

Rights, jobs and social security: New visions for older women and men - Gender equality at the heart of decent work, Campaign 2008-2009

Increases in life expectancy involve changes in the entire life cycle. One fundamental change that has been noted is a shift from three-generation societies to four-generation societies. Many of today's grandparents remain engaged, mobile and active. Traditional characteristics attributed to "seniors" are shifting to an older age bracket (seventies and eighties). But as the majority of the world's population does not have entitlements to any form of old-age pension, for many living longer also means living with scarcity for longer periods of time. Poverty in old age is a key issue of concern.

Because women live longer than men, they form the majority of older persons (55 percent). Currently, women outnumber men by about 70 million among those aged 60 years or over. In the last 50 years, global life expectancy of women has increased from 48 to 67 years, as compared to 45 to 63 years for men. Poverty in old age has a strong gender dimension. Life expectancy for women is higher than for men; therefore, women may be in poverty for a longer period of their lives. A woman's chance of losing her partner is higher, and women are less likely to remarry than men. Women over 60 who have lost their partners greatly outnumber their male equivalents.

Throughout their life cycles, women accumulate disadvantages that pile up at older ages. Double or triple discrimination is often amplified as women advance in age. Women are especially vulnerable owing to their high numbers in unpaid, low-paid, part-time, frequently interrupted, or informal economy work. As a result they are less often entitled to any contributory pension benefits in their own right. Even if they are, their pensions are often significantly lower than those of men due to lower earnings and shorter contribution periods.

A society for all ages requires rethinking the conventional course of working life. It entails introducing more flexible and tailored working patterns, yet at the same ensuring that people have both the right to continue working if they so wish and the right to retire in an affordable manner if they do not wish to continue an economically active life. There needs to be a shift from competition to solidarity among working age groups and to remove the employment barriers facing older people.

Find out more:

- [ILO – Social Security Department \(SECSOC\)](#)
- [ILO – Employment Policy Department \(EMP/POLICY\)](#)
- [ILO – Skills and Employability Department \(EMP/SKILLS\)](#)
- [ILO – International Labour Standards Department](#)
- [ILO – Conditions of Work and Employment Programme \(TRAVAIL\)](#)
- [ILO – Bureau for Workers' Activities \(ACTRAV\) on Social Security](#)
- [ILO – Bureau for Employers' Activities \(ACT/EMP\)](#)
- [ILO – R162 Older Workers Recommendation, 1980](#)
- International Labour Standards and Social Security
- [Resource Guide - Gender equality in the world of work](#)
- [Online Information Resources: Older workers](#)
- Gender Equality and Decent Work - Selected ILO Conventions and Recommendations Promoting Gender Equality