

STATEMENT



International
Labour Office

ILO Statement to the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

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STATEMENT BY

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Fourth Substantive Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and congratulations on your election to lead this session of the open-ended working group.

As we have heard here today in numerous interventions, the age distribution of the world's population is undergoing a profound structural transformation. More people are living longer and staying active later in life than ever before.

This is wonderful news. Longer, healthier lives are the fruits of improvements in public health, nutrition and advancements in modern medicine. The reduction of mortality rates and increase in longevity are testament to human development, our collective potential and our ability to improve conditions for people from one generation to the next.

This demographic shift, however, presents formidable and fundamentally new challenges, particularly the implications it has for labour markets and social protection systems. But these challenges are not insurmountable. By tapping into the same innovation and human ingenuity that has allowed us to live longer, we can also make sure we live better.

Together, we must begin to address population ageing using a more integrated and longer-term perspective, one rooted in dialogue between all the relevant stakeholders—between states, citizens, businesses, and civil society. This is an issue that affects us all.

Population ageing is indeed a universal phenomenon. This demographic shift is taking place in all countries and regions, albeit at different paces and over different time horizons. The population of developed countries is and has been ageing fast, and a similar situation in the developing world is just a few decades away. If not properly addressed, the consequences of these changing dynamics are likely to take unprepared countries by surprise.

In 2012, at the 101st session of the International Labour Conference, the annual meeting that brings together governments', workers' and employers' delegates of the ILO member States, Recommendation 202 on nationally-defined social protection floors was adopted. The Recommendation considers a set of benefits and transfers throughout the life cycle for all and makes no distinction based upon age since all groups should be considered. The Social Protection Floor concept includes important methodological aspects to map, identify gaps, and set priorities at the national level.

In 2013, at the 102nd session of the International Labour Conference, the changing demographic context, as well as employment and social protection issues figured highly on the agenda. The conclusions coming out of this Conference recommended country-specific policy mixes that would take into account the complementarities between employment and social protection policies for all age groups spanned over the life cycle. I would like to take the opportunity to share with you some of the most salient conclusions now.

Firstly, employment and social protection policies must be developed in a mutually-reinforcing way, promoting shared responsibility and solidarity between generations. For example, employment policies that generate decent jobs for all working-age groups can boost the tax and contribution bases of social protection systems that can contribute to provide dignity in ageing. In turn, social protection floors that provide income guarantees and healthcare access to the elderly can increase formal labour force participation among would-be caregivers, often female, and realize the right to Decent Work.

Secondly, countries can improve opportunities for older workers who choose to delay retirement by enacting legislation that prohibits employment discrimination based on age, by launching public awareness campaigns, or developing enterprise-level initiatives to achieve similar ends. Whatever the choice, putting an end to age-based discrimination and embracing diversity and age sensitivity are central to promoting human dignity and, ultimately, to increasing productivity.

Thirdly, measures to improve and update skills throughout the life-cycle must be an essential part of any policy mix. Skills development programmes that promote continual, lifelong learning and that scrap age limits for access to training are critical to promoting the productivity of younger and older workers alike. They make older workers' choices about when and how to retire meaningful ones, and prevent skills mismatches and shortages that can stunt individual professional, as well as national economic growth.

Fourthly, an ageing population coupled with the lingering effects of a global financial crisis is indeed exerting pressure on national budgets and public pension schemes. As some countries seek reform, they may find consensus for increasing the retirement age, while others could offer a mix of gradual and flexible transitions from active working life to retirement, such as phased-in retirement, part-time work or job sharing. Whatever the choice, these reforms must take into account accrued pension-scheme rights, be rooted in dialogue among social partners, and be based on the principles of inter-generational fairness and solidarity in order to be socially and politically sustainable.

In summary, as mentioned in the statement of the United States, within the rapidly changing demographic context, there is a need to develop comprehensive, multi-dimensional and integrated policies that will promote this virtuous cycle of employment, social protection and inclusive sustainable development.

In today's world, there is no shortage of crises. In contrast, longevity is a fantastic opportunity and constitutes one of the most positive signs of progress and a reason to rejoice. With the right combination of policies, and with commitment from relevant stakeholders, demographic transitions can not only become manageable and sustainable, but can even be turned into opportunities to improve livelihoods for the current and many future generations to come.

Thank you.