

Check Against Delivery



## INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION

**Commission on Population and Development**  
**Fortieth session**  
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**General Discussion under Agenda Item 4:**  
**National experience in population matters: the changing age structures of**  
**populations and their implications for development**

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Mr. Chairman,

The theme before this Commission is indeed positive as it signifies an important advancement in the longevity of human life. However, the Secretary-General's report points out a number of economic and social implications as a result of population ageing.

In many countries, longer life expectancy has not been accompanied by longer working lives. Average retirement ages have dropped, posing a threat to the financial viability of public budgets and as a result, older people risk being socially excluded. Many older persons who would like to work longer are discriminated against and forced to leave the labour market prematurely or move to low-quality jobs. Furthermore, the inability of many to address the growing population of youth seeking employment threatens to undermine development.

Since the early 1990's, the ILO has been working to develop innovative strategies to meet such challenges and to facilitate the extension of working lives in productive and decent work.

There is much debate about the impact of ageing on social security financing. While high-income countries face the challenge of ensuring the sustainability of social protection systems, the main challenge for low-income countries is to extend social security coverage to the most vulnerable groups. Our experience has shown that the promotion of decent work is the best way to ensure social protection for all and to allow older age groups the possibility of remaining active longer.

This is particularly crucial for developing countries where poverty among older populations is an increasing concern and few older people can afford retirement. In these countries, it is essential to find ways of extending social security, with attention being given to appropriate active labour market policies for older workers. Complementary measures such as those related to skills development within a lifelong learning framework are also important.

The challenges of demographic change are common to all countries, yet each will find different strategies to address them. These strategies should aim to strengthen the role of social security as a productive factor in promoting employment, stimulating structural change and fostering economic growth.

Examples from some countries have shown that basic income security for the older population is affordable also for low-income countries, and that the improved livelihoods of older people will equally benefit younger generations, especially in countries most affected by HIV/AIDS.

Another area of concern is the situation of migrant workers falling outside the realm of social protection and thereby lacking access to pension schemes and adequate health services. Thus, an examination of the scope and limitations of replacement migration is useful for addressing impacts of new demographic trends.

Finally, due regard should be given to providing an adequate working environment for older workers. This includes the elimination of conditions which are unsafe, unhealthy, or

otherwise life threatening. In this regard, the ILO has worked to elaborate numerous international labour standards relating to older workers including, Conventions on Older Workers Recommendation, 1980 (No. 162); the Social Security Minimum Standards Convention, 1952 (No. 102); and the Invalidity, Old Age and Survivors' Benefits Convention, 1967 (No. 128), and Recommendation (No. 131). Moreover, during the upcoming International Labour Conference in June 2007, the issue of age discrimination in the workplace will be addressed as a follow-up to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work.

Mr. Chairman,

Indeed, the ability to create jobs and better manage the changing population's age structure will give way for increased production and improved standards of living. Productive and decent work is the most powerful lever to maintain and extend social protection at all stages of life. This requires complementary measures such as promoting labour rights of older workers through, *inter alia*, combating age discrimination.

In addition, social dialogue plays a critical role in the design and implementation of policies for older workers. All of these measures are related to the ILO's four strategic objectives contained in the Decent Work Agenda, namely rights at work, employment, social protection and social dialogue. For older workers, this means an opportunity to remain an active part of the economy and society in conditions of dignity, freedom, equity and security.

Thank you.