

Trade Unions against Discrimination Project 4th Learning Seminar on Ageism

Event held in Amsterdam (Netherlands) on 22 & 23 October 2024

DRAFT REPORT

- **Welcome words and Opening**
 - Kitty Jong (FNV Vice-President) opened the workshop by discussing her experience in the trade union, focusing on care, social security, and labour conditions. She emphasized the importance of addressing intersectionality within the union's diversity agenda. She then highlighted the issue of ageism in the Netherlands, noting that both older and younger workers face discrimination. Older workers, particularly those over 50, struggle to maintain employment despite the raised retirement age, while younger workers are paid less due to a "youth salary" that pays them half of the minimum wage. She also pointed out how employers overlook the impact of age on women, particularly during menopause, leading to implicit discrimination. She criticized the cynical use of ageism in labour policies, citing the removal of "senior days" from collective agreements as an example. She also mentioned that workers in physically demanding professions are often forced to continue working past a reasonable age due to the lack of supportive policies. Finally, she addressed the issue of caregiving, noting that women who care for sick family members are often not supported in the workplace. She called for policies that better address the needs of workers at different life stages and expressed hope that the workshop would lead to meaningful action on ageism.
 - Giulio Romani (ETUC Confederal Secretary) thanked FNV for hosting the seminar and shared his experience as a trade unionist in Italy. He highlighted the challenges faced by older workers, particularly in sectors like banking, where deregulation and mergers have made it increasingly difficult for individuals over 50 to remain employed. He pointed out that many companies fail to invest in the skills of older workers, especially as they near retirement age, leading to the perception of older employees as expendable. He also emphasized the growing difficulty for older workers to secure new employment after losing their jobs, due to the lack of investment in their professional development. He then addressed the issue of youth employment, pointing out the paradox where young workers are in demand, but employers keep wages low by exploiting practices like youth wages and migration. While he acknowledged the need for migration to balance demographic shifts, he stressed that it is often misused to exploit workers, perpetuating a cycle of low wages and discrimination. He discussed how age, race, and gender discrimination intersect, compounding the challenges faced by vulnerable workers. He warned that this intersectionality of discrimination leads to further exploitation, leaving workers fearful of losing their jobs while also facing increasing prejudice. Finally, he concluded by emphasizing the need to consider how both young and older workers can be better supported and valued in the workforce.
- **Panel discussion : *Ageism and intersectionality in the workplace: challenges and opportunities***
 - Vera De Man (ETUC Youth Committee Vice-President) discussed the importance of addressing discrimination and ageism in youth employment. She highlighted ETUC efforts to tackle youth wage discrimination, particularly through policies



such as the directive on quality traineeships, which aims to end exploitative practices like underpaid or unpaid internships. Vera illustrated the struggles of young people, drawing from a personal example of a Portuguese intern who, despite hard work, receives no salary and is forced to live with parents due to financial strain. She also emphasized the need for policies like lifelong learning and equal access to social protection for young workers.

- Nicoletta Merlo (EESC Workers' Group Member and Youth Group Vice-President) followed with an overview of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and its role in bridging the gap between European institutions and civil society. She presented the EESC's opinion on youth employment, stressing that young people face precarious jobs, poorly paid roles, and inadequate social protection. She called for more efforts to integrate youth into the labour market through quality jobs, improved legislative measures, and better use of EU funding. She further stressed the importance of lifelong learning, recognizing non-formal skills, and supporting flexible work arrangements for young people. She also pointed out the lack of adequate representation of young people in decision-making institutions (for instance less than 10 EESC members are under 35), and emphasized the importance of meaningful youth participation in such processes.
- Alex Quinn (Policy Officer at the European Youth Forum) how his organization supports young people in understanding and asserting their rights in the workplace. Alex highlighted that young workers often face precarious employment conditions, with unpredictable incomes, temporary contracts, and limited social security. He stressed that knowing one's rights is essential, but young people also need the collective power and tools to enforce them. Alex pointed out the challenges of working outside of standard employment structures, which leaves many young workers without the protections granted to full-time, permanent employees. He also addressed the growing issue of age-based discrimination and the normalization of precarious work for young people. Alex called for a shift in focus to demand a fairer and more stable labour market for the youth, urging for broader changes such as mental health protections at work, shorter working weeks, and recognition of the impact of AI on workers.
- Bernd Bodewes (FNV Political Campaign Strategist) spoke about the ongoing fight against discriminatory youth wages in the Netherlands. He shared the stark difference between the minimum wage for young workers (half the rate of adult workers) and the challenges faced by young people to make ends meet, including rising living costs and housing challenges. He discussed FNV's efforts to raise awareness about the minimum youth wage and to push for policy change through social media campaigns, particularly targeting young people through platforms like TikTok and Instagram. He explained that trade unions are negotiating in collective labour agreements to eliminate youth wage discrepancies and continue advocating for better pay for young workers. He finally highlighted the opportunities presented by the European minimum wage directive, which could help address these issues, although he acknowledged the challenges posed by a right-wing government in the Netherlands.
- **Workshop 1: Experiences of workers being discriminated at the workplace because of their age (intersectional approach)**
- Beppe De Sario (Foundation Giuseppe Di Vittorio Expert) explained that the aim of the workshop was to promote reflection and discussion on age-related discrimination in the workplace, affecting young, middle-aged, and mature workers. Additionally, the workshop sought to explore the intersectional dimensions of these experiences. He emphasized that many international

conventions, treaties, and initiatives addressing discrimination recognize age discrimination as one of the multiple and intersectional factors that can lead to violations of fundamental rights. Age discrimination is often interconnected with sex, gender, disability, ethnicity, or belonging to oppressed or minority groups, and the combination of these factors can intensify discriminatory conditions. However, despite this recognition, the international policy framework has not yet produced comprehensive legislation addressing age discrimination. Discrimination is not only based on age itself (whether elderly, young, etc.), but also on transitions between different life stages, such as being a student, NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training), worker, or pensioner. When ageism is discussed, it is frequently assumed to apply solely to older individuals, with "ageism" often being equated only with discrimination against the elderly. However, the experience of being elderly is not homogenous, and discrimination can be further compounded by factors such as the intersection of age and gender. For example, the gender pay gap, coupled with discontinuous career paths, contributes to the gender pension gap. The safety and well-being of older individuals may be jeopardized when their vulnerable conditions intersect with biases in legislation, administration, social welfare, and the labor market (e.g., LGBTQIA+ individuals, migrants). Young workers, on the other hand, often face precarious conditions in the labor market and are at risk of social exclusion (e.g., NEETs). These structural challenges are made worse by the social invisibility of young people and their limited opportunities for participation at all levels, from institutions to civil society, including within trade unions.

To further explore the intersectional approach from the participants' perspectives, the Mentimeter application was used to pose the question: "*Which workers are victims of multiple discrimination?*"

Below are the responses regarding age-related intersectional discrimination:

- *Young (queer) creative people of Colour who - without any start their own self-employed business, and are willing to work almost free, just to be able to do what they are best at.*
- *Cultural / religious backgrounds, especially people with a non-western last name and woman wearing a hijab*
- *The intersection between age and gender identity produces a multiple discrimination in the access to the world of work. The LGBTQIA+ is reflecting about the possible solutions (eg reserved quotas)*
- *Migrant women of middle age with children*
- *Young women (precariousness - cf. involuntary part time ; work-life balance ; sexual and reproductive rights - cf. endometriosis, menstrual leaves)*
- *"Migrant workers Workers with lower wealth older educational level Women workers"*
- *Young women - UK evidence showing young women are more likely to experience sexual harassment and third party harassment*
- *Youth women*
- *Age intersects with social class. Think, for example, how class distinctions i.e., accent, CV, neighborhood, operate to categorize people into good or bad candidates for the job.*
- *People on benefits trying to get back to work*
- *Psychometric testing used to filter candidates for interviews in public sector jobs. This has shown to disadvantage older workers, workers with disabilities and workers who's first language is not Eng*
- *Older workers in night shifts.*
- *"LGBTQI Women Migrants Disabled Refugees Rom People with diseases Young workers Aged workers"*
- *"after 55 very difficult to find a new job (all workers), youth: stay to long in interim jobs difficulty to get a fixed contract origin: 30% stop of non Belgian origin stop school, difficulty to find jobs"*

Reaction

- Sandro Gallittu (CGIL, Italy) highlighted the intersection of age discrimination and gender identity, particularly concerning young people. He pointed out that discrimination occurs both in access to work and throughout their educational journey, sometimes leading to early school leaving.
 - Angelica Rota (UIL, Italy) emphasized the discrimination faced by young women, especially in terms of pay. She cited the example of Finland, where the gender pay gap is negative for men. To address these forms of discrimination, she stressed the importance of strengthening the role of education and schools.
 - Alice Arkwright (TUC, UK) noted that young people in the UK perceive trade unions as uninteresting, and she called on the labour movement to reflect on this. The union collects data on workplace discrimination cases and views intersectional discrimination as a concept that unions must consider, as all forms of discrimination may be intersectional.
 - Sarrah Bentahar (ETUC) pointed out that understanding and identifying intersectional discrimination can be challenging. She emphasized that trade unions must develop the right tools to support both young and elderly workers in addressing discrimination.
 - Romain Lasserre (FO, France) stated that the intersectional dimension of discrimination intersects with the intergenerational one, and trade unions must strengthen their approach to combating both types of discrimination.
- **Workshop 2 : Best trade unions practices to combat discrimination and ageism inequality**
 - Sarrah Bentahar (ETUC) introduced the workshop, which aimed to share and discuss good trade union practices to combat age discrimination. The workshop began with a roundtable discussion, where one representative from each trade union was invited to present a good practice.
 - Coos Van der Pool (FNV, Netherlands) presented two trade union practices adopted by FNV: 1) a program focused on diversity and inclusion, and 2) an anti-discrimination project called “*Working Towards a Generation Without Discrimination*”. [See PPT here.](#)
 - Alice Arkwright (TUC, UK) presented initiatives (*such as campaigns, analysis and awareness-raising events*) led by the union to reform the minimum wage system in order to better support young workers. [See PPT here.](#)
 - **Workshop 3: Policy recommendations to overcome intersectional discrimination at the workplace (drafting exercise)**
 - Building on the discussions from the previous panels and workshops, the final session of the workshop focused on formulating and discussing policy recommendations to combat age-related intersectional discrimination. Each participant contributed one or more recommendations for policymakers. During the reporting stage, Beppe De Sario (Foundation Giuseppe Di Vittorio Expert) refined and organised the suggestions by their scope, categorising them primarily under: legislation, institutions, and trade union action. [See the list of policy recommendations here.](#)

- **Roundtable discussion : Fighting discrimination against workers approaching retirement age**
 - Agostino Siciliano (FERPA General Secretary) highlighted [FERPA](#)'s role as the representative of elderly workers within European trade unions, with a membership of 10 million people across 42 organizations. Although FERPA represents pensioners, he emphasized that the issue of aging and pensions is also critical for active workers, especially as the elderly population in Europe continues to grow. He described mature workers as a "living encyclopedia" of trade union knowledge and experience, and underscored the need for a balanced discussion between younger and older generations in the workforce. He also highlighted the economic implications of an aging population: with 100 million elderly people in Europe, he questioned how pension systems will be sustained when fewer young workers enter the labour market. He pointed out that while some countries are raising the pensionable age, the challenge remains that businesses are often reluctant to retain older workers. He called for greater collaboration across generations to address these economic challenges. He further mentioned the issue of gender inequality in pensions, noting that women on average receive 30% less in pension payments compared to men, a matter that requires international attention.
 - Silvana Cappuccio (President of FERPA's Women's Committee) began by challenging the negative perception of aging, framing it as an opportunity for a longer and more fulfilling life, particularly in wealthier countries with better public services. She stated that the issue of aging should not be seen merely as a cost, as it is often portrayed by governments and businesses, but as a value. She also highlighted the significant gender gap in pensions, with older women being more likely to live in poverty compared to men. She attributed this inequality to the broader gender gap in wages and the negative impact of inflation on female pensioners. She then emphasized the critical role of caregiving, which disproportionately affects women, both as caregivers and recipients of care and pointed out that the lack of adequate public support for caregiving services often leads to violence and exploitation (particularly in the healthcare sector). She also discussed the compounded discrimination faced by older women, especially those from marginalized groups, including migrants and transgender individuals. She stressed the importance of addressing ageism and sexism together to ensure the well-being of vulnerable populations. Finally, she outlined the key points of [FERPA's manifesto](#), which advocates for dignified work, public investment in healthcare and services, and the creation of quality jobs for older workers. She called for a comprehensive European strategy to address aging populations, as well as an international treaty on the rights of the elderly, similar to those established for children and other marginalized groups.
 - Dick de Graaf (FERPA's Steering Committee member) highlighted the importance of global awareness and action on aging, and encouraged attendees to stay informed through regular newsletters. He urged everyone to follow government initiatives related to healthy aging, pointing out the need for more active engagement and solutions. He concluded his intervention with a call for continued dialogue and collaboration between governments, trade unions, and all generations to address the challenges and opportunities presented by an aging population. The participants were encouraged to stay involved in ongoing discussions and to contribute to efforts that support the rights and well-being of elderly workers and pensioners.