

IOM inputs to the 12th Open-ended Working Group for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons

Focus area 1: "Contribution of older persons to sustainable development"
Focus area 2: "Economic security"

An ageing and more mobile global population:

Migration has been and continues for good part to be analyzed through the lens of demography. It is no surprise therefore that population ageing – a reality experienced in almost every country – would interact with and affect migration. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, international migration has been relatively resilient, and many of the migration trends observed pre-COVID will accelerate and will also continue to be influenced by the demographic shift.

Older persons tend to be already generally overrepresented in the migrant population compared to the general population: out of 7.8 billion people in the world, 9.3% are 65+ years old; however, in the international migrant population, 12% are 65+ years old¹. While the data remain scant, disparities between regions (18.2% of migrants are 65+ in Oceania, whilst only 4.7% are 65+ in Africa) and evidence from the field across IOM work areas paints a picture of hardships and challenges, but also of opportunities and benefits for and with older persons in situation of migration.

Recognizing and enabling the contributions of older migrants to sustainable development:

The overall economic impact of migration, and the agency of migrants is well evidenced: while they represent just over 3% of the global population, they generate around 9% of the world's GDP².

Migration is and will be indispensable to meet the complex global and intra-regional labor market and societal transformations ageing brings – including in countries in the Global South. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, migrants and particularly migrant women have been at the frontline to deliver services and care – including elderly care – in economic sectors where there is not sufficient availability of national workers.

Migrants contribute to the welfare system of the receiving country through their labour which translates in social benefits for the whole population, and through human capital as they increase the birth rate of ageing societies. When returning to their countries of origin, or when retirees migrate to another country than their own country of origin, older migrants invest their savings and pensions in the local economy, and form networks that leads to the development of business and services opportunities, and open doors for global trade.

While some older persons are dependent on the remittances sent to them by family members overseas, evidence has shown as well that older persons that remain behind are also helping their migrant adult children with childcare, household chores, and financial contributions. In 2012, findings of a survey on ageing in migrant- and non-migrant households in migrant-sending communities in Kyrgyzstan, Bangladesh, Mozambique and Jamaica revealed a significant number of "skipped generation" households consisting of older persons and grandchildren. Similarly, the often-invisible unremunerated work of older migrants that accompany working age children or other family members

¹<https://www.migrationdataportal.org/themes/older-persons-and-migration>

²<https://www.mckinsey.com/-/media/mckinsey/industries/public%20and%20social%20sector/our%20insights/global%20migrations%20impact%20and%20opportunity/mgi-people-on-the-move-in-brief-december-2016.pdf>

in their mobility, through child or other form of family or community care and support should not be underestimated.

Research shows the value of experience of older persons. Older migrants have many skills and capacities they can contribute while coping with disasters and the stress that migration can induce. They provide leadership and influence on decision making and control of economic assets based on their experience, they encourage conflict resolution and foster problem solving, and their sense of history helps preserve the community's cultural and social identity especially in cases of displacement where identity erodes.

Promoting and protecting the rights of older migrants and leaving no one behind:

But those contributions migrants and older migrants can make to society and sustainable development are hindered in multiple ways. Migrant workers who lose legal status in their country of destination upon retirement or in the case of job loss (if in precarious, temporary or part-time work which has not opened the door to permanent residence status), may have to return home to countries where few social and family networks remain. Thus, ensuring equitable outcomes for retirees who have lived or worked for decades in a country without acquiring permanent status needs to be considered.

Older migrants may struggle to recoup social security contributions post-retirement, and many more then struggle to move pensions with them if they choose to retire in their country of birth, or third country. Access to and portability of social security contributions is critical to avoid destitution and facilitate both mobility and well-being of older persons. The availability of integration and/or reintegration programmes and services that can address possible language barriers and physical and socio-economic constraints as well as ensure access to health and other services – whether for older migrants that choose to return home after many years or those who choose to retire abroad – should be considered an integral part of social inclusion programming.

Patterns of movement are becoming more complex for some groups, with a growing divergence between those who have the capacity to move, and those who don't – such as the elderly. The effects of environmental and climate change will have a strong influence over future mobility dynamics and become part of the intricate set of factors fueling internal movement, including displacement. The particular burden of "trapped populations" should be given special attention.

While migration can be positive, not all migration occurs in conducive circumstances. Older migrants are often isolated from the rest of society due to their physical, linguistic limitations, economic status as well as their health condition. Digital exclusion, distance from support networks, as well as the prejudices of ageist stereotypes, in addition to being discriminated based on their origin, are some of the factors that undermine their social and psychological well-being and that prevent older migrants from meaningfully participating in different facets of community life.

Towards dignity and well-being for each and every migrant:

IOM is committed to the core values and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights, without distinction of any kind, such as age.

IOM works everyday around the globe and with a broad range of stakeholders to promote adherence to international standards and fulfilment of migrants' rights as a transversal principle of its work, and to advance the socio-economic and well-being of migrants and societies, as one of its core objectives underpinning good migration governance.

Internally, IOM continues to increase its own Staff awareness and capacities to understand and address unique barriers that older people face in accessing services across the migration continuum. In 2021, IOM developed an online course on Older People and Migration which presents some practical approaches on increasing the participation and inclusion of older people. Also in 2021, IOM through the Diversity, Inclusion and Social Cohesion (DISC)³ Initiative produced a resource bank on building capacity on diversity and social inclusion in migrant integration programming, that address the intersectional identities and unique needs of migrants, with a view to promoting migrant inclusion and social cohesion, and that includes age considerations.

³ <https://migration4development.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Resource%20Bank%20-%20Building%20Capacity%20for%20Diversity%20and%20Social%20Inclusion%20%281%29.pdf>