



International
Federation on
Ageing

Consultation Response

United Nations Call for Submissions for the eleventh session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing

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About this consultation

The United Nations (UN) has issued a call for written submissions to support the preparation for the eleventh session of the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG) in April 2020. The call is for substantive inputs on the two new focus areas of “[Right to Work and Access to the Labour Market](#)” and “[Access to Justice](#)”.

There has also been a call for inputs in the form of normative content for a possible international instrument on the two focus areas that were discussed in the tenth session of the OEWG in April 2019, “[Social protection and social security including social protection floors](#)” and “[Education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building](#)”.

About the International Federation on Ageing

The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is a global non-governmental organisation that drives the agenda of the world’s population ageing, so that every older person can live their life to the fullest in a society that respects their past, present and future contributions.

The IFA has a long established and wide-ranging network of member organizations around the world. The network extends to over 75 countries, covering every region. Together these organizations represent over 80 million older people. Longer lives bring great opportunities, including the possibility of rethinking growing older in an ever-changing environment. IFA’s blueprint to drive the agenda of the world’s ageing population is premised on a rights-based approach and underpinned by the UN Principles for Older People and aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Agenda and WHO Global Strategy and Action Plan.

Substantive input for the right to work and access to the labour market

For many people, employment is an important part of one’s identity. As the global population ages, employment rates for older people have increased, yet continue to decline quickly after the age of 55 years. In addition, compulsory retirement set at arbitrary ages forces many people to stop working and gaining income even if they wish to do so. With life expectancy improving in most countries, work and related income is increasingly central to enabling older people to support themselves.

Goal 8 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals calls for the “promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work.”¹ Yet, older people often face difficulties re-entering employment or access to training compared to the younger population, and losing a job in later life is much more likely to result in long-term unemployment.

The primary barrier to securing decent work in later life is not skill limitations, but ageism. That is, discriminatory policies and implicit biases that limit employment opportunities for older people. The WHO reports that due to age discrimination, many employers hold negative attitudes towards older workers.² Age biases in recruitment and legislation on inflexible retirement ages, for example, must be overcome as well as shifting the attitudes of politicians and employers surrounding older employees. Informing politicians and education of employers is critical to address these attitudes and dispel myths around older workers as well as create age-friendly working environments to ultimately establish a supportive and decent working environment for older people.

Older women are more likely to experience ageism in the workplace and face greater challenges in job acquisition than their male counterparts. The proportion of women aged 55 to 64 has increased in most regions, which reflects work and income needs as well as changes in retirement age and pension reforms.

¹ United Nations. 2018. The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2018.

² WHO, 2019. Ageism in the workplace.

Women are more likely than men to be unemployed, or assume informal work, suggesting a lack of income and social security.³

Furthermore, older people are more likely to face competing demands such as caregiving for loved ones while attending to the commitments of employment. More flexible workplace policies that make room for caregiving as well as the management of health issues can allow older people to sustain their job for longer as well as contribute to the broader economy.

As populations age, expanding the quality and range of career opportunities is increasingly important to ensure older workers can enjoy good and decent work which has positive implications for the individual, the economy and civil society. Age discrimination must be addressed in hiring practices as well as in the workplace. No older person should be declined or discriminated for a job, adequate income and career chances based on their age. Based on their vast experience, older workers can make substantive contributions in their jobs and economies at large if politicians and employers recognize the value of older people, form policies that support caregiving roles, and create a supportive culture and environment that does not assume ageist stereotypes and supports healthy ageing.

Age-based discrimination in employment must be reduced through the adoption and enforcement of anti-discrimination laws, age and gender-neutral labour marketing policies, adequate social protection legislation and social campaigns that aim to combat all forms of ageism in the workforce. Additionally, programs such as vocational training, networking initiatives, job search assistance, and lifelong learning specifically for people who experience barriers to long-term, gainful employment, including older persons, must be implemented.

Substantive input for access to justice

Currently, there are no existing provisions to guarantee legal assistance for older persons in society in the way that there are for other societal groups. Governments around the world often understate the fact that many judicial systems negatively impact, and at times jeopardise, access to justice for older persons.

As the UN Principles for Older Persons states, “older persons should have access to social and legal services to enhance their autonomy, protection and care.”⁴ Provisions must be adopted to ensure older persons effective access to justice on an equal basis with others, which depends on whether older people are empowered within their communities, have access to older person-centered justice services, and have fair outcomes for their problems.

The obstacles older people face in accessing justice relates to the failure to recognize that crimes against older people have a disproportionate impact on their independence, development and security. Further barriers to be addressed include entrenched ageism within justice system; lack of appropriate support through the criminal justice process; lack of specialist services; fear of victimization; lack of expedition in justice systems; social, digital and financial exclusion; pre-conceived ideas about older people as witnesses; financial disadvantage; inadequate social protection and social support; and psychological barriers.⁵ Additionally, older persons may find it difficult to express their needs and knowledge gaps regarding their legal rights.

The location of justice must be age-friendly, which means it must be accessible and affordable for people of all ages and function, including those who are home-bound, or have difficulties physically accessing courts. Establishing an “age-friendly” court system is essential.

³ United Nations, 2015. Chapter 4: The World’s Women 2015. Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/chapter4/chapter4.html>

⁴ OHCR, 1991. United Nations Principles for Older Persons. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/OlderPersons.aspx>

⁵ GAROP, 2019. Access to Justice in Older Age [Webinar]. Retrieved from <https://www.rightsofolderpeople.org/event/garop-webinar-access-to-justice-in-older-age/>

Certain groups of older people experience additional marginalization, which is known to further negatively impact their lives and access to justice. Older women, older Indigenous people, older prisoners, older immigrants and refugees, older people living in rural and remote areas, and LGBTQI people, are among those at higher risk of inequalities in access to justice.

To address barriers in access to justice for older persons, multi-sectoral collaborations should be used to scale up interventions and promote policy changes that promote and advance equality for all older people.

Normative content for the right to lifelong learning, education and skills-building

Older persons must have the right to lifelong learning, education and skills-building on an equal basis with others and without discrimination, so they can live autonomous and independent lives, fulfil their aspirations, build their skills and capacities, develop their full human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and participate fully in society.

The promotion of lifelong learning among older persons has shown to significantly contribute to their own health and wellbeing, social life and involvement in the community, and has also shown to increase the wellbeing of the community in which the older person resides.⁶

Education of older persons can take many forms, including tertiary education; vocational training and retraining; digital and new technology-based education; adult education; self, information, recreational and community-based education; lifelong learning programs; health, social protection and legal literacy, and skills training in literacy; numeracy and technological competencies.

Unfortunately, several barriers exist preventing older people the right to lifelong learning, education and skills building. Ageist paradigms and ways of thinking such as ‘you cannot teach an old dog new tricks’ are simply incorrect, inane and need to be addressed.

The UN Madrid International Plan of Action in Ageing called on governments to use education to address a myriad of ageing related challenges, including literacy, job, training, poverty, and discrimination,⁷ however much more work needs to be done. For these reasons, the IFA urges for the following goals to be achieved to ensure older persons the right to lifelong learning, education and skills-building.

- Quality lifelong learning must be affordable and accessible to older persons, including in their communities and in care and support settings
- Ageist stereotypes regarding lifelong learning must be eliminated such as prejudices about older persons’ ability and willingness to learn, and the value and importance of learning, education and skills building in older age
- Older persons must have the right to participate as teachers and sources of knowledge in lifelong learning, educational and skills-building programs for all generations
- Older persons must have the right to participate in the decision-making processes regarding the shape, content and quality of lifelong learning, educational and skills-building programs aimed at older persons
- Barriers to participation in education by older people must be addressed, including discrimination based on age or any other grounds

⁶ Merriam & Kee, 2014. Promoting Community Wellbeing: The Case for Lifelong Learning for Older Adults. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Youngwha_Kee/publication/275002788_Promoting_Community_Wellbeing_The_Case_for_Lifelong_Learning_for_Older_Adults/links/58a3ae2faca272d3a4983698/Promoting-Community-Wellbeing-The-Case-for-Lifelong-Learning-for-Older-Adults.pdf

⁷ United Nations, 2002. Madrid International Plan of Action in Ageing. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/madrid-plan-of-action-and-its-implementation.html>

- Ensure learning programs for older persons are of high quality through professional training, and that older persons have the same opportunities as others to benefit from scholarships or other educational grants

Normative content of social protection and social security (including social protection floors)

Social protection is widely considered to be instrumental in promoting human welfare on a broad scale, and similarly considered indispensable for facilitating fair economic growth, social stability and peace. Today, only 20 per cent of the world's population has adequate social protection coverage, and more than half do not have any coverage at all.

Citizens globally face dangers in the workplace; a challenge which is augmented by low or non-existent old-age pension and health protection coverage. Building efficient and sustainable pension systems presents a difficult task for many governments, and many factors must be taken into account by stakeholders in order to address this challenge.

Health status should not be a barrier to income security, nor income status a barrier to healthy ageing. The Global Monitoring Report on Tracking Universal Health Coverage released by the WHO in 2017 indicated that coverage of essential health services varies widely between and within countries. As increased age is often associated with increased likelihood of having chronic comorbidities and thus increased healthcare utilization, older persons are more likely to face financial barriers to maintaining their health including financial catastrophe due to excessive amounts of out-of-pocket payments. This is particularly true if health coverage is unavailable or inadequate for the needs of older persons.

According to the International Labour Organization, universal health care is an essential component of social protection floors and fighting poverty. However, 38 per cent of the global population does not have any health protection and only 5 per cent have no out-of-pocket spending for long-term care. This is problematic as marginalized groups such as older women are more likely to be poor and experience disproportionately higher financial insecurity in the absence of universal health coverage. In part, this is because older women have an increased risk of multiple chronic comorbidities and/or disabilities in comparison to both younger women and older men. As a result, older women are less able to pay for and access health services equally.

Other subpopulations of older persons experience additional layers of discrimination, which leads to even greater inequalities in access to programs, policies and services. For example, older homeless persons have additional vulnerabilities because of their advancing age. This includes the inability to deal with dangers of homelessness, protect their belongings, get enough to eat, ward off violence and abuse, and get emergency medical assistance. Insufficient nursing homes, lack of assisted living facilities and absence of long-term care can all lead to homelessness, especially when families are unable to provide the necessary care and attention.

Although population ageing is occurring around the world, stakeholders working to improve social protection coverage and access to affordable quality services and benefits often overlook the needs of older persons. In order to ensure adequate social protection of older persons, it is essential to:

- Disaggregate data on social protection by age to inform implementation of social protection measures across each stage of life and thus help break the cycle of intergenerational poverty;
- Increase old-age pension coverage through national legislation plans to include the self-employed and informally employed;
- Extend health coverage to include quality services that help people maintain their health as they age, such as comprehensive assessments, care planning, assistive devices, and physical rehabilitation and provide financial supports to increase affordability of home care, long-term care, and informal caregiving.

- End age discrimination in the workplace, ensure adequate minimum wages for workers of all ages, implement age-relevant social protection policies, and provide universal unemployment insurance;
- Develop public housing policies that consider the needs and income status of older persons, safeguarding access to adequate heating, lighting, food storage, sanitation and clean drinking water, as well as legal protection against forced evictions and harassment;
- Provide adequate and affordable quality health services, including basic health literacy training, as well as long-term care facilities; and
- Expand social protection measures to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty.