

Accountability and Redress in Cases of Intersectional Discrimination Against Older Persons



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ROUNDTABLE SERIES

MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

*Bridging paths towards strengthening
protection and participation*

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**GLOBAL ALLIANCE
INTERNATIONAL LONGEVITY CENTRE**
Designing the Future of Ageing

NGO Committee on Ageing
GENEVA



This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Development at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Zhuoqing Cao and Ms. Sara Louedi, SDP Team.

We hope you enjoy it!



MODERATOR

Mr. Alex Mejía

Director, Division for People and Social Development
UNITAR



COORDINATOR

Ms. Analucía Jácome

Senior Coordinator of the Series
UNITAR

SPEAKERS

Focus: The Role of ICTs in Promoting Access to Justice for Older Persons



Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu

Head, Digital Inclusion Service,
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

“Together, we must strive to ensure a just, inclusive, and accessible world for older persons, where their rights are upheld, their voices are heard, and their dignity is respected.”

- 1 Older persons often face overlapping discrimination based on age, gender, disability, and socio-economic status, compounded by gaps in legal frameworks, limited awareness, and restricted access to information and communication. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) can play a transformative role in promoting inclusion, legal access, and advocacy, by bridging gaps through affordable internet, appropriate digital devices, and accessible services, applications, and content.
- 2 ICTs can enhance access to justice, transparency, and accountability where traditional mechanisms fall short, while also providing new avenues for seeking redress. Digital technologies are not merely tools for inclusion but also means of empowerment, capable of improving quality of life and directly addressing the needs of older persons.
- 3 Firstly, bridging the digital divide begins with ensuring physical and equitable access to digital information and technologies. Older persons often face barriers due to affordability, lack of accessible devices, or insufficient digital literacy. Ensuring affordable internet and devices, alongside training programmes that enhance digital skills and awareness of digital rights, enables safe and equitable participation in the digital environment. Intergenerational support and targeted literacy initiatives further strengthen inclusion.
- 4 Secondly, accessible legal frameworks and e-justice platforms are vital for protecting and advancing the rights of older persons. Geographic and financial barriers often hinder their access to legal services. ICTs can bridge this gap through digital legal platforms, allowing older persons to file complaints, seek advice, and access legal resources online. It is important that governments develop and provide e-legal services, investing in user-friendly systems with features tailored to older persons. These efforts should be complemented by public awareness campaigns to ensure that older persons know how and where to access such services.
- 5 Thirdly, accountability and transparency are essential for enabling older persons to hold institutions responsible. ICTs can enhance transparency through digital reporting platforms that allow safe reporting of abuse or discrimination, track responses, and gather data to identify systemic issues. Combined with data analytics and monitoring, these tools enable governments and NGOs to assess the incidence of intersectional discrimination and evaluate the effectiveness of policies and redress mechanisms.

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 of all people at national, regional and global levels.



- 6 Lastly, empowering older persons requires strengthening advocacy to reinforce legal frameworks and raise awareness of their rights, including those connected to ICTs. As human rights increasingly have a digital component, lack of access to technology can hinder their exercise. Addressing older persons' rights today means considering the digital space where essential activities, such as healthcare appointments, financial transactions, and civic participation are conducted. Social media campaigns and digital tools are therefore crucial for raising awareness of intersectional discrimination and promoting policy change.
- 7 As we look ahead, it is vital that our collaboration prioritises ICT-based solutions that empower older persons and uses technology as a catalyst for more inclusive and equitable legal and social systems.



DID YOU KNOW?

ICTs are not just tools for legal redress but also for amplifying the voices of older persons globally. Through digital advocacy, we can create wide-reaching campaigns that foster greater public engagement and inspire meaningful policy change.

Promoting such advocacy requires empowering marginalised groups to use digital tools effectively. Recognising the transformative potential of ICTs in tackling intersectional discrimination against older persons allows societies to take concrete steps towards inclusiveness. Strengthening digital literacy, creating accessible legal and e-governance platforms, and leveraging technology for transparency, participation, and advocacy are key pathways to ensuring that older persons are no longer excluded by multiple forms of discrimination.

IMPORTANT FIGURE

By 2050, the proportion of the world's population aged 60 and over is expected to reach 22%.

REMEMBER

To ensure affordable internet and devices, top-down and bottom-up support are needed. Governments are encouraged to adopt strategies that address the financial challenges faced by older persons, such as including them as beneficiaries of Universal Service Funds, or designing national affordability schemes and subsidy mechanisms to guarantee equitable access to technology.

The ITU has a long-standing history of promoting digital inclusion and building digital literacy among older persons. Through initiatives such as e-government and e-health services, digital legal aid platforms, and intergenerational learning programmes, ITU helps bridge the gap between generations and ensures that technology serves everyone everywhere.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about ITU Development Digital Inclusion | [Link](#)
- Learn more about ITU Resources & Activities on Ageing in a Digital World | [Link](#)



Focus: Assistive Technology as an Essential Enabler for Older Persons



Ms. Kylie Shae OAM

Team Lead, Access to Medical Devices and Assistive Technology,
World Health Organization (WHO)

“Timely access to appropriate and affordable assistive technologies, products and services is fundamental for older persons to live independently, fully participate in society, and retain their autonomy.”

- 1 Access to assistive technology is essential for older persons, not only because it supports their independence, participation, and dignity, but also because it is a fundamental human right and a core component of universal health coverage. However, significant barriers persist, such as limited service provision specifically targeting older persons, insufficient training among health and social care providers to identify and respond to their needs, lack of integration into national policy frameworks, funding gaps, and issues of acceptability from the perspective of older persons themselves.
- 2 Often, older persons are not meaningfully involved in the design or decision-making processes for assistive products, resulting in solutions that fail to meet their needs effectively. To address these challenges, the Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE) has developed the WHO-GATE 5P Framework, which outlines a comprehensive strategy for improving access to assistive technology for everyone. The framework emphasises the need for coordinated action across five pillars: People, Policy, Products, Provision, Personnel.
- 3 Placing “People” at the centre ensures that older persons and their families are actively engaged in every stage of research, design, development, service delivery, policy-making, and monitoring. This approach increases the acceptability and effectiveness of products and services, counters stigma and ageist stereotypes, and addresses the specific challenges faced by older women, rural populations, and those in humanitarian crises.
- 4 “Policy” serves as the foundation for sustainable access. Legal frameworks must recognise the right to assistive technology, establish sustainable financing mechanisms, and integrate ICT and assistive solutions into health and social care systems. International frameworks and national action plans, accompanied by adequate budgeting, are necessary to ensure equitable access for all.
- 5 The “Products” pillar focuses on designing assistive technologies that respond to the preferences and lived experiences of older persons. Strong supply chains and integration into primary and community healthcare are crucial to making products both affordable and accessible, particularly in rural or remote communities.
- 6 When considering “Provision”, an age-friendly, person-centered, and coordinated care model shall be incorporated, including timely identification of need and access to assistive technology.
- 7 Strengthening “Personnel” involves building the skills and capacities of health and social care providers, including frontline workers and assistive technology specialists. Training should be adapted to the realities of diverse and rural communities, with ongoing evaluation to ensure that equipment meets changing needs.

HIGHLIGHTS ON WHO

WHO collaborates with Member States, UN agencies, and stakeholders across sectors to promote healthy ageing globally. Healthy ageing is defined as developing and maintaining the functional ability that enables well-being in older age. Guided by the Global Strategy and Action Plan on Ageing and Health (2016–2020) and the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030), WHO focuses on four areas: (1) changing attitudes and behaviours towards age and ageing; (2) ensuring communities foster the abilities of older people; (3) delivering person-centred integrated care and primary health services responsive to older people; and (4) providing access to long-term care for older people who need it.



Photo Source: World Health Organization



- 8 In conclusion, equitable access to assistive technology is vital to upholding the rights, dignity, and wellbeing of older persons worldwide. By integrating service delivery, building a skilled workforce, establishing supportive policy environments, ensuring meaningful user involvement, and fostering person-centred innovation in products, societies can ensure that older persons are empowered to live independently, participate fully, and thrive in all aspects of life.



DID YOU KNOW?

Assistive technology is the application of organised knowledge and skills related to assistive products, including systems and services. Assistive products refer to a wide range of devices that are specially designed or readily available and that support individuals with any form of functional impairment of any age.

For older persons, such products include items commonly used in daily life, such as walking aids, wheelchairs, hearing aids, vision devices, and increasingly, digital and smart solutions that facilitate communication, mobility, and access to essential services.

IMPORTANT

Assistive technology serves a diverse population. Some older persons are experienced users whose needs evolve as they age, requiring modifications to existing equipment or entirely new devices. For example, a long-term wheelchair user may begin to require a hearing aid or other sensory devices. These devices often need to be interoperable, complementing one another to meet multiple, evolving functional requirements. Others may be first-time users, for whom the experience of adopting assistive technology can be unfamiliar or even confronting. Ensuring timely access to suitable, affordable products and services is therefore critical to supporting both groups.

The health dimension of assistive technology is particularly significant. For instance, WHO data indicates that 62% of people with hearing loss globally are over 50 years old, yet hearing loss often remains unaddressed. Maintaining hearing ability has clear links to cognitive health and reduced risk of dementia, highlighting that gaps in access to hearing aids have direct implications for older persons' independence, social participation, and overall wellbeing.

CURIOUS FACT

According to WHO's Global Report on Assistive Technology, more than 2.5 billion people currently require one or more assistive products, a number projected to rise to over 3.5 billion by 2050 as the world's population continues to age. Among them, at least 2 in 3 people aged 60 and over need at least one assistive product, with that need often increasing to multiple products as they age.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Global Cooperation on Assistive Technology (GATE) is a WHO initiative that brings together people who share the GATE vision: a world where assistive technology is universally accessible to everyone, everywhere.

The GATE Community comprises over 2,500 members from 135 countries, including assistive technology users, policymakers, service providers, donors, educators, advocates, manufacturers, and researchers. The diversity of membership is a strength, as it provides rich discussions and helps generate effective solutions to complex challenges.

WHO-GATE 5P Framework offers a comprehensive strategy for improving access to assistive technology for everyone, including older persons.



USEFUL SOURCES

- WHO and UNICEF, Global Report on Assistive Technology (2022) | [Link](#)
- Learn more about WHO GATE | [Link](#)
- Learn more about WHO's work on ageing | [Link](#)



Focus: Educational Gerontology as an Empowering Tool to Combat Ageism



Dr. Jie Li

Professor, Institute of Educational Law,
East China University of Political Science and Law (ECUPL)

"Investing in educational gerontology is not merely about addressing a social problem; it is about paving a broad avenue towards dignity and well-being for our shared future."

- 1 Intersectional discrimination against older persons forms an invisible web that stretches across families, public spaces, and institutions. What we witness today is no longer a series of individual acts, but a reflection of a wider systemic breakdown of the entire supporting system.
- 2 The law, as a hard constraint, plays a vital yet limited role. It is indispensable for punishing extreme acts and setting social baselines, but is also inherently reactive and defensive. Legal mechanisms cannot easily address everyday microaggressions, implicit bias, or silent indifference. To rely solely on punishment is to prune the branches while leaving the roots of discrimination embedded in the soil of society. While the law defines boundaries, it cannot by itself transform attitudes. The more profound and lasting solution lies in education.
- 3 Educational gerontology provides a proactive and fundamental tool for empowerment. By disseminating scientific knowledge on ageing and fostering intergenerational empathy, it challenges stereotypes and cultivates a culture of respect. This inside-out process aims to reshape societal consciousness, turning respect for older adults from a legal requirement into an ingrained moral instinct and shared cultural value.
- 4 The core value of educational gerontology lies in empowerment and prevention. It not only protects older adults but also empowers everyone who is ageing. This transformation moves governance from a passive "dare not discriminate", driven by legal deterrence, to an active "choose not to discriminate", rooted in cultural consciousness and empathy. This transformation provides fertile ground for law to take effect, shifting governance from institutional constraint to societal consensus.
- 5 To achieve this transformation, education shall operate across three dimensions: empowering older persons, professionals, and the general public. For older persons, it means fostering positive attitudes towards ageing and viewing later life as a stage of continued learning and contribution. For professionals such as caregivers and social workers, it entails moving beyond procedural competence toward empathy and humanistic care. For the public, it involves cultivating knowledge, attitudes, and skills that counter bias and fear. Together, these dimensions transform the cultural foundations of ageism and prepare society to embrace ageing with dignity and inclusion.
- 6 Through this systematic educational empowerment, we ultimately aspire to build a genuine age-friendly learning society. In this society, older persons are respected as sages and vibrant participants; every service interaction is infused with professionalism and warmth; and the younger generation no longer fears growing old, recognizing it as a new life stage with adequate support and inherent dignity.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE EAST CHINA UNIVERSITY OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND LAW

The East China University of Political Science and Law (ECUPL), founded in 1952 and located in Shanghai, is among the first higher educational institutions established by the People's Republic of China specializing in legal and political science education. ECUPL is committed to nurturing inter-disciplinary law professionals with in-demand skills and innovative minds by leveraging its advantages in legal studies and through cross-disciplinary integration.

The discipline of law of ECUPL has continuously ranked top 10 among about 700 such disciplines in China. Actively promoting international cooperation, ECUPL has established partnerships with over 214 universities and academic institutions across 48 countries and regions, as well as with 9 regional and international organisations. It has established the Sino-American Research Centre on an Ageing Population in partnership with John Marshall Law School.



華東政法大學
East China University of Political Science and Law



TO BEAR IN MIND

According to the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, older persons should have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection, and care. In practice, however, many older persons continue to experience abuse in community settings, whether physical, psychological, or financial.

From an international law perspective, protections against discrimination and violence are enshrined in human rights instruments. Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that all persons are equal before the law and are entitled, without any discrimination, to equal protection of the law.

Similarly, Article 13 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities obliges States Parties to ensure effective access to justice for persons with disabilities on an equal basis with others. This includes the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations to facilitate their effective participation, both directly and indirectly, in all legal proceedings, including as witnesses, at investigative and other preliminary stages.

REMEMBER

Educational gerontology explores the intersection between education and ageing, focusing on how the learning process evolves in later life. It seeks to design and refine educational approaches that support healthy ageing, enhance lifelong learning opportunities for older persons, and foster the development of inclusive, age-friendly communities.

Educational gerontology serves as a proactive and fundamental approach to empowerment. It focuses not on post-hoc remediation but on addressing the challenges at their roots. By promoting a scientific understanding of ageing, it dismantles stereotypes, and by fostering intergenerational empathy, it nurtures a culture of respect.

USEFUL SOURCES

- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Older Adult Learning and Active Ageing: Bridging Self-actualisation and Emancipation (2021) | [Link](#)
- Learn more about the East China University of Political Science and Law | [Link](#)



Focus: Reframing Ageing and Combating Ageism through Evidence and Narrative



Dr. Reuben Ng

Assistant Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy,
National University of Singapore (NUS)

“Ageism is the most experienced discrimination in the world – and yet, the least talked about.”

- 1 The demographic scale of ageing is unprecedented. By 2050, 2.1 billion people worldwide will be aged 60 and over. This demographic shift will profoundly affect social systems, governance, pensions, labour markets, and healthcare. Countries such as Singapore illustrate the rapidity of this change, projected to become super-aged in half the time it took Japan, compressing decades of demographic transition into just a few years.
- 2 Ageism is widespread yet under-recognised. Global survey data covering 140 countries reveal that 1 in 10 people report experiencing age discrimination, more than discrimination based on gender or skin colour. Despite its prevalence, ageism remains far less visible in public discourse: on social media, racism appears 60 times more frequently and sexism appears 24 times more than ageism. This discrepancy underscores the urgent need to bring age-related discrimination into the public spotlight.
- 3 Language significantly shapes societal perceptions of older persons. An analysis of English-language texts over the past 200 years demonstrates that terms such as “senior citizen” or “elderly” attract increasingly negative stereotypes, whereas framing older persons through family roles (e.g., “grandparent”) or professional roles (e.g., “doctor,” “teacher”) generates more positive perceptions. This highlights the potential of language and framing as tools to influence social attitudes and challenge ageist stereotypes.
- 4 Ageist perceptions are socially constructed and have evolved over time. Between 1810 and 1880, older persons were often portrayed as heroes and romantics. Over the past 50 years, however, ageing has been increasingly medicalised, with attention focused on conditions such as dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. This over-medicalisation has shifted narratives from recognising older adults’ contributions and resilience to emphasising vulnerability.
- 5 Positive storytelling can powerfully counter stereotypes. Depicting ageing solely through the lens of limitation narrows societal perceptions of older persons. By highlighting their resilience, professional achievements, and active participation in family and community life, alongside appropriate health coverage, we can foster a more balanced and human understanding of ageing, promoting strength, agency, and contribution.
- 6 Evidence and communication must work hand in hand to drive change. Data reveal where discrimination occurs, but progress depends on using that knowledge to shape inclusive policies, workplace practices, and public narratives. When research insights are translated into concrete action through media, education, and policy design, societies can move beyond awareness to genuine inclusion, ensuring that older adults are valued and visible across all areas of life.

HIGHLIGHTS ON NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE

Founded in 1905, the National University of Singapore (NUS) is globally recognised for its excellence in education, research, and innovation, nurturing generations of leaders across diverse sectors in Singapore and beyond. The Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy plays a distinctive role in shaping Asia’s policy and leadership landscape through impactful research and informed public discourse. In the field of ageing, NUS has established leading research institutes and centres dedicated to exploring the biological, social, and environmental determinants of healthy ageing. These centres develop interventions and technologies that help older persons remain active, independent, and engaged for as long as possible.



IMPORTANT FIGURES

The world's population aged 60 and above will reach 2.1 billion by 2050, reshaping economies and social systems at an unprecedented pace.

In a global survey covering 140 countries, 1 in 10 people reported experiencing age discrimination, a rate higher than for gender or racial bias.

Analysis of 200 years of written English reveals a marked increase in negative language about ageing, underscoring how cultural narratives can perpetuate stereotypes.

DID YOU KNOW?

The term "ageism" was coined in 1969 by Robert Butler, a Pulitzer Prize-winning gerontologist. He defined ageism as "a process of systematic stereotyping and discrimination against people because they are old", likening it to two other forms of bigotry: sexism and racism.

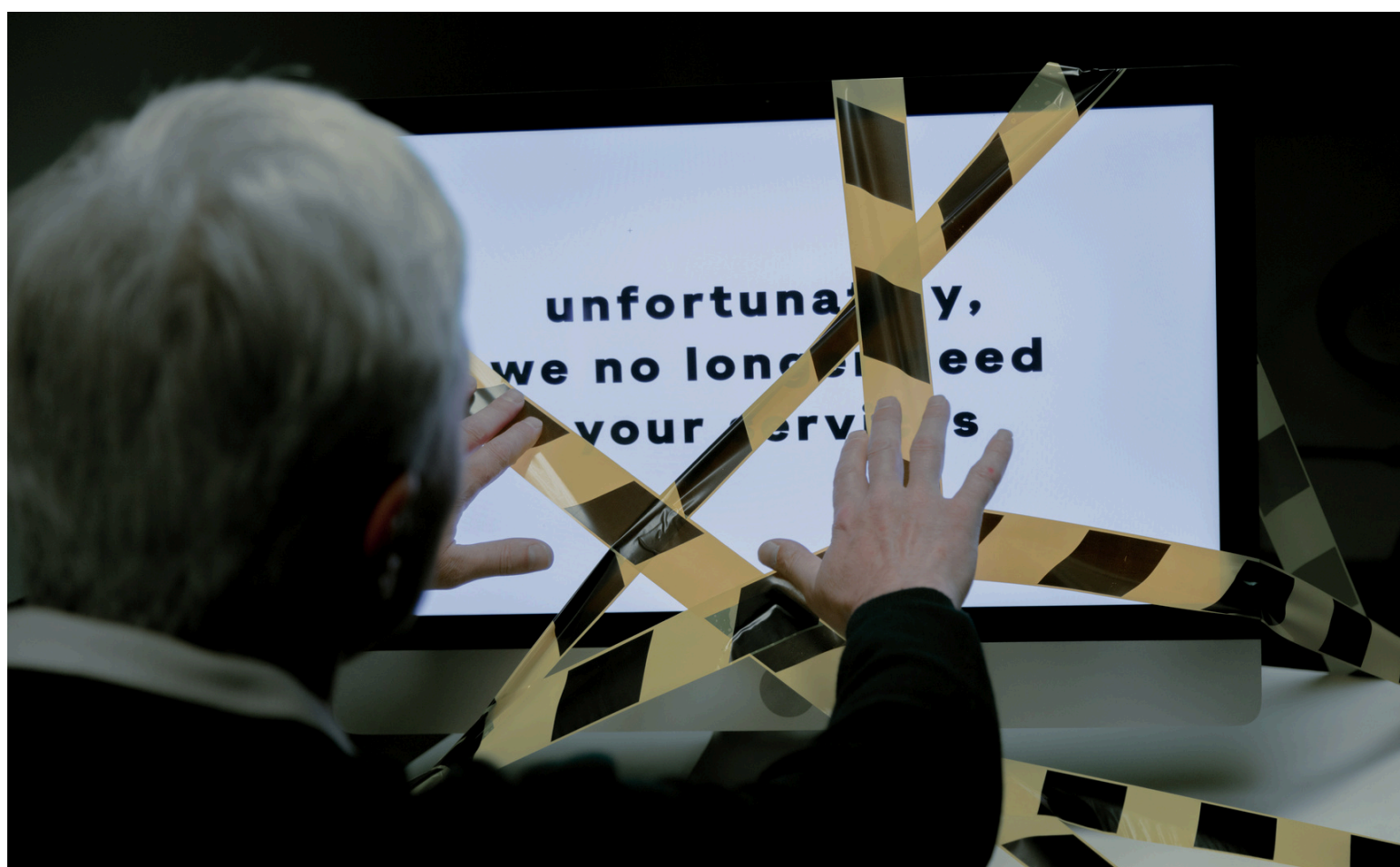
TO BEAR IN MIND

Ageism is the most experienced but least discussed form of discrimination globally. Real change comes from recognising older adults as capable, resilient, and active contributors to society, not just as vulnerable or dependent.

By combining robust evidence, positive storytelling, and role-focused framing, we can reshape perceptions and social attitudes, empower older adults, and create inclusive families, workplaces, and communities where they are fully seen and valued.

USEFUL SOURCES

- Reuben Ng, Jeremy W Lim-Soh, Ageism Linked to Culture, Not Demographics: Evidence From an 8-Billion-Word Corpus Across 20 Countries (2021) | [Link](#)
- Reuben Ng, Nicole Indran, Reframing Ageing during COVID 19: Familial Role-based Framing of Older Adults Linked to Decreased Ageism (2022) | [Link](#)
- Learn more about NUS | [Link](#)



Focus: Protecting Older Workers and Promoting Inclusion through Policy and Social Engagement



Dr. Jody Heymann

Founding Director, WORLD Policy Analysis Centre
Distinguished Professor of Public Health,
University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)

“Inclusion isn’t about goodwill. It’s about rights, enforcement, and the chance to contribute across the life course.”

- 1 Work matters across the life course. Employment is not just about income, but it affects health, social connections, purpose, and engagement in our communities. Many older persons want to continue working, and many need to do so. Yet widespread age discrimination continues to restrict opportunities and participation, limiting the contributions and well-being of older persons globally.
- 2 Misconceptions about older workers persist, but evidence contradicts them. Studies across various professions show that older persons maintain high productivity; while their pace may be slower in some tasks, their accuracy often surpasses that of younger colleagues, resulting in comparable overall output. Similarly, older workers can learn new technologies effectively when given appropriate training, challenging stereotypes that they are “too old” to adapt.
- 3 Legal protections against workplace age discrimination exist in much of the world, but are uneven. In many countries, employers are not required to implement preventive measures, and protections against retaliation for reporting discrimination are rare. In one-third of countries, discrimination remains legally permissible.
- 4 Intersectional gaps exacerbate vulnerability. Older adults who also belong to marginalised groups (including those with disabilities, immigrants, and gender minorities) face significantly higher risks of discrimination. Laws that combine protections across multiple identities are few, leaving these populations especially exposed to exclusion.
- 5 We need systems that facilitate engagement and participation. From parental leave policies that include grandparents to accessible ICT and assistive technologies, inclusion depends on structural choices. Moving away from being seen as dependents to being seen as contributors is possible when societies design policies that empower older adults to care, connect, and contribute, redefining what it means to age actively. That’s how we change attitudes, by living full, connected lives.
- 6 Norms and policies must evolve together. Legal prohibitions alone are insufficient; social attitudes and structural barriers also need transformation. When older adults can fully participate in work, families, and communities, they are recognised for their contributions and capacities rather than being reduced to stereotypes. Combining enforcement of rights, supportive policies, and societal recognition is essential to achieve meaningful inclusion and challenge pervasive biases.

HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF WORLD POLICY ANALYSIS CENTRE

The WORLD Policy Analysis Centre engages in a rigorous research process to gather and transform massive quantities of legal and policy data into the quantifiable, accessible, user-friendly resources found on this website, including interactive maps, tables, and downloadable datasets. WORLD has developed more than 2500 indicators of key aspects of laws and policies that matter to equality, human health, and development. Through partnerships with organisations around the globe, WORLD aims to translate its global policy data into community- and country-level improvements.





DID YOU KNOW?

Around 65% of countries prohibit age discrimination in the workplace, compared to 35% of countries still allowing age-based discrimination.

Protections addressing intersectional discrimination on the grounds of age combined with disability, migration status, or sexual and gender identity remain significantly less common.

Productivity studies show older persons perform as effectively as younger workers.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Societies thrive when people of all ages can contribute. Achieving age equality means going beyond awareness to build systems that protect, empower, and include. When legal frameworks, workplace policies, and social norms align, age is no longer a barrier and older adults are recognised as essential contributors to families, communities, and the economy.

USEFUL SOURCES

- WORDL Policy Analysis Centre, Workplace Discrimination Database | [Link](#)
- Learn more about WORLD Policy Analysis Centre | [Link](#)
- Learn more about UCLA Fielding School of Public Health | [Link](#)





Decade of healthy ageing



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



International
Labour
Organization



UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency



World Health
Organization



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