
Written Statement Submitted by the International Federation on Ageing (IFA)

11th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

29th March – 1st April 2021

As an international non-governmental organization whose membership base comprises government, civil society, industry, academia and individuals, the International Federation on Ageing appreciates the opportunity to provide a written statement at the 11th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing towards the focus area: right to work and access to the labour market.

The World Health Organization Global Report on Ageism has highlighted that in times of crisis, such as economic recessions and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, older workers are disproportionately impacted by job loss and unfair workplace dismissals.¹ Re-entering the labour market is hardly possible for workers aged over 50 years, and long-term unemployment as well as loss of income is common in many countries. The situation is particularly precarious for older women, part time workers, and older workers in less stable jobs without opportunities for vocational training and capacity building. These obstacles are often compounded by frequent wage cuts in new jobs and discriminatory hiring practices based on age, a form of ageism, which assume reduced productivity of older workers.

Furthermore, in the formal labour market, the right to work, to access and participate in labour markets through paid jobs is often violated by inflexible mandatory retirement ages that do not permit continuation of employment even if needed as retirement pensions are frequently inadequate. Specifically, early retirement regulations are likely to be misused to force older workers out of the labour markets even if they wish to continue working.

In the informal labour market, where the majority of older persons in developing countries are active, decent working conditions such as adequate wages and social protection, are completely absent. Furthermore, unpaid informal work, for example long-term care provided by older women to family members, is often not economically recognized and omitted in labour statistics, ignoring the impact of these significant contributions to the functioning of the economy, the health and long-term care sector and the society at large.

In the near future the exclusion and discrimination of older workers from the workforce, in the face of severe labour shortages anticipated given the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, is expected to result in significant reduction of wealth and living standards around the world. However, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that increasing participation of older workers in the labour force may increase Gross Domestic Product by nearly 20 percent over the next decades.²

Within this context and in light of the concerted actions being undertaken over the next ten years as part of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, the International Federation on Ageing calls for the following actions to be considered:

- To respect and enforce equally for older workers the human rights to work and social security as well as international labour standards and decent work;
- To establish urgently measures aimed at increasing job security for older workers and opening access to labour markets by removing age barriers;

¹ World Health Organization. (2021). Global Report on Ageism. Geneva, Switzerland. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

² OECD. (2020). Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce: Living, Learning and Earning Longer. OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/59752153-en>.

- To ensure flexibility of retirement age in public pension schemes and age neutrality in all social protections schemes;
- To enforce empowerment of older workers through life long training and participation in the labour force; and
- To consider older workers' contributions both formal and informal work as economically equally important and develop policies to recognize informal and unpaid work.

A universally binding rights-based policy framework to respect and protect the right of older people to work and access the labour market is essential to ensuring income security in later life, and also social, health and food security. Within the context of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030 the International Federation on Ageing is honoured to have the opportunity to work alongside Member States to advocate for the rights of older people towards tackling the pervasive discrimination and stigmatization known as ageism.