

## **The 12<sup>th</sup> Session of OEWGA 2022 -----**

### **Contribution for the Focus Area 1 on “Contribution of older persons to sustainable development”- Point 4, “Equality and non-discrimination”**

submitted by the Fondation pour un Centre pour le Développement Socio-Eco-Nomique (CSEND), ECOSOC accredited since 2014 ([www.csend.org](http://www.csend.org)) together with Citizen Science Project: “Future-Oriented Biographies in the Present” ETH/University of Zurich ([www.aelterwerden.ch](http://www.aelterwerden.ch)).

#### **Part A: Equality and Non-discrimination at societal level, Citizen Science Project, ETH Zurich**

Though age-based discrimination is in contradiction with the Swiss constitution, there is no corresponding legal regulation which would allow action against such violations in court. Derogatory stereotypes are omnipresent in everyday life. There are no restrictions on the freedom of expression of older people in Switzerland; they have their own media such as [www.seniorweb.ch](http://www.seniorweb.ch). Women over 65 also formed the "Klimaseniorinnen" association, demanding more effective climate protection measures from the Swiss government.

Mandatory retirement at age 65 for men (64 for women) is the law in Switzerland. It is based on the deeply engrained concept of a three-phase life-cycle model (education → work → retirement), regardless of the demographic changes of the past decades which increased the average life expectancy by one month every year. This extends particularly the “middle (work) phase” with great potential for participation and engagement.

Companies, however, very rarely offer to extend employment contracts beyond the current retirement age. This severely limits the choices of around 80 percent of the workforce. Self-employed persons can – depending on customers and markets – choose to end work activities freely.

Many women, for various reasons, tend to leave the workforce already in their late fifties – considerably earlier than men.

The mass withdrawal of the workforce from working life early or in the middle of the seventh decade of life is not sustainable at two levels:

- The WHO shows a clear relationship between healthy aging and social integration, for example in collaborative productive activities. Of course, the scope and level of demand of the activity must be appropriate.
- Anyone who works in Switzerland for wages or fees makes contributions to the Swiss social security insurance (AHV). As a result of demographic changes, however, the gap between contributions made and benefits paid is growing. The Swiss social security system is thus not sustainably financed.

#### **Key Demands:**

- Promotion and expansion of more flexible labor market access for persons between 55 and 75.
- Expansion of publicly co-financed qualifying continuing education options and programs for persons between 50 and 80.
- Health promotion strategies as a way to better cope with health limitations while enhancing the options to contribute to society.
- Decoupling official or mandatory retirement age from actual transition to retirement.

## **Part B: Equality and Non-discrimination at enterprise level, CSEND, Geneva**

The Swiss government conducted six studies on the participation of older persons in the Swiss labour market from 2015-2021. The final report showed that the number of working people aged 55 and over in full-time jobs increased by 18% however the studies do not clarify whether the 65+ year old persons have to work due to insufficient financial resources or because they want to remain professionally active.

(<https://www.news.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/68946.pdf>)

Measures were proposed by the government to reduce age discriminatory qualifications in job advertisements and a brochure was published to give guidance on how to avoid ageism in enterprises. What is still missing are concrete regulations on how to support older workers before and after retirement at their job-site. Older employees should be considered as know-how resources who have accumulated skills, knowledge and network links to clients and hence do not require basic on-the-job education and training.

Study by Metrobasel in 2016 on the factors impacting an ageing workforce i showed that enterprises need to manage better the inter-generational aspects of an age-mixed work force ([https://www.metrobasel.ch/images/Archiv/2016/Aging\\_Workforce\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.metrobasel.ch/images/Archiv/2016/Aging_Workforce_WEB.pdf)). Regulations are needed on how to ensure the best possible collaboration between young and older workers in enterprises

Experts from 15 countries drafted the new ISO 25550 standard, “Ageing societies — General requirements and guidelines for an age-inclusive workforce.” It offers guidance for inter-generational arrangements of work and labour relations to the benefit of employers and employees. (<https://www.iso.org/standard/76420.html>).

An age sensitive work culture would be beneficial for all and for society at large. Older workers can share their know-how with younger employees provided the work environment is supportive for inter-generational cooperation and employers ensure dignified work conditions for older workers.

**Key Demands:** Compliance and regulatory tools need to be put in place to re-enforce age inclusive work environments. Such policy tools need to provide the incentives and pressures for enterprises to respond to the needs of the older workers by a positive approach based on merits, individual choice and dignity. The potential benefits of such tools like ISO 25550 need to be adopted globally and given full support by employer associations, trade unions and governments.