

Age discrimination at work

It happens all the time. And it happens everywhere. Older people (often between 50 and 65 years old) face age discrimination at work in many ways.

They may be overlooked for promotion, because employers think they are not capable of handling added responsibilities.

They may be excluded from training because they ostensibly cannot acquire new skills, or it is assumed that they will find learning harder and slower.

They are the first to be dismissed during restructuring.

Employers seem to believe that the investment in training and development of older workers is not worth the effort and cost because they have fewer years left in which to "pay back" the investment.

This often means that older workers lose their jobs and then a vicious cycle begins when they realize that it is really very difficult to find a new one. They are considered incapable of adjusting to a new environment, resistant to change and less motivated. In several countries, the largest percentage of long-term unemployed are people between the age of 55 and 65. For women, the percentage is even higher, based on available data.

The result is that many retire with reduced pensions and this has a very serious impact both financially and psychologically.

Current legislation in most European countries does not allow such practices, but they happen just the same, because long-held prejudices and stereotypes are slow to go away. Existing International human rights treaties do not explicitly mention ageism as a discrimination, leading to lack of protection of the rights of older persons at work.

What is required is an international legally binding instrument that will provide employers with both incentives and disincentives in dealing with older workers. A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons will allow the enforcement of rules to ensure that training and development is available to everyone and that the rights to work of people of all ages are respected and protected.

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