



ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation



## The Implications of Demographic Shifts on Social and Economic Security through Labor Markets and Leisure Activities

 **19** September 2024

 9.30 a.m. – 11.10 a.m. (NY time)/  
3.30 p.m. – 5.10 p.m. (CET)

With the support of:

This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fenghzi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



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## SPEAKERS

## Focus: The current scenario and feasible solutions for older persons in the labor market



**Mme. Dorothea Schmidt-Klau**

Chief of the Employment, Labor Markets and Youth Branch of the Department of Employment Policy, Job Creation and Livelihoods, EMPLAB, at the UN International Labor Organization

*“We need comprehensive policies that intervene at macro, sectoral, enterprise, and individual levels.”*

- 1 We are witnessing a change of unprecedented magnitude. Societies are ageing, youth challenges remain unsolved, and there are limited and inaccurate perspectives on older persons.
- 2 Older persons have the lowest labor force participation rates and receive the least investment in reskilling compared to other age groups. For the youth, demographic pressure exists alongside unsolved employment problems. Population aging and increased longevity are often perceived as burdens on national economies, labor markets, health, and social care. Older persons are seen as expensive, unproductive, and incapable of adapting to new technologies.
- 3 With all these challenges and misperceptions, potential solutions may span from labor markets, using the potential of young people, older persons, migrants (in all cases especially women), overcoming ageism at the workplace and beyond, intergenerational solidarity, and respect for work outside of labor markets.
- 4 We need comprehensive policies that intervene at macro, sectoral, enterprise, and individual levels. Firstly, macro policies and investment policies shall be age-sensitive to ensure investment in sectors that profit from ageing and provide jobs for older persons. Secondly, we need to leverage technological progress to support aging societies and shrinking workforces. Thirdly, policies need to incentivize and motivate enterprises to adopt intergenerational approaches, fostering collaboration across age groups. Fourthly, a policy framework for lifelong learning is essential to ensure that older workers can continuously upskill and reskill. Finally, policies shall adopt a life course perspective to transitions.
- 5 Policies are essential in addressing the challenges of aging societies and youth employment. The success of countries like Singapore and Sweden in increasing labor force participation among older persons demonstrates the importance of policy interventions. We need to respect the contributions of older persons, promote intergenerational solidarity, and design policies that support all age groups.

### HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR MARKETS AND YOUTH BRANCH, EMPLAB, AND LABOUR MARKETS SERVICES FOR TRANSITIONS

The work of the EMPLAB branch is guided by international normative and policy instruments (notably the Employment Policy Convention No. 122) relevant to the promotion of employment and decent jobs for all.

The branch responds to the demands and needs of ILO constituents, and other relevant development stakeholders. Its services consider the specific circumstances of countries in terms of the economic and labor market situation, and sectoral composition, along with the challenges faced by different population groups (youth, working age, older workers) and different types of workers (formal, informal), including the most vulnerable ones.

EMPLAB seeks to influence policy change through social dialogue and participatory practices. Its Geneva-based staff teams up with ILO employment specialists in the different regions to offer coordinated responses to contextual, contemporary challenges.

EMPLAB supports governments, and workers' and employers' organizations to develop and implement gender-responsive employment and labor market policies with a focus on youth, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.





## CURIOUS FACT

Longevity has doubled since 1900, with the fastest change ever recorded. A child born today in a developed country has a 50% chance of living past 100 years old. The old age population (65+) will grow by over 300% this century, compared to the working-age population (15-65) which will grow by less than 50%.

13% of the young labor force is unemployed and 20% of young people were NEET (not in employment, education or training) in 2023.

## REMEMBER

When pensions were introduced in Germany in 1889, life expectancy was just above 40 years. Today, the average life expectancy is above 80, meaning most people will receive pensions for a very long time.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- ILOSTAT Statistics on the population and labor force | [Link](#)



# Focus: Social security, retirement, and the future of ageing populations



**Mr. Alejandro Bonilla**

Chair, NGO Committee on Ageing  
President of the Association of Former International Public Officials for Development (Greycells)

*“Ask the pensioners and older persons what they want, what they need, and what they want to do. It's not something that we can decide without them.”*

- 1 At the family level, no one tells us that we will grow old. Schools don't prepare us for old age. Even in professional careers, there is little focus on aging, except for demographers and actuaries. This lack of preparation explains the scarcity of policies addressing older persons. For actuaries, it's crucial to avoid the perception that death only comes at the end of life. Mortality tables show that death can occur at any age, which is relevant not only for old-age pensions but also for widows' and orphans' pensions. This highlights the importance of comprehensive social security systems.
- 2 The social and economic insecurity drives demographic shifts. We have very little choice in life. We don't choose where we are born or the economic conditions we face—whether hyperinflation, war, recession, or political instability. These factors shape our starting points, which are far from equal.
- 3 Every economy wants to grow, and growth requires consumption. Lowering interest rates is one way to encourage consumption. However, cultural choices also play a role. In today's culture, immediate gratification through sports, music, and technology often takes precedence over saving for the future. Economic insecurity is leading many to delay having children, further skewing the ratio between young and old.
- 4 After World War II, many countries adopted the ILO Social Security Convention as a basic social contract and a driver of development. However, recent years have seen a shift from social insurance to individual savings for retirement. This change favors those with stable jobs, high education, and steady economies, but disadvantages informal workers, women (who face lower salaries and longer life expectancies), and those with low contribution density. This shift has also driven the privatization of pension systems.
- 5 In 2001, the ILO reached a crucial agreement on the new consensus on retirement and income security for older persons. This consensus emphasized ILO standards and the need to complement public and private systems, as well as insurance and savings. Successful countries use multi-pillar pension systems based on public financing, employment, and individual contributions. These countries distribute risk and integrate public policies, education, and civil society participation.
- 6 Public policies, education, and awareness are crucial, but there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each country must tailor its approach to its specific situation. While public policies are important, we cannot rely solely on them for our future. We must take an active role in shaping our own futures.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

The NGO Committee on Ageing is affiliated with the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations (CONGO) and works to raise world awareness of the opportunities and challenges of global ageing. Throughout the year, the Committee works to promote the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which contains many suggestions for actions which benefit older persons.





## IMPORTANT

It's essential to involve older persons in discussions about their needs and desires. As with other marginalized groups, the principle of "nothing about us without us" should apply. The ILO's discussions on social security could benefit from more direct involvement of older individuals.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- The ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) | [Link](#)
- The ILO Report on "Social Security: Issues, Challenges and Prospects", 2001 | [Link](#)



# Focus: Sustainable working lives and civil political participation in all ages



**Ms. Sarah Loriato**

Policy Officer on Employment and European Parliament Liaison,  
AGE Platform Europe

*“Aging policies must consistently refer to older persons as right holders. Leaving the labor market shall not mean leaving society.”*

- 1 The right to work is at the core especially when it comes to employment, ageing and other types of policies. Today’s policies are limited by an archetypical conception of lifecycle, which compromises current and future employment policies without reflecting what ageing on the labor market and in society means and implies.
- 2 AGE adopts a human rights-based approach in the advocacy work. It advocates for a new vision that includes a multistage life course approach. The first stage of life includes leisure activities, learning, and a progressive entry into the labor market. A middle stage is divided between work, education, care for children or older relatives, sabbaticals, and learning activities. As in the older age stage, work, leisure activities, and education might continue even after reaching retirement age. This vision is necessary to reveal and include the potential of older workers in employment policies and ageing strategies.
- 3 AGE gathered good practices from EU member states and drafted recommendations to support sustainable and quality working lives, which mainly focused on three aspects.
- 4 Firstly, we could provide support for older workers, which includes career management, managing an ageing workforce, lifelong learning and adult education, as well as minimum income and adequate pensions. Secondly, we need to fight against age discrimination in all its forms, including during recruitment and work, access to work and training, and intersectionality. Thirdly, workplaces shall be adapted for all ages by prioritizing health and security, mental health at work, flexibility of time, and digitalization.
- 5 However, access to leisure activities can be limited by financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and ageism. Decision-makers shall include accessibility and affordability of activities, places, and means for civic and political participation, as well as access to information and freedom of expression.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON AGE PLATFORM EUROPE

The AGE Platform Europe (AGE) is the largest European network of non-profit organizations of and for older persons. AGE has around 100 members and has existed since 2001. A human rights-based approach is adopted in the advocacy work. AGE advocates for a new vision that includes a multistage life course approach. It seeks to combat ageism, promote human rights throughout the life course, reduce inequalities and enable everyone to live a full and dignified life. It also raises the aspirations and needs of older persons bridging the gap between them and policymakers. The members’ experiences and ideas are also turned into policy proposals, advocacy, campaigning, dissemination actions and projects.





## GOOD PRACTICES FROM EU MEMBER STATES

In Belgium, a collective agreement concluded between social partners provides for the adoption of a plan to maintain or increase the number of employees aged 45 and over in private companies. Measures of the plan could relate to recruitment processes, skills and qualifications, care development or working conditions.

In Sweden, the employment rate of women aged 55-59 is 81.9%, compared to 87.3% for men of the same age. Both men and women are entitled to 18 months of parental leave, which must be shared over at least 6 months. In addition, as soon as the child is one year old, the municipalities must offer a childcare solution to the parents.

## TO BEAR IN MIND

It's essential to include older persons in decision-making and monitoring processes to ensure that policies are adequate and applicable in real life.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- AGE Platform Europe | [Link](#)
- AGE Barometer 2023 | [Link](#)
- Healthy Workplaces Campaigns launched by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work | [Link](#)





# Focus: Access to employment for refugees and older persons



**Mr. Ricardo Pla Cordero**

Protection Officer - Ageing and Disability Inclusion,  
Division of international Protection / Community Based  
Protection Unit  
UNHCR

*“Improving access to employment and social protection for older persons and refugees requires coordinated efforts across policy, administrative, and community levels.”*

- 1 A significant increase in formal employment access for refugees globally was observed. Several restrictions hinder refugees' access to employment, including administrative or practical barriers, no recognition of skills or certificates, lack of awareness among refugees' rights and opportunities for formal employment.
- 2 When applying this analysis to older persons in situations of forced displacement and statelessness, we find significant issues. Firstly, many older refugees lack necessary documentation, either because they left it behind or never possessed it. Secondly, many older refugees cannot access their pensions from another country due to non-transferability, lack of international agreements, or loss of documentation. Thirdly, there are difficulties for older persons to access information and digitalized services.
- 3 To address these challenges, promising practices and enabling actions can be implemented to improve the situation for older persons and refugees in the labor market.
- 4 Better monitoring of employment access and social protection schemes for older persons leads to more effective policymaking. States should include employment rates for refugees in their data, disaggregated by sex, age, and disability.
- 5 There is a need to remove policy and administrative barriers that hinder access to employment. Removing these barriers is crucial to ensure their protection in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- 3 At the operational level, it is essential to ensure accessibility to information and premises. This includes providing information in multiple languages and offering alternative ways to access it, such as through human interaction.
- 4 Alternative measures to facilitate access to information and capacity building for older persons to access national services are crucial. These measures should focus on providing tailored support and ensuring that older persons can effectively engage with available resources and services.
- 5 By removing barriers, leveraging promising practices, and ensuring inclusive participation, we can create more equitable opportunities for these vulnerable groups.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. During displacement, older persons can be particularly at risk of abuse and neglect. UNHCR works to support and protect older persons on the move, enabling access to basic services as they recover and rebuild after a crisis.





## CURIOUS FACT

According to the Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Report prepared by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2023, despite having legal rights to employment, only 67% of refugees have formal access, and only 45% access it in practice.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Refugee women and older adolescents face additional challenges, primarily due to caregiving responsibilities. Nearly 70% of these individuals are burdened with household chores, childcare, and care for older persons or those with disabilities. This "care dilemma" highlights the need for state and civil society interventions to support these groups while ensuring dignified care for older persons and persons with disabilities.

## PROMISING PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

Several promising practices are emerging globally. For example, cash-for-work programs in Afghanistan eased the economic strain on vulnerable households and benefited the wider community. In India and Venezuela, we see cross-generational support and the transfer of traditional skills and land management techniques, which benefit younger populations. Additionally, efforts to make national protection systems accessible to refugees, as seen in Costa Rica and other countries, are gaining traction.

## PROMISING PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

States have a responsibility to protect refugees and older persons within their jurisdiction and should engage them formally as part of the workforce, as learners, and as individuals with full rights.

There are multi-country opportunities for states and stakeholders to collaborate. The Global Compact on Refugees provides a platform for multi-stakeholder pledges on economic inclusion and social protection. States, academia, and NGOs are encouraged to join and contribute to better economic integration and social protection for refugees. More partners, especially those with a focus on aging, are needed to strengthen these efforts.

## IMPORTANT

Participation in humanitarian and development assistance programs is crucial. Along with humanitarian assistance, it is important to adopt a development approach in countries hosting refugees. Collaboration with organizations like the ILO is essential in this regard. For example, UNHCR has adjusted eligibility requirements for cash-for-work programs in Rwanda to include older refugees, ensuring equal access to employment opportunities.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- UNHCR Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Report (December 2023) | [Link](#)
- UNHCR Report "A Claim to Dignity: Ageing on the Move" | [Link](#)
- Global Compact on Refugees | [Link](#)
- The 1951 Refugee Convention | [Link](#)



# Focus: Leveraging intersectionality and support for older persons



**Dr. Michael Ashley Stein**

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability,  
Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School

*“Older persons deserve a life of dignity that includes leisure, recognition for their contributions, and respect for their experience and wisdom.”*

- 1 In a world increasingly influenced by neoclassical economics, we urgently need solidarity and allyship. Instead of fighting over limited resources, we should focus on expanding opportunities and increasing the overall availability of resources.
- 2 We must explore how to leverage these changing realities to improve social welfare, mental health, and social inclusion for older persons. Loneliness and social isolation are profound issues among older adults, with significant impacts on both mental and physical health. We should consider alliances between older persons and youth and explore how technologies like AI can enhance social connectedness.
- 3 In the labor market, we should reconsider efficiencies beyond just entry costs, salaries, and benefits. Older workers may have higher initial costs, but they also bring reduced training and onboarding needs, as well as valuable experience and institutional knowledge.
- 4 We must also recognize the intersectionality of aging and disability. As people age, they are more likely to experience disabilities, making this a cross-cutting issue. Similarly, gender intersects with aging, as women often face social stigma and are pushed into caregiving roles rather than earning positions. This limits their economic opportunities and educational attainment, creating further challenges when they enter the labor market.
- 5 Additionally, we shall look into the issue of pensions and emphasize social inclusion and leisure activities for older persons.
- 6 By addressing the intersectionality of aging, disability, and gender, and by leveraging technology and community support, we can create a more equitable and dignified future for older persons.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY

THPOD has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to empowering civil society and other actors by fostering knowledgeable and discerning advocacy for Human Rights. Their endeavors encompass a range of activities, including the provision of comprehensive human rights training and education, the facilitation of international law and policy development, the promotion of inclusive practices in development, the dissemination of technical assistance pertaining to strategic litigation, and the cultivation of innovative perspectives regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to human rights.





**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Women live longer than men, which means pensions incur greater costs for them. However, from a non-discrimination standpoint, we must ensure that women’s pensions are not discounted. This raises important questions about how to balance economic realities with equity and fairness.

**IMPORTANT**

In middle-income and high-income countries, there is a lack of community-based support for aging populations. Institutional care, such as nursing homes, is often the default solution, despite its many shortcomings. We must advocate for deinstitutionalization and the prevention of violence and abuse, as highlighted in human rights discussions.





# Decade of healthy ageing



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