal frameworks and effective enforcement are therefore essential, supported by capable institutions and age-inclusive workplaces and practices. Talent does not decline with age, but discrimination often prevents older persons from fully contributing their skills and experience.

3. Second, lifelong learning must become a reality. In ageing societies and rapidly changing labour markets, skills are essential because they determine productivity; age itself does not determine productivity. Yet older workers are too often excluded from training opportunities. We cannot extend working lives without also extending learning lives.

4. Third, we need the right jobs for people of different ages. Different life stages involve different capacities, expectations, expertise, and aspirations. Action is therefore needed at the macro, meso, and micro levels: economic policies should consider their age-related employment impacts; institutions, including public employment services, should adapt to ageing societies; and enterprises should adopt workplace practices that support workers of different ages. We must not only prepare people for jobs, but also prepare jobs for people of every age.

## Highlights on ILO

ILO is devoted to promoting social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights, pursuing its founding mission that social justice is essential to universal and lasting peace. It works to combat age discrimination and help countries adapt labour-market and social-protection policies to ageing populations.



5. Fourth, social protection and employment are two sides of the same coin. Many older persons lack adequate pensions and income security, while others lack access to decent work. Integrated systems are needed to combine decent employment with social protection throughout the life course. Jobs without protection create insecurity and poverty, while protection without employment opportunities is insufficient and difficult to sustain. Workers need both decent jobs and adequate protection during periods when they are not working.

6. Fifth, we must recognize the reality of life course. Poverty in old age often begins much earlier, resulting from accumulated disadvantages such as poor school-to-work transitions, informality, and unstable employment. If these disadvantages persist, they become increasingly difficult to address later in life, potentially leading to continued poverty, informal employment, or a need to continue working due to inadequate social protection. Old-age security policies must therefore start early, making youth policies an important part of old-age policies. A successful transition from school to work can significantly reduce insecurity later in life, while a failed transition can have consequences throughout the life course.

7. Sixth, age-inclusive labour markets benefit everyone. Different generations bring different forms of experience, knowledge, networks, skills, and capacities for mentoring. Older and younger workers contribute in different but complementary ways. Particularly in tight labour markets, societies cannot afford to exclude available talent. Age diversity is therefore an asset to individuals, enterprises, and economies and can provide a comparative economic advantage.

8. Seventh, intergenerational solidarity is essential. A life-course approach connects generations. Investing in young people today helps reduce poverty in old age tomorrow, while including older workers strengthens economies and societies today. Ageing policies should therefore promote fairness and mutual support across generations rather than create divisions. This is particularly important given the high and growing risk of poverty among older persons, especially older women.

9. In conclusion, economic and employment security for older persons depends fundamentally on the functioning of labour markets. Without employment, decent work, and adequate labour market opportunities, economic security in later life cannot be ensured. This requires age-responsive policies at the macro, meso, and micro levels and a policy-making approach that consistently considers the implications for older workers.



## Remember

Social dialogue is essential to shaping effective ageing and employment policies. Younger and older persons should have a meaningful voice in these discussions. Social dialogue should reflect the experiences of the people most affected by demographic and labour-market changes, so that policies are informed by the realities they are intended to address.

## Did You Know?

According to ILO, people aged 55 and above represented 10.9 per cent of the global labour force in 1995, compared with 16.3 per cent in 2020. This shift is happening faster than the growth of their working-age population, possibly reflecting the inadequacy of pension amounts or the prevalence of informality.



## Useful Resources

- ILO, The Plight of Older Workers in Labour Underutilization (2024) | Link
- ILO, Volunteer Work among Older Persons: Trends and Policy Implications for Ageing Societies (2025) | Link
- ILO ITC, Online Course "Employment in ageing societies: Turning the challenge of ageing into societal opportunities" | Link

# Focus: Bridging Technology Gaps to Support Senior Workforce Participation



**Dr. Loly Gaitan**
Programme Officer, International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

***"Older persons must be recognized as active contributors to the digital and AI-enabled economy. They bring experience, knowledge, skills and social capital that are valuable to inclusive and sustainable economic development."***

1. We are living through two major global transformations: population ageing and digital transformation. This raises an important question: will digital transformation reinforce existing inequalities, or will it create greater opportunities for inclusion and economic participation for all?

2. Digital inclusion is no longer solely a social issue but also an economic imperative. Access to digital technologies increasingly determines whether individuals can access employment and income opportunities, participate in digital markets, manage financial resources and access social protection, and engage in lifelong learning. Therefore, inclusion must be actively promoted and supported by policy, technology, and capacity building to empower older persons.

3. There are three areas of particularly importance for ensuring that older persons participate meaningfully in the digital economy: accessibility, affordability and connectivity, and skills and confidence.

4. First, digital technologies and services must be accessible. Technologies should be designed from the outset to be usable by older persons, including those experiencing age-related changes in vision, hearing, mobility or cognitive functioning. This includes simple and intuitive interfaces, voice-based services, assistive technologies and other forms of inclusive design. Accessibility should not be treated as an additional feature introduced after technology has been developed; it should be incorporated into the design process from the very beginning, including in the development of AI systems.

## Highlights on ITU

ITU is fully committed to contributing to the success of the UN Decade on Healthy Ageing, by raising awareness, developing guidelines on policies and strategy advice, sharing good practices, and strengthening capacity to ITU members on how to use the ICTs to develop innovative solutions that have economic and social benefits and thus, help them to turn this challenge into a great opportunity.

Over 75 ITU-D tools and resources are available to support ITU members and stakeholders' efforts in implementation process to achieve digital inclusion.



5. Second, technologies must be affordable, and connectivity must be universal, reliable and affordable. Economic participation is not possible without meaningful access to technology. ITU continues to advocate for universal connectivity, including in rural, remote and underserved areas. Affordability is equally important, as the availability of a digital service does not guarantee access for individuals who cannot afford the necessary devices, connectivity or related services.

6. Third, older persons need relevant digital skills and confidence. Digital literacy must evolve alongside technological change and increasingly include emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence. Older persons need practical skills that enable them to navigate digital environments safely, manage finances online, identify potential risks and scams, and take advantage of economic opportunities.

7. Training programmes should therefore be adapted to the real-life circumstances and needs of older persons. They should be delivered in accessible and trusted environments, including community centres and libraries, and should make greater use of intergenerational support. Intergenerational learning can be particularly valuable in helping older persons build both the skills and confidence required to participate in increasingly digital societies.

8. The central message is clear: if older persons are excluded from digital transformation, they risk being excluded from economic participation itself. Inclusive policies, accessible technologies, universal and affordable connectivity, and targeted capacity-building can help ensure that older persons are able to remain active, independent and economically secure in an increasingly digital world.



## Remember

Older persons are not a homogeneous group. Older women may experience multiple and compounding disadvantages associated with age, gender, income, education and access to technology.

Older women are often less likely to have access to digital technologies and the skills required to use them effectively, while also being more exposed to lifelong economic inequalities, including lower pensions and greater participation in informal employment.

## The Opportunities and Barriers to Digital and Economic Participation

Artificial intelligence presents significant opportunities for older persons. With appropriate access, skills and support, older persons can continue to contribute actively to the economy through flexible and remote work, digital entrepreneurship and micro-businesses, participation in online platforms, mentoring, and knowledge-sharing. AI tools can help translate a lifetime of experience, knowledge and expertise into new forms of economic participation, enabling older persons to engage with digital economies.

According to recent research by EY, 32% of older women have never used AI, compared with 20% of older men. The digital divide is not simply a technological gap, but is increasingly becoming an economic participation gap. As services, labour markets and financial systems become more digital and AI-driven, limited digital access and skills can translate directly into reduced opportunities for employment, income generation, financial independence and social participation.

## Priorities for Action

1. Integrate digital inclusion into employment and economic policies, ensuring that older persons are included in national digital strategies.

2. Promote lifelong learning and digital skills, with practical and accessible training that keeps pace with technological change.

3. Address intersectional inequalities and promote inclusive design, with particular attention to older women and ensuring that technologies, including AI, are accessible to all.

4. Strengthen digital trust, safety and protection, particularly against cybersecurity threats, online fraud and other risks in digital and financial environments



## Useful Resources

- ITU Report, Artificial Intelligence and Ageing: Inclusive Pathways for Older Persons in a Digital World (2026) | Link
- Learn more about ITU's resources on ICT/digital accessibility | Link
- EY, How Older Generations are Engaging with AI and Why It Matters (2026) | Link

# Focus: Inclusive Employment for Older Persons in the Digital Age



**Mr. Daniel Uribe**
Lead Programme Officer, South Centre

***"Older persons need functional digital literacy, including intermediate and advanced skills, confidence in using digital tools, and the ability to understand and question automated systems. "***

1. The global workforce is undergoing a structural transformation driven by demographic change and longer life expectancy. People are now expected to reskill and update their knowledge throughout their working lives, while many older persons may wish or need to remain economically active for longer. This reality creates a need for inclusive retention policies, which can sustain household income, expand taxable revenue, stabilize labour supply and retain valuable experience.

2. At the same time, digital transformation is fundamentally changing how people work and presents both opportunities and risks for older workers. Technology can enable remote work, greater flexibility and new forms of adapted employment, potentially allowing older persons to participate in the labour market beyond traditional employment structures. Meanwhile, it can also create exclusion through digital divides, inaccessible systems and algorithmic bias.

3. These emerging challenges do not mean the protection of older workers in the digital economy begins from zero. Existing international human rights and labour standards already provide important foundations. ICESCR protects rights relevant to decent work, social security and an adequate standard of living. ILO Convention No. 111 addresses discrimination in employment and occupation, while ILO Recommendation No. 162 promotes equality of opportunity, continuous vocational training and voluntary, gradual retirement transitions for older workers. These standards provide a basis for protecting older persons' right to decide whether to continue working or to retire.

### Highlights on the South Centre

The South Centre is the intergovernmental think tank of the Global South. It helps developing countries to combine their efforts and expertise to promote their common interests in the international arena. The South Centre undertakes research and analysis oriented towards various areas of international policy that are relevant to the protection and promotion of the development interests of developing countries. It also helps the countries of the South to develop common points of view and to work together on major international development-related policy issues.



4. As one example, the platform economy illustrates this paradox clearly. Workers can potentially choose when to work, access new employment opportunities and bypass some of the rigidities associated with traditional employment structures. However, significant deficits in decent work also coexist, including insecure employment status, inadequate social protection, limited safety protections and exclusion from employment-related benefits. In extreme cases, a worker may effectively be removed from a platform by an automated system rather than through a meaningful human decision.

5. The risks become even greater when we consider how AI systems are trained and how they make decisions. Three barriers are particularly important: inadequate data representation, proxy discrimination and stereotype amplification. If AI systems are predominantly trained on data generated by younger users, they may be optimized around younger populations and fail to reflect the experiences of older persons. Algorithms may also discriminate indirectly through variables associated with age, such as an older graduation date, long employment history or familiarity with older software. Finally, generative AI can reproduce social stereotypes portraying older adults as less technologically capable or adaptable. Because algorithms learn from human-generated data, existing social biases can be reproduced and amplified through automated systems.

6. The UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence provides an important framework based on human oversight, fairness, non-discrimination, transparency and accountability. AI should not independently determine whether a person is recruited, rejected, promoted, penalized or dismissed. Meaningful human-in-the-loop mechanisms are essential, particularly where fundamental rights may be affected. Workers should also have the right to understand the logic behind decisions affecting their employment.

7. To promote inclusive employment for older persons in the digital age, countries should reconceptualize digital literacy for older workers by moving beyond basic access towards durable digital skills, functional digital competence, critical thinking, privacy awareness, AI literacy, and psychological confidence. At the same time, an inclusive digital employment environment requires coordinated action across the public and private sectors. Governments should integrate human rights, labour standards, and ethical AI principles into domestic law; employers should address age discrimination in AI-driven recruitment and workforce management; and technology developers should embed accessibility, age diversity, and meaningful human oversight into digital systems.



## Did You Know?

The "human-in-the-loop" principle means that an automated system should not necessarily have the final word where a decision can significantly affect a person's rights or livelihood. Human review can provide an opportunity to identify errors, discrimination or circumstances that an automated system cannot adequately understand. In employment, this could mean requiring human review before an AI-based recruitment system rejects a candidate or before an automated performance system removes a worker from a platform.

## Food for Thought

ILO Convention No. 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy can help address structural challenges faced by workers in the platform economy, particularly older workers. It provides stronger protections by requiring the legal classification of workers based on the actual nature of their work and performance, extending access to comprehensive social security frameworks, requiring disclosure of automated systems and meaningful human review, and establishing impartial complaint procedures.

For older workers in particular, these protections could create a clearer pathway towards formal employment status, retirement stability and long-term financial resilience, while reducing the risk of hidden algorithmic age discrimination and empowering workers to pursue direct legal claims when their rights are violated.

## Remember

The 2021 UNESCO Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence provides a human rights-centred framework for governing AI, shifting the focus from blind techno-solutionism towards ethical stewardship throughout the AI development lifecycle. There are 3 principles which establish an ethical boundary around AI development and use.

- Strict human oversight. AI does not replace human judgement in employment screening and workers have the right to appeal to a human decision-maker.

- Fairness and non-discrimination. Organizations to audit training data for diversity and prevent AI systems from reinforcing existing societal biases, including age-related bias.

- Transparency and explainability. Workers who are denied employment or otherwise affected by an algorithmic decision should have the right to understand the logic behind that decision.

## Useful Resources

- ILO Convention No. 193 on Decent Work in the Platform Economy (2026) | Link
- UNESCO, Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence (2023) | Link
- Learn more about the South Centre | Link



# Focus: Approaches to Equal Rights in Employment for Older Persons Globally



**Ms. Aleta Sprague**

Cofounder and Principal of Legal Analysis, Equal Futures

***"Inclusive employment for older persons requires a legal framework that protects people throughout their working lives. "***

1. Age discrimination remains a significant barrier to inclusive employment for older persons. An essential step is to establish clear legal protections. Globally, most countries have adopted some form of legislation prohibiting age discrimination in employment. However, around 34% of countries still lack age-specific legal protections. Compared with other commonly protected grounds, such as gender, disability, religion and race, age remains comparatively under-protected in many legal systems.

2. The scope of legal protection also matters. Countries and courts apply broader equality and non-discrimination principles in different ways, and general protections may not provide sufficient safeguards at every stage of employment. This is especially important because age discrimination can intersect with other forms of discrimination. For example, research has found that older women may experience greater discrimination than older men. Where legislation protects against gender discrimination but does not explicitly address age, older women may remain vulnerable to discriminatory treatment that results from the combined effects of age and gender.

3. Recruitment and hiring are among the most important areas of protection. Correspondence studies across different countries have documented discriminatory treatment of older applicants, while emerging technologies may further amplify these risks if automated recruitment systems reproduce age-related biases. Yet only around 48 % of countries have clear, age-specific legal provisions prohibiting discrimination in hiring. This is significant because hiring is one of the areas with the strongest legal protection: even here, more than half of countries do not explicitly prohibit age discrimination.

## Highlights on Equal Futures

Together with the WORLD Policy Analysis Centre, Equal Futures makes available quantitatively comparable data on more than 2500 laws and policies in 193 countries affecting human health, development, well-being, and equality. With partners, it advance accountability efforts, undertake rigorous analyses of policy effectiveness, facilitate comparative studies of policy progress, and inform policy debates.



4. Protection also remains incomplete once workers enter employment. Pay is a critical dimension of workplace equality, as discriminatory remuneration can accumulate over a person's working life and directly affect financial security in later life. At the same time, only around 39 per cent of countries have age-specific legal provisions prohibiting discrimination in access to training. This is particularly concerning in the context of rapid digital transformation. Older workers may be excluded from training because of stereotypes that they are less able or willing to learn new technologies, creating a self-reinforcing cycle in which lack of training further limits their employability and career opportunities.

5. Career progression presents a similar gap. Older workers may face discrimination in promotion or even involuntary demotion as a means of encouraging them to leave employment or move towards retirement. Yet only around 40 % of countries explicitly prohibit age discrimination in promotion and related career opportunities. This shows that legal protection often becomes weaker after a person has entered employment. Protecting workers during recruitment is not enough if they subsequently face unequal access to training, professional development and advancement. Inclusive employment therefore requires protection throughout the employment relationship, rather than at a single point in the employment cycle.

6. Termination is one of the most significant areas of concern. Around 54% of countries do not have explicit age-specific protections against discriminatory termination, while a further 20% have legislative provisions allowing exceptions where termination is connected to retirement. Although retirement systems may legitimately establish conditions for pension eligibility or retirement, such provisions can create risks when reaching a particular age become an automatic justification for ending employment. Legal frameworks therefore need to distinguish legitimate retirement policies from discriminatory assumptions about the capacity, productivity or value of older workers.

7. Age discrimination cannot be addressed effectively by focusing on a single stage of employment or relying solely on general equality provisions. Countries need clear and enforceable age-specific protections, combined with safeguards against intersecting forms of discrimination and new forms of bias emerging from technological change. Such an approach can help ensure that older workers are not only protected from discrimination but also able to participate, develop their skills and remain in decent and productive employment for as long as they choose.



## Important Data

Between 2016 and 2024, the share of countries with age-specific protections against employment discrimination increased by approximately 6%. This reflects growing recognition of age discrimination and a broader trend towards more specific national discrimination laws. Effective protection requires not only a formal prohibition of discrimination but also comprehensive coverage across the employment cycle, including recruitment, pay, training, promotion and termination. It should also address intersectional discrimination and emerging risks associated with digitaliation and automated decision-making.

## Useful Resources

- WORLD Policy Analysis Centre, Workplace Discrimination Laws (2023) | Link
- Learn more about Equal Futures | Link

## To Bear in Mind

Legal protection should not be assessed only by asking whether a country has a general prohibition of discrimination. We also need to ask where and when that protection applies. Recruitment, pay, training, promotion and termination are distinct stages of employment, and discrimination can occur at each of them. A country may therefore have a general legal prohibition against age discrimination while still leaving important gaps in specific areas of working life. Looking at these different stages provides a much clearer picture of whether older workers are genuinely protected.

Legal protection is also only one part of the picture. The widespread evidence of age discrimination shows that the existence of a law does not automatically eliminate discriminatory practices. Effective protection requires implementation, enforcement and accessible mechanisms through which workers can challenge discriminatory treatment. This is particularly important as new technologies increasingly influence recruitment and other employment decisions.





# Decade of healthy ageing

unitar
United Nations Institute for Training and Research

United Nations | Department of Economic and Social Affairs

UNFPA

IOM UN MIGRATION

ILO International Labour Organization

UN WOMEN

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

World Health Organization

UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER

ITU

With the support of:

WHO Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities

hpod Harvard Law School Project on Disability

Group of Friends of the Human Rights of Older Persons • UN Geneva •

INPEA

ILC GLOBAL ALLIANCE INTERNATIONAL LONGEVITY CENTRE Designing the Future of Ageing

NGO Committee on Ageing GENEVA

GIA Global Initiative on Ageing

cifal Global Network