

14th session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Guiding questions on the normative content related to social inclusion

Inputs by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

To foster social inclusion of older persons, the ECLAC¹ considers that it is vital to integrate the intersectional perspective into the design of public policies, programmes and measures, as it increases the visibility of the diverse nature of old age and of ageing. The intersection of gender, social stratum, ethnicity and race, territory of residence, disability, migration status and gender identity, among other factors, deepens inequalities. Adopting this perspective enables consideration of the multidimensional nature of older persons' vulnerability to poverty, financial insecurity, lack of access to health services, education, and care and can thus guide public policies that guarantee older persons' rights and freedoms and make it possible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Pensions, health, education, digital inclusion and care services are pillars of guaranteeing older persons' autonomy during the life course. The countries of the region face the challenge of expanding social protection system coverage and access for older persons, especially through contributory and non-contributory pensions, with financial sustainability and an emphasis on reducing the gender gap. The social protection of older women must be ensured by designing and implementing policies, programmes and actions with a gender perspective, taking into account the inequalities that are amassed during the life course. Likewise, States must improve the information systems and administrative records for older persons who receive benefits under social programmes, to ensure they have up-to-date data.

Furthermore, action should be taken to boost creation of formal, decent, quality jobs for older people who wish to continue working, promoting access to social protection, extending unemployment insurance and guaranteeing sufficient income under secure conditions. Policies and programmes must also be pursued to encourage hiring of working older persons and enable them to re-join the labour force, creating information systems on their labour force participation and the design and implementation of measures to combat ageism in work. It is also essential to regulate paid domestic work to ensure that domestic workers have access to labour rights such as fair wages, leave, severance pay, unemployment insurance, social protection and retirement pensions.

Older persons often have no choice but to carry on working or re-enter the labour force, especially in countries with lower pension coverage rates and amounts. Self-employment, by providing people with the opportunity to flexibly manage when and where they work, is an option that is often taken up by older persons. However, there is a high risk of self-employment being associated with informal employment. For this reason, some countries in the region, in order to promote decent work, have implemented actions and programmes that seek to incentivize formal work for older persons. For example, Chile and Colombia have adopted tax incentives and subsidies as a strategy to help older persons enter and re-enter the labour market. Of particular note in this area are programmes linking allowances and employment training that, in the Chilean case, provide targeted allowances to people aged 55 and over. It is also important to highlight the efforts being made to encourage participation by older persons themselves in public policy

¹ See ECLAC (2022), "Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: inclusion and rights of older persons" [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/48568-ageing-latin-america-and-caribbean-inclusion-and-rights-older-persons>.

decision-making. One example is Colombia, where the National Council of Older Persons promotes employment, economic autonomy and entrepreneurship and seeks to create formal employment for older persons in the public sector.

Ageism and gender discrimination are still among the main challenges to be faced if the inclusion of older persons in the labour market is to become a reality. Prejudices and stereotypes against older persons, which deepened during the pandemic, exacerbate inequalities from an intersectional perspective, making it difficult for them to access decent employment. Thus, if the aim is to promote quality employment for older persons, it is important to design measures that help to combat all forms of discrimination in the workplace. Accordingly, the efforts by some countries focus on major legislative reforms aimed at combating discrimination in firms' employment arrangements and removing age criteria for access to training programmes. In Chile, for example, the age limit for National Training and Employment Service (SENCE) programmes was abolished, thereby putting an end to a form of ageism that affected the right to lifelong and in-service education.

In terms of access to education, lifelong learning must be made a reality and formal and non-formal education strategies are urgently required to enable more and more older people to learn about, use and take ownership of information and communications technology (ICT). Assessing the causes and effects of the digital divide for this population group is therefore a valuable exercise.

With respect to access to lifelong learning, 16 countries of the region have documented the implementation of programmes and actions aimed at expanding educational access and opportunities for older persons. Both formal and non-formal education strategies have been considered, with opportunities for people to improve their literacy, obtain primary and secondary education certificates (Chile, Guatemala, Mexico and Paraguay), receive vocational training and instruction and take training and refresher courses in different subjects. In the Caribbean, educational programmes have been implemented with an emphasis on promoting health, well-being and development, as well as social skills (Saint Kitts and Nevis), and free training programmes have been provided (Belize).