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THE EMPLOYMENT OF OLDER WOMEN WORKERS

Report by the International Labour Office

Note by the Secretariat: The Secretary-General has received from the International Labour Office the following report on the employment of older women workers. The Office prepared the report for the Commission in conformity with resolutions 445 G (XIV) and 547 L (XVIII) of the Economic and Social Council. The Secretary-General has the honour to communicate the report to the Commission.

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### Introduction

It is not just in very recent years that the existence of special difficulties in the placement and employment of older workers has attracted attention. Long before the Second World War, the problem had aroused the interest of public authorities and sociologists and in many countries had been the subject of studies and of enquiries into the causes of and possible remedies for these difficulties.

The International Labour Organisation, realizing the importance of the problem, decided then that it should be studied and instructed the Office to prepare a preliminary report<sup>1/</sup> for the Governing Body; the report was submitted to the session held in October 1938. World events caused this problem to be shelved for a long time. Now, owing to various factors, principally the aging of the population and also the full employment policies to which most Governments are committed, interest in the question has revived. Nevertheless, it does not as yet seem ripe for consideration on the international level, especially as, for the time being, at least, it does not by any means affect all countries equally.

It would seem that the same may also be said of the special problem of older women workers, which, even in countries where interest in it is keen, has scarcely hitherto been dissociated from that of older workers in general. The reasons for this are obvious. The economic, social, physiological and demographic factors which condition and often limit the employment of the older members of the male labour force, are to some degree the same as those affecting the trend of the employment of older women workers. Similarly, the prejudice with which both categories meet on the labour market is essentially attributable to the same mistaken estimate of the true ability of middle-aged and even elderly workers.

It is none the less true that the placement and employment of older women workers are dependent on special factors which aggravate their difficulties on the labour market. In its resolution of 23 May 1952<sup>2/</sup>, the Economic and Social

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<sup>1/</sup> Report of the Office on the Question of Discrimination against Elderly Workers. International Labour Office, Governing Body, 85th session, 25 October 1938. Mimeograph document, GB 85/16/350.

<sup>2/</sup> Resolution 445 G (XIV).

Council first stressed this aspect of the question of older workers and indicated how useful a special international study of the problem of employment of older women would be. The Council invited the International Labour Office to collaborate in such a study. On 12 July 1954, the Economic and Social Council, in another resolution<sup>1/</sup>, invited the Office to transmit the results of its studies, through the Secretary-General, to the Commission on the Status of Women. The report in question will be found in the following pages. It should be regarded as a possible point of departure for further and more advanced studies; it constitutes an attempt to relate the problem of older women workers, and of their difficulties in obtaining employment, to the demographic, economic and social conditions which, in the countries where the problem is a practical one, account for the characteristics and govern the trend of the employment of older women.

It should be noted at the outset that such a study is beset by great difficulties, reflecting the many and varied implications and correlations which the problem involves so far as both men and women are concerned; and so far as women are concerned, these difficulties are aggravated by the inadequacy of specific data. Furthermore by contrast with elderly male workers, the category of older women workers is not a homogeneous whole, but rather a somewhat heterogeneous group. The women concerned (to use a very general expression) can, as a first step, be divided into two broad categories. The first comprises women who have been regularly and uninterruptedly occupied; the second is that ill-defined category, which can scarcely be translated into figures, of women who late in life try to obtain employment for the first time or after a very long period of occupational inactivity. Although the problems of the two categories coincide in some respects, they inevitably differ in others and should to some extent be treated apart. Within the limitations of this preliminary study, however, there can be no question of doing so.

It will be seen from the following pages that, in the countries where it is being studied, this question is not free of contradictions nor of the paradoxes which make the problem of older workers one of the most difficult

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<sup>1/</sup> Resolution 547 L (XVIII).

employment problems to be dealt with under the prevailing demographic and economic conditions<sup>1/</sup>. Moreover, where the data throw light on the special difficulties of middle-aged women workers, they also reveal an extreme diversity of conditions as between the different branches of business and as between one country and another. It is therefore difficult, if not impossible, to discern any trends that could be said to hold true internationally.

One important point is that the question seems to be acute in only a few countries, whose economy has reached a certain level of development. For this reason the examples given in this study relate principally to those countries, while practically no reference is made either to countries with under-developed economies where questions of general under-employment have priority, or to the countries of Eastern Europe where the special difficulties of the employment of older women workers do not seem as yet to have received much prominence.

This study endeavours to bring out the full scope of the problems inherent in the subject; it also gives an idea of the research which will have to precede further and closer investigation. The study reviews, in turn, the trends of the employment and unemployment of older women workers in certain countries selected for purposes of illustration, and the principal factors which influence, favourably or adversely, the employment of older women workers and of women who take up an occupation late in life; next, it considers the principal measures which are likely to create employment opportunities for both categories, to counter the prejudice of employers against them, and to give them, subject to equality of skill, equal chances with younger women workers on the labour market. Lastly, this paper endeavours to demonstrate that the problem of older women workers cannot be completely dissociated either from the problems of the employment of older workers generally, or from the problems connected with the employment of women at all age levels. These questions, which have for long engaged the attention and been the subject of studies of the International Labour Organisation, are also nowadays inseparable from the full employment programmes the realization of which is one of the fundamental purposes of that Organisation.

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<sup>1/</sup> See The Problem of the Employment of Older Workers. International Labour Review. Volume LXIX, No.6, June 1954, pages 594-618.

THE PLACE OF OLDER WOMEN IN THE ACTIVE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

1. Some preliminary data concerning the aging of populations

The full significance of the problem of the employment of older women workers may be grasped if it is placed against the background of demographic developments in the twentieth century. While there is a general trend towards aging populations, the longevity of women has increased more than that of men. It may therefore be expected that the age groups of middle-aged and elderly women will gradually grow larger even than the corresponding male age groups. Some general figures will illustrate this trend towards aging.

In the United Kingdom<sup>1/</sup>, the number of persons over minimum pensionable age<sup>2/</sup> was 2,750,000 in 1911 and 6,500,000 in 1951. It is estimated that it will rise to 9,750,000 by 1977. By 1962, the population between the ages of 20 and 40 years is expected to be less by 7 per cent than it is now (1952), while the number between 50 and 60 is expected to increase by 17 per cent.

In the United States, in 1890 the population aged 45 and over was 10,632,000 or 17 per cent of the total of 62,622,000. In 1950 the figure was 42,907,000 (28 per cent) out of a total population of 150,697,000.<sup>3/</sup> In the same year, the female population of the United States for the first time exceeded the male (by 1,500,000). There were 116 women aged 65 and over to every 100 men in the same age group (females exceeding males by one million), whereas in 1900 the figures had been 98 women aged 65 and over to 100 men in the same age group.<sup>4/</sup>

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1/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women. First Report, October 1953, London, H.M. Stationery Office, Cmd.8963.

2/ 65 years for men, 60 years for women.

3/ Illustrative United States Population Projections, 1952, by Robert J. Myers and E.A. Rasor. Actuarial Study No.33, November 1952, Federal Security Agency, Washington.

4/ Employment and Economic Status of Older Men and Women. Bulletin No.1092. May 1952. United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington.

In France<sup>1/</sup> in 1896, there were 1,500,800 men aged 65 and over out of a total male population of 18,922,700 men, (7.9 per cent), and 1,692,900 women aged 65 and over out of a total female population of 19,346,400 (8.7 per cent). According to the 1946 census the figures then were 1,782,000 men aged 65 and over out of a total male population of 19,114,000 (9.2 per cent), and 2,601,000 women aged 65 and over out of a total female population of 20,986,000 women (12.4 per cent).

The life tables prepared by demographers and published in the United Nations Demographic Yearbook<sup>2/</sup> illustrate another aspect of the more pronounced aging of the female population. Nearly everywhere, the expectation of life at birth is greater for women than for men. It is lower only in countries such as India, where the length of human life is short in the case of both sexes. On the other hand, in the United States the expectation of life in 1950 was 72.4 years for white women and 66.6 per cent for white men. In the United Kingdom, the corresponding figures were 71 years for females and 66 for males in the period 1947-51, as against 48 and 44 years, respectively, in the period 1891-1900<sup>3/</sup>. In Denmark, the expectation of life was 67.8 years for men and 70.1 years for women (1946-50); in Norway, 67.8 years for men and 71.7 for women (1945-48); in Sweden, 67.06 years for men and 69.71 for women (1941-45); in the Netherlands, 69.4 years for men and 71.5 for women (1947-49); and in Canada, 65.18 years for men and 69.05 for women (1947).<sup>4/</sup>

## 2. Older women workers in the labour force

How has the aging of the population affected the development of the structure of the labour force? Has this development led to a greater labour force participation of women aged 40 years and over? And has the increased employment of female labour in certain countries<sup>5/</sup> been reflected in a corresponding increase in the proportion accounted for by older women?

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1/ Evolution de la population active en France depuis cent ans, d'après les dénombrements quinquennaux. Etudes et Conjoncture, Economie Française, May-June, 1953, page 244

2/ United Nations: Demographic Yearbook, 1953.

3/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women, First Report, October, 1953. H.M. Stationery Office, Cmd.8963, page 12.

4/ United Nations: Demographic Yearbook, 1953.

5/ See Vocational Guidance and Training for Women. International Labour Review, Volume LXVI, No.1, July 1952, pages 56-76.



Spectacular developments in the United States. Some impressive changes, even greater than those observed in the general population, occurred in the distribution of the labour force of the United States according to age and sex between 1890 and 1950. The female labour force is four and a half times greater today than it was in 1890, whereas the figure for men is only two and a half times greater. This increase is accounted for chiefly by workers aged 45 and over, and more especially by the women in that age group. Whereas the number of women aged 45 and over has quadrupled in the total population of the United States, it has increased ninefold in the labour force.

Owing to this development, the average age of working women has risen from 25 years in 1890 to 36 years in 1950. It is only three years lower than the average age of men in the labour force, by contrast with a difference of nine years in 1890.

These great changes took place mainly between 1940 and 1950, a period in which three and a half million women were incorporated into the labour force. Since the end of the war, many young women have left their jobs to devote themselves to family duties, whereas many middle-aged women remained in employment. This explains why in 1947 the number of women workers aged 35 and over for the first time exceeded that of younger women workers. In 1953, they accounted for 56 per cent of the entire female wage-earning population<sup>1/</sup>. Accordingly, two trends are observable in the United States: the labour force participation of middle-aged women tends to increase while that of younger women is, relatively, decreasing.

Developments in other countries. To what extent is the development so strikingly demonstrated by the above figures also a feature of the experience of other countries?

An answer to this question really calls for a study, covering the period since the beginning of the century and a sufficient number of countries, of the development of the female labour force participation rates in the various age groups as compared with the rates for males, and, secondly, of the evolution of the age structure of the female and male labour force.

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1/ Women as Workers. United States Department of Labor, Womens' Bureau, Washington, page 45 (undated).

A study of these two correlatives, covering a sufficient number of countries and according to occupations, would be most valuable. But there is one major obstacle: the virtual absence of statistical data on which to base such research. Particulars relating to older workers generally are inadequate in any case, and those relating to older women workers are extremely scanty. Even in the United States, where more attention has been given to the problem of older women workers than elsewhere, the experts have deplored the lack of specific data.<sup>1/</sup>

Although some fragmentary and scattered data have been brought together in this report, it should be stressed that they relate neither to the same periods nor to the same categories of persons and hence cannot form the basis of strict comparisons between countries nor can they be used for identifying what are the marked trends in the employment of women after a certain age. At most, they can give some indications which reveal, on the one hand, the extreme diversity of existing situations and, on the other hand, the immense area still to be explored in the almost untouched subject of the employment of older women.

The development of the situation in certain countries, selected for purposes of illustration, for which some data exist will be studied below from four different points of view: (a) the trend of the female labour force participation rate according to age; (b) age structure of the female labour force; (c) sex distribution of the older groups of the labour force; (d) the place of middle-aged women in economic activity.

(a) Trend of the labour force participation rates. Table I shows the male and female rates for the age groups 40 and over, at an earlier and at a recent date.

Although these data are not strictly comparable, for they relate neither to the same age groups nor to absolutely identical categories, they show the extreme diversity of the situations in what may be said to be economically developed countries. In the first place, they show that the developments observed in the United States are not sufficiently general to support conclusions that would be valid internationally; apart from the United States, only in the United Kingdom, among the six countries selected, has the participation of older women

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<sup>1/</sup> Frieda Miller: "Older Workers and Older Women", in No Time to Grow Old. New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Problems of the Aging, Washington, 1951, pages 183-192.

in active life increased in comparison with the earlier period. In the other four countries, that participation decreased. It should also be noted that, although the labour force participation rate of older women in France decreased between 1911 and 1946, it remained very high. Admittedly, French censuses count all farmers' wives as "active" or part of the labour force, whereas in other countries a married woman is not so counted unless she states that she helps her husband; yet the revised calculations which took this fact into account yielded figures only slightly lower than those which appear in the table, and so hardly invalidate the findings. Furthermore, especially at the beginning of the century, women did not take a prominent part in the economic activity in the United States and the United Kingdom.

TABLE I

Female and male labour force participation rates  
for selected countries, according to age groups  
(per thousand)

GERMANY<sup>1/</sup>

Census years	18-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65 and over
1925											
women	774	677	481	395		382		373		318	176
men	936	950	972	975		969		925		796	474
1950											
women	847	704	503	382		356		316		213	95
men	917	934	945	963	973	971	966	934	874	731	268

<sup>1/</sup> "Perspectives sur la population active européenne", by M.J. Bourgeois-Pichat, Population, Institut National Démographique, Paris, July-September 1953, eighth year, No. 3, pages 419-464.

FRANCE<sup>1/</sup>

Census years	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65 and over
1911											
women	572	584	534	523	529	531	527	510	484	434	322
men	827	947	966	971	970	966	956	936	892	835	655
1946											
women	580	598	491	482	494	513	514	501	461	401	223
men	755	911	955	970	972	973	963	930	853	762	543

GREAT BRITAIN<sup>1/</sup>

Census years	16-17	16-19	18-20	21-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	65 and over	70 and over
1921 <sup>2/</sup>												
women	709			663	335	229	210	201	183	153	---	6.5
men	914			967	978	978	967	940	887	794	405	---
1951												
women	608		829	655	371	344	340	277	144	90	53 <sup>3/</sup>	0.3
men	---	890	---	953	981	987	980	954	878	487	320	---

ITALY<sup>1/</sup>

Census years	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-64	65 and over
1911									
women	526		427		355			329	267
men	898		958		967			935	815
1936									
women	498	472		329				227	115
men	828	927		974				920	618
									50 <sup>3/</sup>
									354 3/

1/ "Perspectives sur la population active européenne", by M.J. Bourgeois-Pichat, Population, Institut National Démographique, Paris, July-September 1953, eighth year, No. 3, pages 419-464.

2/ England and Wales.

3/ ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1954, page 8.

UNITED STATES<sup>1/</sup>

Census years	14-19	20-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 and over
1890							
women	245	302	168	127	125	115	76
men	500	909	960	959	939	890	682
1950							
women	232	428	315	346	334	227	78 <sup>1/</sup>
men	400	811	926	941	913	830	414 <sup>2/</sup>

<sup>1/</sup> Women as Workers: United States Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Washington (undated) page 51.

<sup>2/</sup> ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1954, page 8.

A comparison of similar data for a larger number of countries, if such data existed, would probably reveal an extreme diversity of trends during the last half century.

How greatly situations vary from country to country will be gathered from the labour force participation rates given in Table II; it will be noted, for example, that these rates for women aged 60 to 64 range from 104 per thousand in Australia to 171 per thousand in Denmark and 401 per thousand in France<sup>1/</sup> whereas the rates for women aged 65 and over vary from 28 per thousand in New Zealand, 91 per thousand in Denmark, 120 per thousand in Switzerland and 223 per thousand in France.

It is also of interest to note how the female labour force participation rate compares with the male rate at various points in life. Table I, which should in this instance, be read horizontally, shows that while the female rate generally reaches its peak early in life, in some countries it tends to decline from one age group to the next, whereas in others the marrying and child-bearing

<sup>1/</sup> As noted earlier, censuses in France include all farmers' wives in the labour force whereas in other countries a married woman is not included unless she states that she helps her husband. For the purposes of international comparison the French figures would need to be scaled down slightly by weighting.

age is marked by a drop, followed by a slight increase after the age of 35. Thereafter the rate remains stable until around the age of 50; then, from the age of 54 onward, the female rate declines steeply. We may note in passing that even in the countries where this process is not reflected in the statistics, women apparently return to employment when they are freed from their duties as mothers or wives or are widowed or divorced.

Moreover, in any comparison of the male and female labour force participation rates at different ages, allowance should be made for the fact that in many cases middle-aged women are as a matter of course excluded from the census figures relating to the labour force and, in order to be enumerated as part of the labour force, must actually be employed. In most cases they are not even included in the statistics of employment services, as many of them are self-employed. Such women represent what might be called a marginal contingent of the economically inactive population, liable at any time to join the labour force. This feature is characteristic of the female labour force, which unlike the male labour force, does not form a clearly defined mass.

The male and female labour force participation rates, spread over a lifetime, reflect yet another difference between the sexes: women leave economic activity earlier and in larger numbers than men. This difference becomes more marked in the older age groups (except in France). Women apparently leave economic activity earliest in countries having a more favourable economic situation and a higher standard of living.

(b) Age composition of the female labour force: While the proportion of women in the labour force varies considerably from country to country, it tends in all cases to be higher in the older age groups than in the younger groups.

TABLE II

Labour force participation rates for age groups over 40 in certain countries<sup>1/</sup> (per thousand)

Countries and census years	Women							Men						
	40- 44	45- 49	50- 54	55- 59	60- 64	65 and over	40 and over	40- 44	45- 49	50- 54	55- 59	60- 64	65 and over	40 and over
Australia (1947)		177			104	51 <u>3/</u>	138		952			799	339 <u>3/</u>	805
Canada (1951)			192		74					930		524		
Chile (1940)		260			219				920			794		
Denmark (1952)			303		171	91 <u>3/</u>				960		783	425 <u>3/</u>	
United States (1950)		334		227		78 <u>3/</u>			913		830		414 <u>3/</u>	
France (1946)	513	514	501	461	401	223 <u>2/</u>		972	963	930	853	762	543 <u>2/</u>	
New Zealand (1945)		165		97		28			933		788		307	
Panama (1950)		211			101		179		969			765		910
Portugal (1940)		195			166		184		968			888		942
United Kingdom (1951)		340		277	144	53 <u>3/</u>			979		954	878	320 <u>2/</u>	
Sweden (1950)	292			262		78		974			898		370	
Switzerland (1941)			244			120				946			548	
Czechoslovakia (1947)		395		283		119 <u>3/</u>			934		735		297 <u>3/</u>	
Turkey (1950)						462 <u>4/</u>							802 <u>4/</u>	

<sup>1/</sup> Table based partly on data contained in the report, Economic opportunities for women: Older women workers. United Nations, Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women, eighth session. E/CN.6/251, 9 February 1954.

<sup>2/</sup> Perspectives sur la population active européenne by M. J. Bourgeois-Pichat, op. cit. pages 419-464.

<sup>3/</sup> ILO Year Book of Labour Statistics, 1954, page 8.

<sup>4/</sup> Ibid. Persons aged 66 and over.

Table III provides two examples of this trend in two countries where the female labour force participation rates have evolved quite differently since the turn of the century. The rise in the figures relating to the older age groups, while less marked in France than in the United States, is nevertheless characteristic. This fact should be taken into consideration in any study of the employment opportunities of middle-aged women.

TABLE III

Age structure of the female labour force  
(percentages)

UNITED STATES<sup>1/</sup>  
1900-1950

FRANCE<sup>2/</sup>  
1906-1936  
(agriculture excluded)

Age	1900	1950	Age	1906	1936
14-19	24.6	8.9	-20	18.8	12.7
20-24	23.6	15.3	20-29	26.8	24.9
25-34	22.8	23.2	30-39	19.4	21.5
35-44	13.0	22.8	40-49	15.8	18.5
45-54	8.5	17.6	50-59	10.9	13.4
55-65	4.9	9.1	60 +	8.3	9.0
65 +	2.5	3.1	40 +	35.0	40.9

<sup>1/</sup> Older Women as Office Workers, *op. cit.*, page 63.

<sup>2/</sup> L'activité professionnelle des femmes en France, *op. cit.*, page 23.



(c) Distribution of the older age groups of the labour force, according to sex: What changes have occurred in the composition of the labour force as a whole from the point of view of the proportions accounted for by men and women respectively at different age levels?

Only extensive studies could provide an answer to this question, and we shall deal with only two countries here by way of example. In France, in spite of a slight drop between 1906 and 1936, the proportion accounted for by females in the labour force (excluding agriculture) remained stationary at about one-third. The distribution is the same in the age groups over 40.<sup>1/</sup>

In the United States on the other hand, as could be expected from the data given earlier, the evolution since the turn of the century has produced some very great changes in the proportion accounted for by older women as compared with that accounted for by men in the same age group. Whereas, for example, in 1900, women aged 45 to 64 years constituted 11.9 per cent of the labour force of both sexes, the figure had risen to 24 per cent by 1950. In the age group of 65 and over, the percentage accounted for by women rose from 11.4 in 1900 to 17.4 in 1950.<sup>2/</sup>

Research into these ratios, if extended to other countries, would probably disclose a great diversity of situations.

(d) Distribution of older women according to occupation: As we turn our attention to occupations, we leave the general and abstract consideration of the place of older women in active life and grapple with practical and real matters. One particularly interesting lined enquiry would be to study how far the aging of populations, and the trend towards the incorporation of the female population in the labour force, influenced the age distribution of women workers in the various occupation groups and the distribution according to sex in each age group. Owing to insufficient data, however, we cannot go so far in our analysis; if we did, it would be so complex as to exceed the scope of this report.

In the absence of material on which to base a comparison of the developments in a larger number of countries, some valuable ideas may be culled from recent data concerning the United States, the United Kingdom and France.

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<sup>1/</sup> and <sup>2/</sup> (See draft page 17)

In the United States, where the female labour force has increased considerably during the past half-century, the distribution of women between the ages of 45 and 64 according to the major occupation groups was as follows in 1953.<sup>1/</sup>

TABLE IV

UNITED STATES: Distribution of women aged 45 to 64 according to major occupation groups in 1953.<sup>2/</sup>

Professional, technical and kindred workers	11.4 per cent
Farmers and farm managers	1.6 " "
Managers, officials and proprietors, except farm	7.4 " "
Clerical and kindred workers	19.3 " "
Sales workers	9.1 " "
Craftsmen, foremen and kindred workers	2.2 " "
Operatives and kindred workers	18.3 " "
Private household workers	11.1 " "
Service workers, except private household	14.8 " "
Farm labourers and foremen	4.4 " "
Labourers, except farm and mine	0.5 " "

An altogether different picture is conveyed by the percentage figures for women over 65, these being relatively more numerous in the following occupation groups: private household and service workers, farm workers, managers, officials and proprietors; whereas women aged 45 to 64 were proportionately more numerous in the categories of operatives, and sales and clerical workers.

What percentage of the female labour force in each occupation group is over 45 years of age? The following data, relating to April 1951<sup>3/</sup> and April 1953<sup>4/</sup>, show that whereas women aged 45 and over represented 32 per cent of the total female labour force on the first date, and 32.5 per cent on the

<sup>1/</sup> The figures, added up, total more than 100 because the percentages have been rounded off.

<sup>2/</sup> Women as Workers, U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, Washington, D.C., page 57.

<sup>3/</sup> Older Women as Office Workers, op. cit., page 64.

<sup>4/</sup> Women as Workers, op. cit., page 56.

second, the proportion varied considerably from one occupation to another. Older women are proportionately more numerous in the categories of farmers and farm managers, managers, officials and proprietors, craftsmen and foremen; and less numerous among clerical workers and operatives. The trend is the same for older men.

TABLE V

UNITED STATES: Women workers aged 45 and over as a percentage of the total female labour force

Occupation groups	April 1951		April 1953	
	Total Employed women	Women aged 45 and over as percentage of total	Total employed women	Women aged 45 and over as percentage of total
Clerical and kindred workers	4,931,000	19.1	5,090,000	21.4
Operatives and kindred workers	3,737,000	29.8	3,862,000	27.2
Service workers (except private household)	2,143,000	39.0	2,300,000	40.0
Private household workers	1,872,000	45.4	1,854,000	40.2
Professional, technical and kindred workers	1,784,000	33.3	1,928,000	35.7
Sales workers	1,264,000	33.2	1,434,000	36.4
Managers, officials and proprietors, except farm	1,039,000	50.9	888,000	52.2
Farm workers and foremen	608,000	38.6	580,000	44.8
Craftsmen, foremen and kindred workers	211,000	57.6	268,000	44.8
Farmers and farm managers	205,000	57.6	150,000	69.3
Labourers (except farm and mine)	97,000	26.9	80,000	32.5

In the United Kingdom, women over 45 account for 28.3 per cent of the total female labour force (including agriculture). A study of the various occupation groups suggests that the proportion of older women workers does not depend on the relatively easy nature of the work. In fact, because the young tend to drift away from certain types of hard work there is often a greater concentration of older women workers in occupations which might be considered unsuited for them. The same tendency, incidentally, has also been noted elsewhere, for example in Belgium.

Table VI<sup>1/</sup> gives, by way of example, the percentage of women aged 45 and over in some British industries which employ a relatively large number of women (end of May 1952).

TABLE VI

UNITED KINGDOM: Percentage of women aged 45 and over in certain occupation groups at the end of May 1952

Occupation	Total number of female employees	Women aged 45 and over as percentage of total
Engineering, shipbuilding and electrical goods	431,000	20.4
Textiles	542,000	31.5
Clothing	445,000	24.8
Food, drink and tobacco	358,000	23.8
Distributive trades	1,064,000	21.2
Public administration	378,000	35.7
Professional services	973,000	32.6
Miscellaneous services	1,206,000	41.7

The next table, dealing with France, sheds light on still another aspect of the question, namely the respective proportion of men and women over the age of 40 in certain occupations in which the proportion of female employees is quite large<sup>2/</sup>.

1/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women, op. cit., pages 54-55.

2/ Recensement général de la population effectué le 10 mars 1946, Etat civil et activité professionnelle de la population présente. Premiers résultats détaillés. Direction de la Statistique générale. Paris, 1949, pages XLVIII-XLIX.

TABLE VII

FRANCE: Men and women aged 40 and over in some major occupation groups (1946)

Occupation group	Number of women aged 40 and over in the occupation group	Number of men aged 40 and over in the occupation group	Women aged 40 and over as a percentage of the total number of men and women aged 40 and over in the occupation group
Agriculture (including farmers' wives)	1,787,157	2,142,435	45.4
Transport and handling	204,948	819,395	20.0
Commerce	352,617	465,405	43.1
Service workers, personal and health services	549,590	175,573	75.8
Administrative services and liberal professions	344,338	577,723	37.4
Technicians and manual workers in the processing industries	602,523	1,555,953	28.4

It will be noted that in France in 1946 there were more women than men aged 40 and over in the personal and health services category, the ratio being 4 to 1. The proportion of women aged 40 and over was also high in agriculture, commerce, and the administrative services and liberal professions.

It is worth while to consider more closely the employment of women in the last-named category. Of the 1,054,515 women in that category (1946 census), 344,338 or a little over 32 per cent are aged 40 or older. However, if we segregate the 78,131 women managers, officials and proprietors from the administrative and professional group, we will see that in this group the number of women aged 40 and over is 51,433, or a little over 65 per cent. On the other hand, in the category of workers, employees and labourers, which includes 773,923 women, only 219,923 or approximately 28 per cent are aged 40 and over.<sup>1/</sup> Although these figures relate to only one occupation group in

<sup>1/</sup> Recensement général de la population, op. cit., pages 112-113.

one country, they indicate what seems to be a rather widespread trend in this occupation group: the proportion of middle-aged women is much higher among the self-employed and those holding executive and responsible posts, than in subordinate positions. It is not certain that the trend is the same in industry, in particular in those branches of industry which employ large numbers of skilled workers. We do not have enough information on this point.

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These few examples will serve to show how many aspects of the employment trends for older women would have to be studied if one is to obtain a clearer picture of the current situation. Economic conditions, economic development, the industrial structure and the economic and political systems vary so greatly from country to country that one is inclined to say a priori that a more searching study would undoubtedly reveal an infinite diversity of situations which are hardly comparable inter se or amenable to international treatment.

To sum up the few data given above, it would seem that in a number of countries the employment of older women has decreased during the last half century. This phenomenon reflects the generally improved living conditions and the extension of old age relief and insurance. In other countries on the other hand, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, the number of older women carrying on an occupation, which was relatively low at the beginning of the century, has increased greatly.

At the same time, certain trends affecting the distribution of older women according to occupation are probably common to many countries: the large number of older women employed in agriculture, private domestic service and maintenance, certain major industries (such as the textile industry), administrative services, health and hospital services, the liberal professions, and in the executive ranks and posts of some occupations. In any interpretation of these figures, however, allowance would also have to be made for the employment opportunities, expressed in absolute figures, for middle-aged women in the various groups and types of occupations, and these would have to be compared with the corresponding figures for men. The foregoing gives an idea of the complex research - relating not only to trends in the employment of women but also to the evolution of manpower generally - that would be involved in broad, perfectly objective study.

3. Factors which influence the employment of older women

The extension of the employment of middle-aged women can certainly be traced back to insufficiency of resources and to the need to earn a living. A study published in the International Labour Review<sup>1/</sup> brings out the importance of this factor in the case of married women of all ages. There can be no doubt that, so far from needing less with age, many women need more resources as they grow older - married women because their family budget is not adequate to meet the rising cost of living and the additional expenses of providing for several children; and widows or divorced women out of sheer economic necessity.

There is another, equally important, factor. In many countries the range of trades traditionally reserved to women has been expanding continuously. Hence, middle-aged women, being no longer restricted to a few occupations, all too often poorly paid, may be tempted to try their luck on the labour market.

Moreover, the changed outlook towards the greater prominence of woman in society, and the experience of women working outside the home, are responsible for a new attitude towards employment. Many women nowadays, even if married, feel the need to leave the narrow confines of domestic work and to take part in some activity they enjoy.

Yet, vis-à-vis the opportunities offered by the labour market, they are inevitably confronted with economic factors, such as the economic conditions, the shortage or surplus of manpower in certain occupations, exceptional conditions due to war, or other factors, which facilitate or limit their access to employment. For example, in the countries suffering a shortage of manpower, older women have a better chance of obtaining employment. Similarly, in those occupations which are short of manpower owing to the drift away of younger workers, the proportion of older women is relatively high, even if the nature of the work does not seem suitable for their age.

Other powerful factors on the other hand have the opposite effect, that of hampering and obstructing the employment of middle-aged women. Since they are the causes of the specific unemployment of older persons and of the difficulty of placing them, they will be discussed in a separate chapter.

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<sup>1/</sup> Employment of married women and mothers of families, International Labour Review, vol. LXIII, No. 6, June 1951, pages 676-697.

## UNEMPLOYMENT OF OLDER WOMEN WORKERS

There is no doubt that after a certain age, in spite of all the reasons which seem to argue in favour of increased employment for them, it becomes harder for older women to find and hold jobs, and to obtain fresh employment after dismissal, than for younger women. Though the same trend is observable in the case of men, it seems more pronounced in the case of women.

### 1. Some statistics

In general, what is alarming in the unemployment of older workers is its duration more than its frequency. It has been noted that older persons becoming unemployed took much longer to find other employment than the unemployed in the other age groups. In so far as one can judge from official statistical data - and very few statistics lend themselves to an analysis of unemployment from the three points of view of age, sex and occupation - this would seem to be as true of women as it is of men.

The few data given below can only be regarded as examples, as mere indications. They are taken from the Belgian, United Kingdom and Italian statistics relating to unemployment. The first of these three countries (Belgium) is suffering from unemployment which, while not very disturbing, is nevertheless the subject of serious attention by the public authorities; the second (United Kingdom) has no unemployment of speak of; and in the third (Italy) unemployment is very serious.

The best way to examine to what extent unemployment affects older women more than older men, or women of all ages, is to compare the number of unemployed with the number of employed persons in the same age group.

The Belgian data, based on an unemployment census of 14 November 1951,<sup>1/</sup> offer the following picture for men on the one hand, and for women on the other:

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<sup>1/</sup> La remise au travail des chômeurs d'âge avancé, Study by the National Employment and Unemployment Office, Brussels, February 1952.



TABLE VIII

1. BELGIUM: Persons wholly unemployed on 14 November 1951

Age	Women			Men		
	Wage-earning (including unemployed) a	Wholly unemployed b	per cent $\frac{b}{a}$	Wage-earning (including unemployed) c	Wholly unemployed d	per cent $\frac{d}{c}$
under 50	408,733	47,864	11.7	1,246,462	56,035	4.5
50 and over (50-60)	54,460	11,132	20.4	314,761	40,097	12.7

The table suggests that women, and particularly older women, are generally more adversely affected than men.

Another, more recent Belgian study relating to operatives and office workers<sup>1/</sup> analyses the situation according to ten-year age groups and according to sex. The figures below relate to operatives.

<sup>1/</sup> Vieillissement de la population et emploi de la main-d'oeuvre agée. Report prepared by Mr. L.E. Reneau, Head of the Research and Statistics Department of the National Employment and Unemployment Office, for the Brussels branch of the Association belge pour le progrès social, June 1954, page 5.

TABLE IX

2. BELGIUM: Unemployment among operatives on 30 December 1953

Age group	Women			Men		
	Wage-earners (including those unemployed)	Wholly unemployed <sup>1/</sup>	per cent	Wage-earners (including those unemployed)	Wholly unemployed <sup>1/</sup>	per cent
under 20	73,244	3,551	4.8	108,004	6,123	5.7
20 - 30	112,543	20,118	17.9	272,545	20,737	7.6
30 - 40	57,647	10,684	18.5	219,565	15,648	7.1
40 - 50	58,241	12,025	20.6	254,354	22,538	8.9
50 - 60	40,592	10,783	26.6	202,084	28,953	14.3
60 - 65	9,491	3,364	35.4	62,250	17,387	27.9
Total <sup>2/</sup>	351,758	60,525	17.2	1,118,782	111,386	10.0

<sup>1/</sup> Persons wholly unemployed at mid-November 1953.

<sup>2/</sup> Not including workers over 65.

This table confirms the trend which has been noted. It also illustrates another phenomenon: the sharp rise in the number of unemployed persons over the age of 50 indicates the existence of a specific unemployment of older workers in Belgium. The figures relating to office workers published in the same study show the same trends: more acute unemployment among older women than among younger women and older men.

The data for the United Kingdom give similar results.

TABLE X

UNITED KINGDOM: Number of men and women wholly unemployed in relation to the total number of wage-earners in the respective age groups on 8 December 1952 1/

Age group	Women			Men		
	Wage-earners under pensionable age <u>2/</u>	Wholly unemployed	per cent	Wage-earners under pensionable age <u>3/</u>	Wholly unemployed	per cent
	a	b	$\frac{b}{a}$	a	b	$\frac{a}{b}$
under 20	1,212,000	17,789	1.5	983,000	11,528	1.2
20 - 39	3,163,000	63,332	2.0	5,971,000	89,142	1.5
40 - 49	1,409,000	25,381	1.8	3,114,000	44,950	1.4
50 - 54	571,000	14,141	2.5	1,288,000	25,986	2.0
55 - 59	444,000	11,834	2.7			
55 - 64				1,819,000	53,385	2.9
Total	6,799,000	132,477	1.9	13,175,000	224,991	1.7

1/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women, op. cit., page 56.

2/ Women: 60.

3/ Men: 65.

Italy,<sup>1/</sup> however, shows a different trend. According to the sample survey of unemployment carried out in September 1952 by the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry into Unemployment, only 1.5 per cent (11,500 out of 742,400) of the female labour force aged 50 and over was unemployed (women who had worked before or who were seeking their first employment; housewives, students and similar categories not included). In the case of women workers under 50, on the other hand, the figure was 10.2 per cent (411,800 out of 4,112,500). In addition, the figure for women over 50 was lower than that for men over 50 (1.5 and 2.1 per cent respectively). Italy is, of course, a special case, for in that country unemployment is heavily concentrated in the younger age groups.

1/ Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sulla disoccupazione: La Disoccupazione in Italia (Chamber of Deputies, Rome 1953), vol. I, tome 1, pages 38-59.

While such figures as we possess support the statement that periods of unemployment are longer among the older workers than among others, it is not proved that the situation in this respect is more unfavourable for women than for men.

In Belgium,<sup>1/</sup> for example, the persons who on 14 November 1951 had been unemployed for more than 24 months had an average age of over 50. On that date, there were almost 14,000 such workers in Belgium, including 12,000 men and 1,800 women. On the other hand, the Belgian statistics show that the average duration of unemployment among women over 50 is considerably shorter than among unemployed men of corresponding age. It should be noted, however, that this situation is affected by the restrictive conditions governing the grant of unemployment benefits to certain categories of unemployed women, particularly married women, who in Belgium lose their right to benefit sooner than men.

Figures relating to the United Kingdom also show that unemployed women in the older age groups are subject to much longer periods of unemployment than unemployed women in the younger groups. Only by more intensive statistical research could it be determined whether from this point of view the situation in the United Kingdom is more favourable for elderly women than for elderly men.

The following table gives the statistics for registered wholly unemployed women in Great Britain on 8 December 1952, classified according to age and to duration of unemployment (weeks):<sup>2/</sup>

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1/ Le problème de la remise au travail des chômeurs d'âge avancé. Op. cit., page 4.

2/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women. Op. cit., page 57.

TABLE XI  
UNITED KINGDOM: Length of unemployment (weeks)

Age of unemployed women	13 or less	Over 13 and up to 26	Over 26 and up to 52	Over 52	Total
under 20	15,428	1,625	571	165	17,789
20-39	47,428	9,009	5,130	1,765	63,332
40-49	17,529	3,620	2,756	1,476	25,381
50-54	8,891	2,244	1,830	1,176	14,141
55-59	6,755	2,096	1,675	1,308	11,834
Total	96,031	18,594	11,962	5,890	132,477

The aggregate statistics relating to unemployment among women should be interpreted with great caution. For example, if only one typically female occupation, such as the textile industry, is experiencing a recession at the time of the census of unemployment, the aggregate figures for female unemployment will show a sharp rise in relation to male unemployment, so that a comparison of the unemployment trends among men and women of the same age groups becomes impossible.

Furthermore, in countries where unemployment insurance is not general and compulsory, many women seeking employment do not apply to the employment offices and are not registered. Lastly, it seems that as a woman worker grows older she tends less and less to apply to official employment offices. This means that a very large proportion of older women workers seeking employment are not included in the unemployment statistics. To these must be added the middle-aged women who seek work for the first time, or after a long period of unemployment, and who also often do not apply to the public employment offices. It is very difficult therefore to form an accurate idea of the number of women workers and older women seeking employment. It is certainly much greater than the statistics would lead one to suppose.

## 2. Economic and technological factors

Studies of unemployment among older workers in general have shown that at times of economic stability or expansion the number of middle-aged and older unemployed persons is comparatively large in relation to the number of unemployed persons of all ages, whereas, at times of recession or depression older unemployed persons, because merged in the mass of unemployed persons of all ages, seem proportionately less numerous. This observation applies equally to women. For example, in Switzerland, where unemployment is low, the number of older women who are unemployed in relation to the total number of unemployed women is proportionally very high; at the end of January 1954 the figure was 61.6 per cent (as compared with 60.1 per cent for men).<sup>1/</sup> On the other hand, when the number of unemployed women increases, the proportion of unemployed older women decreases.

The economic and technological factors have a very great effect upon the rise and fall of unemployment among older persons. How great their effect is is best illustrated by movements in particular occupations or occupation groups. Thus, in practice, unemployment among older persons rises or falls in direct ratio to the abundance or shortage of the manpower supply in the occupation or occupation group concerned. For example, unemployment among older women is declining almost to vanishing point in the various branches of domestic service, which in very many countries are now completely deserted by the younger age groups. On the other hand, it is increasing in office work and in certain professions in which the younger elements are tending to predominate. The overriding influence of the economic factor is also apparent whenever the number of applicants for employment in a particular occupation is increased by, for example, a seasonal recession. For example, the census of wholly unemployed persons in Belgium carried out on 16 November 1953, a time of seasonal decline in business, disclosed unemployment among women workers over 50 years of age in the following occupation groups: tobacco, domestic service, hotels and restaurants, skilled labourers, foodstuffs. In general, these occupations are sensitive to seasonal influences.

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<sup>1/</sup> La Vie Economique, Berne, March 1954, page 113.

Technological factors are responsible for unemployment in all occupation groups undergoing modernization in which working methods and machinery are due for overhaul or replacement, in which posts are eliminated or in which certain trades are no longer called for. The older workers of both sexes are often the first to suffer. The skill and experience on which they may pride themselves are not always a sufficient guarantee against dismissal. In the French textile industry, for example, in which the age limits are generally less strict for women than for men, it has been found that when new trades and new methods are introduced, as for example in weaving, those dismissed are partly older women workers and partly female operatives of mediocre ability. This trend is also reflected in hiring practice: in modernized undertakings or in new branches of the textile industry, employers prefer not to hire older women workers, whose habits and methods of work they consider a liability rather than an asset. Moreover, modernization frequently involves the elimination of posts or skilled occupations, with the consequence, in many cases, that older workers are dismissed who, though often experienced, cannot usefully be retrained in new working methods because they will remain in employment for only a few years longer.

Having described some of the characteristics of unemployment among older men and women workers we may sum up as follows:

The distinctive feature of unemployment among older workers in general is its duration rather than its frequency. The few investigations which have been conducted, however, do not support any general conclusions as to the intensity of unemployment among older women as compared with that of unemployment among older men, since the examples given above also show contradictory trends in this respect. It would seem, however, that many older women seeking employment fall completely outside the purview of the employment offices and are not included in the lists of officially registered unemployed persons or persons seeking employment. This is particularly true of women who, late in life, try to obtain work by their own efforts. In addition to the registered unemployment, therefore, there is among older women workers a concealed unemployment the volume of which cannot be determined.

For older workers of either sex, the chances of finding or regaining employment depend largely on the prospects of the economy and the state of the labour market. They are greater or smaller in direct ratio to the shortage or abundance of the manpower supply in the occupation to which the workers belong. The prospects of employment for older workers of either sex are largely affected also by the advance of mechanization and the development of industrial techniques. For older men and women workers, the transformation of occupations and the introduction of new equipment often mean a danger of unemployment.

The importance of these facts will be realized if they are related to demographic development and the increasing influx of women into employment, for these factors will inevitably raise the number of older and middle-aged women seeking work. At the same time, in several countries the capacity of the labour market is not sufficient to absorb the entire supply of manpower and furthermore many of the difficulties which women have to face on the labour market are unlikely to be disposed of in the near future. Consequently, we must first enquire what these difficulties are.



## CAUSES OF DIFFICULTIES IN THE PLACEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT OF OLDER WOMEN WORKERS

As will be seen below, while in many respects the difficulties encountered by older workers are the same for both sexes, the handicaps to which older women are subject on the labour market are accentuated by the fact that, in their case, the difficulties peculiar to the employment of women are aggravated by the difficulties due to age.

These difficulties, which in practice take the form of age limits on recruitment, have two main causes: the existence of pension schemes and the preference of employers for younger staff.

### 1. Existence of pension schemes

Though at first confined to public administrations, which incidentally, are covering an ever wider range of activities, pension schemes are now common in many sectors and large undertakings or institutions. They involve the application, if not of a strict age limit on admission to employment, at least of practices which often have the force of a rule. In such undertakings, the employers are reluctant to hire older workers for whom they will have to pay larger pension contributions. The difficulty of this problem is increased by the fact that the contribution rates for women are often higher than for men.

The age limits governing the admission of women to employment in public service vary, according to country, from the age of 25 to the age of 40. In France, for example, the maximum age of admission for women is from 26 to about 30. In Sweden it is 30. In Canada it has recently been raised from 35 to 40.

Moreover, it seems that through this extension of pension schemes a kind of tradition has gradually been built up, not only in undertakings where such pension schemes are in force, but also in large areas of business where the modern tendency is to adapt hiring policies to the rules of the public service or of undertakings with pension schemes, though without the same reason for applying those rules.

A similar tendency is observed at the retirement stage. There is every reason to think that the rules laid down in the retirement schemes of the public service have some effect on retirement practices in private business generally, whether such schemes apply or not.

What are the minimum ages at which persons qualify for pensions under the various national schemes?

The minimum pensionable age is lower for women than for men in some countries, including Austria, Belgium, Denmark and the United Kingdom, where it is 60 for women and 65 for men. In Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Italy it is 55 for women and 60 for men; and in some countries it is even lower, as for example, in Yugoslavia, where it is 50 for women and 55 for men. On the other hand, the minimum age is the same for men and women in some countries, including Czechoslovakia, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Turkey, where it is 60, and Ireland and Norway, where it is 70.

Since the beneficiaries under these national schemes are not as a rule bound to discontinue employment as soon as they become eligible for pension, there does not seem to be any direct correlation between the qualifying age for pension purposes and the particular difficulties which older women experience in remaining in employment.

The same does not apply under the superannuation schemes in State, regional and local administrations, local government authorities and the great nationalized industries and banking systems, or in undertakings which have special superannuation schemes. In all these cases, superannuation generally implies discontinuance of employment. Furthermore, the prescribed retirement age is often lower for women than for men. It should be noted, however, that age is not always the decisive factor; the number of years of service and the amounts paid in the form of contributions are also taken into account; and sometimes the situation varies according to the post held and its grade. Some countries and some undertakings, for example, tend to retain women holding responsible posts in employment for a longer time.

In the United Kingdom, a Ministry of Labour enquiry in 1949 <sup>1/</sup> showed that a considerably greater proportion of women than of men were subject to compulsory

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<sup>1/</sup> Economic Opportunities for Women - Older Women Workers, Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women, op. cit., p. 17.

retirement in finance, public utilities and commerce, co-operative societies and other large retailers; and a slightly smaller percentage of women than of men among the clerical, technical and administrative staff of manufacturing industries, building and road transport. In that country, most women retire between the ages of 60 and 64. For men the retiring age tends to be between 65 and 70. In the professions retirement ages are usually the same for both sexes. There is a tendency in some countries to raise the retirement age for women. For example, in the United Kingdom, the banks recently decided to raise the retirement age for women from 55 to 60.

There is no doubt that any retirement or pension scheme which imposes on the beneficiaries strict conditions of age, either on entering or on leaving employment, creates difficulties for middle-aged persons seeking work, and for persons desiring, for economic or other reasons, to remain at work after reaching retiring age. There is no need to emphasize, however, that age limits on recruitment are more serious than age limits on retirement, for the latter merely reflect the recognition of a social advance which, it is to be hoped, will in time extend to all categories of wage-earners of both sexes.

## 2. Prejudice of employers against older women workers

Apart from the age limits imposed under pension schemes, age limits governing the hiring of workers are undoubtedly more frequently imposed in the case of women than in that of men. For instance, at the employment offices at Columbus and Houston in the United States <sup>1/</sup>81 per cent of the offers of employment for women and 64 per cent of the offers for men carried age restrictions. According to a recent Germany enquiry <sup>2/</sup>(June 1954) into unemployment among older workers in the Federal Republic, 51.5 per cent of the women without work were unemployed for reasons of age. In the case of men, the percentage was only 41.5.

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<sup>1/</sup> Older Workers seek Jobs. U.S. Department of Labor. Bureau of Employment Security. Washington, August 1951, reprinted 1953, page 8.

<sup>2/</sup> Die Arbeitslosigkeit der Älteren Angestellten im Bundesgebiet Anfang Juni 1954, Amtliche Nachrichten der Bundesanstalt, 26 July 1954, Nürnberg, page 482.

The age barrier often falls as low as 35 for women in occupations where men are accepted up to the ages of 40 or 45. Departures from this almost general trend occur only in certain typically female occupations such as the textile industry, or when there is a shortage of skilled labour or in occupations such as hospital services and domestic service, where the competition from younger workers is negligible. Furthermore, the age barrier rises and falls according to the requirements of the market and the supply of manpower.

It would appear that, broadly, older women workers are faced on the labour market with the difficulties attaching both to their age and to their sex, because in many countries and production sectors there is not only a prejudice against age but also a more or less concealed prejudice against female labour. This prejudice varies according to sector of industry and occupation and usually reflects either genuine difficulties arising from the inability of older women workers to do certain jobs, or a failure on the part of the employers to recognize the qualities peculiar to older workers. This deserves some elaboration.

What objection have the employers to older workers in general and to older women workers in particular? Is this prejudice justified? The following pages will attempt to answer these questions.

As a general rule, the results of various investigations and observations show that employers make the following principal complaints to justify their refusal to hire middle-aged workers of both sexes and the discharge of workers when they reach middle age: decline in performance (quantitative and qualitative), loss of adaptability and loss of physical endurance and speed. All these are important factors in many occupations in major industries or in occupations involving hard work, as well as in work organized on the assembly line principle and requiring great dexterity. Employers also often take the view that the risk of accident and disease involves additional expense, both for medical care and in the form of a fall in output due to the absence of older men and women workers from work.

So far as women in particular are concerned, the complaints are variously, according to occupation, lack of training and skill, character difficulties,

mental rigidity, special health troubles due to the menopause and even, in certain occupations, to loss of physical attractiveness and carelessness in dress.

We shall deal with these various complaints in turn, relating them to what is now known about the phenomena of senescence, and then to experiments conducted by industrial psychologists and also by business firms to enquire into the scope and limitations of the work of older workers of both sexes.

(a) Aging and aptitude for employment

One of the factors limiting the scope of activity of women in middle age is certainly the development of their aptitude for employment as affected by senescence. This term means the sum of the effects of all the infectious, physical, nutritional and psychological traumatisms accumulated over the years. <sup>1/</sup> How are the phenomena of senescence reflected in aptitude and performance? Have the changes which accompany increasing age an effect on occupational activity?

In reply to these questions, biologists, public health specialists, doctors and industrial psychologists as well as practical experiments show that age makes its inroads on each organ, function and person by no means uniformly - earlier or later according to the circumstances of life, working conditions and individual temperament. Hence there may be a considerable lag between a person's chronological age and his real age for occupational purposes. This fact alone suffices to demonstrate how arbitrary it is to lay down uniform limits on the ages of recruitment and retirement.

From the point of view of occupational physiology, certain studies <sup>2/</sup> show that it is the muscles, the heart and the sense organs which undergo some deterioration with age. But not all the muscles become atrophied at the same rate. Some are affected earlier than others, as for example the lumbar muscles

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<sup>1/</sup> Cf. Le travailleur âgé, ses problèmes médico-sociaux, by Dr. René Sand. World Health Organization, European Regional Office, Seminar on occupational medicine, Milan, 27 September-3 October 1953, EUR/SCH 8, 27 May 1953, page 1.

<sup>2/</sup> Cf. La physiologie du travailleur âgé, report presented by Dr. F. Bourlière at the three-day course on the scientific study of aging populations, held on 22-24 April 1948. Complete records, Fascicule V relating to the work of the labour organization section.

used most in heavy work, on which, incidentally women are rarely employed. This tendency is less marked, on the other hand, in the muscles of the forearm and hand, which are used in more delicate work requiring dexterity, skill and more advanced specialization. That is perhaps one of the reasons for the high proportion of middle-aged women among those employed on specialized work in engineering, for example. The cardio-vascular system is subject to deterioration at a comparatively early age, the individual's physical capacities being noticeably affected. Age also usually diminishes the acuteness of the senses, particularly sight and hearing. Because women have a greater expectation of life than men one might suppose that the point at which the phenomena covered by the term senescence begin to tell comes later in life in the case of women than in that of men. Allowance should, however, be made for the period of the menopause, which, at about the age of 50, often produces in women an unsatisfactory state of health for a time varying in length from one person to another. On the other hand, owing to advances in medicine and minor surgery, women are it seems less troubled than formerly <sup>1/</sup> by this physiological change, which is often counterbalanced, once the critical age is past, by greater physical and moral stability and greater resistance to a large number of minor diseases. Still, as will be seen below, it is clear that age is bound to add to the physical limitations which bar women of all ages from certain kinds of heavy work.

Biologists and industrial psychologists draw attention to another fact: on the one hand, the mental faculties are much less severely affected by senescence than the muscular faculties; and on the other hand, the more gifted a person is, the more chance he has of escaping the effects of senescence until an age which may sometimes be very advanced. <sup>2/</sup> Moreover, whatever the degree of physiological aging, its effects are not directly and in all cases reflected in a diminution of real occupational capacity.

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<sup>1/</sup> Reading Course in Executive Technique, section II, book 3, Special Problems in the Supervision of Women, by Elinore Morehouse Herrick, page 46. Funk and Wagnalls Company, New York.

<sup>2/</sup> Influence de l'âge sur l'activité mentale et psychologie de la sénescence, report presented by Dr. J. Dublneau at the three-day course on the scientific study of aging populations, op. cit., Fascicule III, work of the section dealing with the aging of the individual, pages 74-88.

The research carried out by the Nuffield Foundation<sup>1/</sup> in the United Kingdom shows how the human body behaves during the process of gradual deterioration that sets in at the beginning of the thirties and continues throughout the rest of the worker's life. It appears that when faced with a given situation the human body makes the best use it can of the machinery at its disposal; thus any defect in the mechanism of the body is at least partially offset by a change in the method of approaching and dealing with the situation in question. In terms of occupational activity, this process tends to enable the individual partly to compensate for his deficiencies by a change in method. Furthermore, a slackening of speed in the performance of certain work is not only not general among all older women workers, but is frequently more than made up for by improvements in the quality and precision of the work done. On the basis of the studies of the Société française de psychotechnique we can draw up the following balance sheet of the gains and losses which are attributable to senescence:<sup>2/</sup>

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1/ A.J. Welford: Skill and age. Nuffield Foundation, London 1951, IX + 161 pages.

2/ Cf. L'Emploi et le reclassement des travailleurs âgés. Les applications de la psychotechnique, report presented by G. de Beaumont and Mrs. Bresard at the three-day course on the scientific study of aging populations. Op. cit., Fascicule V, page 51.

<u>Level</u>	<u>Losses</u>	<u>Gains</u>
Physical	Flexibility, robustness	-
Sensory	Sight, hearing	Taste
Psychomotor	Manual strength and precision	Regularity
	Speed	
Intellectual	Distributed attention	Concentration and caution
	Memory, imagination	
	Creative spirit	Methodical habits
	Adaptability	
Moral	-	Punctuality
		Appreciation of finished work
		Care over detail
Affective	Sociability	Willingness
Character	Initiative	Patience
	Diligence	Discipline
	Energy	Prudence
	Vitality	Reliability
		Stability

From the foregoing we can gather how vast is the scope for the employment of older women workers in all skilled occupations which involve responsibility and require initiative, knowledge and experience, and how far this scope may even be increased, according to the type of post and standard of qualifications. This suggests that in many occupations vast opportunities of advancement for workers exist and that by reason of their age, middle-aged women workers and office workers possessing recognized qualifications and experience should have the benefit of these opportunities. In fact, however, while skilled and



experienced male workers have some prospect of promotion, the prospects for women workers are usually much more restricted. As a consequence, women workers have fewer opportunities of applying the qualities characteristic of middle age in an occupation.

The above table also explains the difficulties often encountered by older workers of both sexes in jobs where the principal requirements are strength and speed. According to a recent study<sup>1/</sup> by an investigator in the Nuffield Research Unit into Problems of Ageing, these difficulties are all the greater if the operation in question is governed by strict standards of performance involving time pressure or conveyor line work, or if it involves learning new reflexes or movements, or requires constant changes of bodily movement. Conversely, senescence has least influence in occupations and jobs which call for greater knowledge and care, and its influence becomes even less pronounced as the worker is given more latitude and scope in performing his duties. This shows how important it is for women who out of choice or necessity remain in employment for a long time to acquire sound occupational qualifications.

(b) Adaptability

Employers frequently complain that older workers in general have difficulty in adapting themselves to new machines or new working methods.

Admittedly, according to experiments by industrial psychologists, even an older person capable of a performance superior to that of his younger colleagues on account of his many years of experience and training, will take longer than the latter to learn new skills. Yet, during the war it was observed in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States of America that in practice a very large number of older workers were perfectly capable of learning new techniques, especially if the latter were connected with a trade with which they were already familiar and in which they could, to some extent, draw on past experience. It was also noticed that very often whatever narrow-mindedness was displayed towards the acquisition of new techniques was attributable more to character than to age.

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<sup>1/</sup> R.M. Belbin. "Difficulties of older people in Industry", in Occupational Psychology, October 1953, volume 27, No. 4, pages 177-191.

(c) Utilization of acquired qualifications and skills

Although the lack of adaptability is a factor to be allowed for in a study of the employment difficulties of older workers, it is equally true that the possession of sound qualifications and skills acquired over long years of occupational activity often makes up for the deficiency.<sup>1/</sup>

As shown by a survey carried out in 1950 in a number of firms in the United Kingdom<sup>2/</sup> this is the reason why many older workers of both sexes find it easier to do heavy work to which they are accustomed than to learn new jobs which call for adaptability. This explains the presence of so many older women in certain heavy jobs in the textile industry which they have held for many years. The experience of elderly women who do housework is another example. They owe their ability to cope with work which is often very tiring to the fact that they have always done it.

(d) Risks of sickness and accident

As a rule the risks of sickness do not rise until advanced age. They do not appear to be any greater in the case of women between 50 and 60 than in that of younger women. As stated above, disorders connected with the menopause are often counterbalanced by the increased powers of resistance acquired by many women who, once they have passed the critical age, are not so often absent on account of minor ailments.

It has also been admitted that the risk of accidents is smaller among older than among younger personnel. This fact is explained partly by the element of caution but also by the fact that as a rule not many older workers of either sex are employed on operations which involve the risk of accident. It is true, however, that while older workers are not more likely to have accidents, when they do occur accidents are often more serious and entail longer absences.

(e) Absenteeism

Whereas the rate of absenteeism in industry is usually higher among female than among male workers, various surveys of different authorship agree that as

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<sup>1/</sup> G. de Beaumont and Mme. Bressard: L'emploi et le reclassement des travailleurs âgés, op. cit. page 51.

<sup>2/</sup> The Employment of Elderly Workers. Report of a survey on the practices and experience of 400 member firms of the Industrial Welfare Society, London, 1950.

they grow older women are absent less frequently and for shorter periods than younger male or female personnel. According to the enquiry carried out in Belgium,<sup>1/</sup> to which reference was made earlier in this paper, some firms reported that unjustified absence was 75 per cent less among older employees (male and female) than among younger ones. So far as absence on account of sickness is concerned, according to a survey recently made in France,<sup>2/</sup> older female workers were generally not absent so often as younger ones, at least up to the age of 60 or 65, according to the occupation group concerned. Among skilled and highly skilled female personnel in business and transport undertakings the incidence of sick leave was reported as lower in the case of women over 50, and even over 65 years of age, than in the case of younger personnel. However, absences were reported as being more frequent among skilled and unskilled female operatives in the textile and metallurgical industries as from the age of 50 already. Possibly one should consider whether there is not some connexion between excessive work tempo and the frequency of absenteeism among workers suffering from abnormal fatigue.

The incidence of absenteeism for no valid reason is in all occupation groups and in all categories definitely lower than among younger female personnel.

(f) Aging due to occupational factors

It is not always without danger for older women workers to try to cope with the demands of certain types of work, particularly specialized piece-work or assembly line work or work done in a standing position. The frequently very arduous conditions governing work and performance in the major industries, in the metallurgical, engineering and textile industries often cause premature aging, due to the circumstances of the occupation, among the men and women who spend their working lives in these industries. This is a factor to be borne in mind in a discussion of the various handicaps barring middle-aged women from certain types of work or certain branches of industry. Some of these handicaps are mentioned below as examples:

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1/ Le problème de la remise au travail des chômeurs d'âge avancé, op. cit.  
page 13.

2/ Employment of older workers: Memorandum prepared by the Organization for European Economic Co-operation, dealing specifically with France, mimeographed document, 69 pages. Document No. (54) 05, scale 2, Paris, 29 July 1954.

Engineering and electrical industry

Work done in a standing position

Use of high-speed machines

Work calling for great keenness of sight and perfect control of movement

Assembly line work

Work to meet minimum group output standards

Chemical and rubber industries

Work done in overheated, premises saturated with gas and dust (nitrogen)

Work done in dark rooms (factories manufacturing photographic products)

Continuous shift-work in certain laboratories manufacturing pharmaceutical products

Handling of corrosive substances

Agricultural and food industries

Many very arduous jobs in sugar factories, breweries, refineries, distilleries, biscuit factories; often done in a standing position

Conditioning and packing work by the assembly line method

Textile industry

Work performed in a standing position and requiring arm-stretching

High speed work in the preparation of looms

Handling dust-laden materials

Work in a very humid atmosphere

Office work

Fatiguing work on calculating machines

Typing performed on an output basis

It seems that middle-aged women workers who have become unfit for high-pressure work or for work under unhealthy conditions ought to be able to find employment wherever automatic machines that are easy to handle or to control are introduced. In fact, however, it has been observed that employers prefer to hire unskilled girls who do not demand high wages. For example, in the Belgian textile industry, upon the introduction of new automatic winding

machines the operation of which involves no difficulty of adaptation and which are easy to run, employers tend to give preference to girls, whereas the work seems specially suitable for older skilled women workers.<sup>1/</sup> The same tendency has been observed in other occupations, especially in the printing and allied industries.

(g) The aesthetic factor

In some occupation groups, other factors influence the decision of employers to lower the age limits governing the recruitment of personnel. In the retail trade, for instance, in which a large number of women are employed, the aesthetic factor notoriously plays a very important part and the loss of youth and physical attractiveness is a serious handicap to older women workers. According to a survey made by the Public Employment Service of the State of New York,<sup>2/</sup> a saleswoman in the United States of America is considered old at 40, while a pattern designer of 60 is often given preference over her younger colleague. Age limits are less strictly applied in local and small shops than in the department stores or shops in the centre of the city. These limits are also relaxed according to the type of shop and the class of customer with which the saleswomen have to deal. The situation is similar in most countries on account of the traditional belief that customers wish to be served by young and attractive personnel. Yet this view often operates to the detriment of the real interests of the business concerned for it tends to ignore completely the needs of the large number of older women customers whose requirements and taste would no doubt be much better understood and served by staff of more mature age.

3. Experiments made in industry and commerce to enquire into the performance and aptitude for employment of older women workers

How are these various positive and negative factors reflected in performance and aptitude for employment? The examples given below show that, at least in

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<sup>1/</sup> Le problème de la remise au travail des chômeurs d'âge avancé, op. cit.  
page 20.

<sup>2/</sup> The Public Employment Service views the Older Job Seeker, by the New York State Employment Service. No Time to Grow Old, New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Problems of the Aging, Legislative Document, 1951, No. 12, page 97.

quality, the performance of middle-aged and older women workers is often superior to that of younger women workers.

According to a recent survey carried out in France,<sup>1/</sup> in 1,163 firms employing more than fifty wage-earners of both sexes, and including firms in the processing industries, power plants, commercial concerns and transport undertakings, the evolution of quantitative performance as related to age varies from one occupation group to another. It also depends on the worker's degree of skill. So far as women in particular are concerned, the decline in quantitative performance begins at about 50. The decline is specially marked among operatives in the engineering, electrical and textile industries, where it is common knowledge that the prevailing method is generally that of piece-work or the assembly line and where the operations are often performed by skilled and unskilled female operatives who have to work standing up and at a very exacting tempo. Some jobs in the textile industry have not only to be performed in a standing position but also involve arm-stretching (for example, warping).

On the other hand, however, qualitative performance, so far from declining often improves with age. According to the same survey, in the case of business and administrative personnel the quality of women's work improves after the age of 50. The improvement is noticeable up to the age of 65, and even beyond that age in some occupations. In the case of skilled female workers, forewomen and supervisors, the quality of the work is superior after the age of 50 (and in some occupations up to 60 or 65) to that in the younger age groups. In the metallurgical and textile industries, the quality of the work performed by skilled and unskilled female operatives is better from 50 to 64, and from 50 to 59 in certain occupation groups, but poorer after the age of 50 in certain other occupation groups.

The same survey shows that for all categories of employees of both sexes in all occupation groups, workers over the age of 50 are more conscientious.

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<sup>1/</sup> Employment of older workers. Memorandum relating specifically to France, op. cit., pages 12 to 14.

Similar tendencies are reported by the Industrial Welfare Society<sup>1/</sup> which carried out a survey in the United Kingdom relating to male workers over 65 and female workers over 60. In the opinion of the employers who participated in this survey, elderly male and female workers have a stabilizing influence, are more reliable and conscientious, produce better quality work and while not so fast as younger people, work steadily throughout the day, which from the point of view of performance, compensates for the slower speed with which they do their work.

It appears, moreover, that in a number of department stores, experiments made with older personnel have been highly successful.<sup>2/</sup> For example, according to a survey made in the United States in twenty-two department stores, the performance of personnel aged 60 and over was at least equal, if not superior, to the average performance of younger employees. Moreover, the productivity of such personnel shows no downward trend up to the age of 80. Of the personnel studied, 76 per cent showed no physical or psychological deficiency.

4. Other factors to be taken into consideration

(a) Insufficient vocational training

While the prejudice of employers, which, as we have seen, is sometimes unjustified, is responsible for many of the difficulties encountered by older women workers on the labour market, it cannot be denied that the lack of vocational training on the part of female workers of all ages is another serious obstacle. If we consider the distribution of women in general over the various occupation groups we find that a very large proportion of them are now employed in posts for which an apprenticeship is not necessary. In the food industries, for example, women are mostly employed on handling or conditioning jobs done on the assembly line system, and in the metallurgical,

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<sup>1/</sup> The Employment of Elderly Workers. Survey of the Industrial Welfare Society, op. cit.

<sup>2/</sup> The effectiveness of older personnel in retailing. Robert L. Peterson, Business Management Service. College of Commerce and Business Administration. University of Illinois Bulletin No. 607, 1954. 15 pages.

engineering and electrical industries, on skilled work performed on the assembly line system.

Now, unemployment statistics show that unskilled workers are most exposed to the vicissitudes of the labour market: the proportion of labourers in unemployment is often higher than that of skilled male and female workers.

The impact of this lack of skill<sup>1</sup> may be delayed for a long time. In the specialized occupations in the major industries women display a dexterity which is often superior to that of men because the women are more willing to do the same work continually. After a certain age this fact proves disadvantageous to them. Often, because under the trying conditions of this type of work, they age prematurely and are discharged when their output falls, and then find themselves on the labour market with no special qualifications to offer.

Surveys made in the United States, especially in the business and administration branch, illustrate this fact and show that once women, including those in the older age groups, have received occupational training they are better equipped to surmount the obstacles which prevent them from obtaining employment.<sup>1/</sup> There must also, however, be a certain manpower shortage in the occupation group in question. An enquiry carried out in France into trends in office employment likewise confirms that the lack of sound professional training in office work is one of the main causes of the difficulties encountered by older female applicants for employment.<sup>2/</sup>

A report on vocational guidance and training for women,<sup>3/</sup> prepared by the International Labour Office for the Commission on the Status of Women, draws attention to the often inadequate training received by girls before they enter the business world, and also to the quantitative and qualitative defects of the opportunities for training offered to girls and women. While substantial progress was made during the Second World War, mostly necessitated by an acute

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<sup>1/</sup> Older women as officer workers. United States Department of Labour, Washington, op. cit., pages 1 to 26.

<sup>2/</sup> "Unemployment among office clerks in France", Industry and Labour, I.L.O. volume VIII, No. 3, 1 August 1952, pages 146 to 149.

<sup>3/</sup> "Vocational guidance and training for women", International Labour Review, volume LXVI, No. 1, July 1952, pages 56-76.



shortage of manpower, the training opportunities, especially in the "mixed" occupations, are far from adequate and are not of the same standard as those offered to young men. This lack of training, which in itself is apt to cause difficulties for younger people, produces just as serious, if not more serious, consequences twenty years later when, in the case of women seeking employment, incompetence has to be added to the handicap of age.<sup>1/</sup>

(b) Lack of vocational guidance

Clearly, however, a satisfactory basic training is not a sufficient guarantee against unemployment for a woman who chooses an overcrowded trade or career. This means that, if the lack of professional training is a cause of unemployment which may not produce its effects for a long time, the same can be said of the lack of vocational guidance at the beginning of business life. Many girls, following certain fancies, choose trades or occupations which are already overcrowded or in which great changes are taking place. This tendency is met with in all occupation groups, and both in manual and office occupations and in the liberal professions. The predilection of girl students for arts courses, which (with certain exceptions) hold out fewer prospects of employment than others, has its counterpart in the influx of girls into office jobs. Patently, a person who chooses an overcrowded profession which has no future runs a greater risk of one day experiencing unemployment. At this point, the interests of the individual and those of society coincide. As was said in a recent survey made in Belgium, "the problem of old age is more than anything a problem of youth". It is a matter of regret that despite the wide variety of posts now open to women, so many working class families do not, for financial reasons, make for their daughters the sacrifices which they readily accept in order to enable their sons to become apprenticed to a skilled trade.

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1/ The position of women as regards one of the forms of training for skilled trades - apprenticeship - and certain causes which prevent them from taking full advantage of the training opportunities offered by apprenticeship are discussed in a report (cf. "The position of women and girls as regards apprenticeship") prepared by the International Labour Office for the present session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

2/ L. UVERGOELS, Le sort des travailleurs âgés. Report on the discussions of the Liège section of the Association belge pour le progrès social on the future of older workers in the Liège area. Le Progrès Social. Bulletin de l'Association belge pour le progrès social. Liège, June 1954, page 43.

(c) Existence of a category of untrained women who seek employment late in life

The special position of women who attempt to enter an occupation late in life illustrates the very serious consequences of the lack of training and guidance. As we have seen, the husband's death, divorce, inadequate resources and the rising cost of living are among the pressing reasons which nowadays impel many women without husbands, or married women with insufficient means, to try their luck on the labour market. Often, having formerly been dressmakers, saleswomen or office workers, they think that, because they were employed before marriage, once they have found a job they can, without too much trouble, begin working again. But the difficulties they encounter on the labour market are often as formidable as those confronting women without training or experience in the occupation in question. Their skill has been blunted and their experience has suffered. They have for long been out of touch with the business world. They are often unaware of their shortcomings or their possibilities, and tend either to overstate or understate them. On the employment market, they represent a labour force which is often ready to accept any wage and any kind of conditions of employment, regardless even of the rules laid down in collective contracts of employment and in the labour legislation. This shows how important this aspect of the question is not only for the women directly concerned but for workers generally.

5. A summing up

The evidence set forth above goes some way towards disposing of the arguments given by employers for their reluctance to employ older women workers, whom they regard as suffering from a lack of aptitude for employment. The evidence proves that in all skilled occupations, quantitative and qualitative performance is maintained, and even increases, until advanced age, and that in unskilled occupations only quantitative performance declines from the age of 50. It is undeniable, however, that in some occupation groups and undertakings the working conditions are so unhealthy or trying as to accelerate the aging of large groups of specialized female operatives. But irrespective of the occupation group or undertaking, the effect of age varies from one individual to another and hence age cannot be treated as an objective test for the purposes of employment or dismissal.

Practical experience would therefore seem to confirm the opinions of biologists and industrial psychologists. When confronted with difficulties attributable to age, most women endeavour to overcome this drawback by exercising increased care and meticulousness in their work. Moreover, from the standpoint of vocational experience, the assets which come with age represent a further positive element which should be taken into account, for the good not only of the persons concerned but also of the community.

The fact that employers themselves have supplied concrete evidence testifying to the often arbitrary nature of chronological age limits is inconsistent with the recruitment practices which they apply more or less universally. It seems that they do not fully draw the inference which is inescapable in practice, except in the case of highly skilled women workers in an occupation group where in any case there are no younger candidates.

All the other special difficulties encountered by middle-aged women workers on the labour market would seem to be attributable to the one or other of the following factors:

1. The majority of the women employed in industry work as specialized or unskilled machine operators in posts that call for speed and endurance, dexterity and keen faculties - precisely the qualities that are blunted with age. The introduction of new and more easily operated machines, instead of benefiting the specialized workers who have been worn out by the job, often prompts the employer for wage reasons to recruit untrained girls.
2. In the case of women with higher qualifications, the fact that they do not enjoy opportunities for advancement within the undertaking on an equal footing with men constitutes an obstacle to their reassignment to equal or better positions once they are older.
3. The majority of women, whether in industry, office work or commerce, have not received sufficient vocational training in their youth, a circumstance largely accounted for by a traditional attitude towards the employment of women.

4. In some occupation groups, such as retail trade, and even in certain office positions, insistence on the aesthetic element is so great that middle-aged women find themselves at a disadvantage in the labour market to a degree unknown by aging male workers.

5. Many women seek employment late in life, or after a long period of inactivity, without possessing the necessary skills or qualifications.

## MEASURES TO FACILITATE THE EMPLOYMENT OF OLDER WOMEN WORKERS

As has been noted in the foregoing sections of this report, the employment of older women workers is governed and limited by many complex factors. These to a large extent are determined both by the population trends and by the course of economic and industrial development. Accordingly, measures to improve the employment opportunities of such workers will have little effect on a labour market saturated with younger workers; on the other hand during a period of economic expansion and labour shortages, they may prove effective in gradually developing conditions favourable to the regular employment of older women workers and affording them, if equally qualified, equal employment opportunities. It will be possible to ensure wider employment of older women workers **only** to the extent that employers' prejudices - which, as has been seen, are often unjustified - are broken down, that the individuals concerned are aware of the possibilities open to them, and, furthermore, that the limitless vocational opportunities are better distributed throughout the labour market and within the individual undertakings on the basis of each worker's aptitudes and abilities.

Clearly, then, an improvement in this situation can be expected only if action is taken by both public authorities and private initiative, by employers and trade unions, and by women's organizations and will depend on the attitude of the persons concerned. Such action will be considered below under the four following heads:

1. Measures to be taken by undertakings to overcome obstacles to the recruitment and employment of older women workers;
2. Measures to be taken by placement and training services to assist older women workers seeking employment to find the job best suited to them;
3. Legislative or other measures to remove prejudice, educate public opinion and promote the employment of older women where as part of a General Labour Policy;
4. International aspect of the problem.

1. Measures to be taken by undertakings, civil service departments and commercial establishments

(a) Age limits and pensions

Various suggestions have been made for overcoming the difficulties raised by the age limits for recruitment imposed under pension schemes. In the United States some firms have expressed their readiness to employ older women workers if they agreed not to participate in the pension fund or undertook to defray the higher cost of their participation in the pension scheme themselves. A similar proposal was made in the United Kingdom by the National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women which made the following comments:

"In our opinion a satisfactory basis for working out the individual solutions will have been established once employers and workers accept the principle that an employee, entering on a new pensionable job after a certain age, is entitled to the superannuation benefits related to the actuarial value of the contributions paid by him and on his behalf for the period of his service with the firm - and no more. If this were accepted, it would usually follow that for entrants above that age modified pension terms could be fixed to give the employee the actuarial value of the payments actually made by him and on his behalf without involving the employer or the fund in additional costs." 1/

These proposals, however, place the workers at a disadvantage by either affording them less protection in their old age or ~~none~~ at all, or by placing what may be a heavy financial burden on them. Accordingly other solutions have been sought. For example, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs of Great Britain and Northern Ireland<sup>2/</sup> has **suggested that clerical and administrative workers should be permitted to transfer their pension rights when changing their jobs.**

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1/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women, op. cit. page 34.

2/ Economic Opportunities for Women: Older Women Workers, op. cit., page 38.

Lastly, it has been suggested that compensation should be paid from public funds for any losses sustained by employer-operated pension funds by engaging persons above the usual age limit for admission to the fund.

(b) Re-classification, re-assignment, transfers, special arrangements, special workrooms.

Depending on the branch of activity, the type of job and the individual concerned, some women workers may find it hard after a certain age to hold a job which has become too difficult for them, because of the stamina and speed it requires. This problem may be solved at the industry and undertaking level and by action on the part of the competent personnel services, where these exist. In the opinion of a United States specialist in the employment problems of older workers,<sup>1/</sup> management must **realize** the need for a large-scale redesigning of jobs so that the full potentiality of the older worker may be maintained.

There are two possibilities: the older woman worker may be retained in her job without difficulty if special arrangements are made, or it may prove impossible to keep her in the same job and consideration should then be given to her re-assignment elsewhere in the undertaking in order to avoid dismissing her.

It would seem from what is known today about the mechanism of acquired abilities and the adaptation problems of older persons in general that it is usually better in the interests both of the undertaking and of the individuals concerned, to allow older women workers to continue as long as possible to perform the same job with the requisite alterations and adjustments, such as the provision of seats at the proper height for the job, and of glasses for work; the reduction of working hours and the introduction of breaks; the introduction of alternative work putting less pressure on the employee or of minor changes in equipment.

In practice, adjustments of this kind are made in many undertakings. The French survey already referred to noted many examples in France of adjustments or reductions in work schedules in printing plants, boot and shoe factories, mechanical and electrical engineering enterprises and in the food industry

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<sup>1/</sup> Solomon BARKIN. - Jobs for Older Workers. Journal of Gerontology, Vol. 7, No. 3, July 1952, page 429.

In addition, part-time employment, which is still rarely met with in Europe, is widely practised in the United States and in the United Kingdom in the case of women in all age brackets, but more particularly, it would seem, in that of women over 30-35 years of age. Since the part-time employment of women is the subject of another report submitted by the ILO to the Commission on the Status of Women it will not be discussed in detail here.

In applying the solution of re-classification, the procedure to be followed differs considerably, according as the woman concerned is a skilled employee or worker or a specialized or unskilled worker. In the case of the former, such knowledge and experience as they may have acquired must not be allowed to go to waste. This can be done by giving the woman worker a similar post involving supervisory or advisory functions or the training of young people and by not putting her in an inferior job. In view of the present conditions for women workers, this solution can obviously be applied only in those industries where women occupy really skilled jobs requiring certain training and experience. Examples of this are certain skilled jobs in the textile industry and in the leather and hides (leather goods) industry, particularly in countries where these industries are famous for the quality of their production. In France for example the supervisors of apprentices are frequently selected from among the best workers. Similarly, in the fashionable dress-making establishments in Paris, older workers are particularly prized as instructors of young employees. It would seem that in other branches of industry too, women should be able to find wide opportunities for promotion in jobs of this type - opportunities which have hitherto rarely been taken. In the hotel trade, for example, supervisory and inspection duties could be given to middle-aged women who have spent their lives in that field. This practice could also be followed in commerce, although hitherto most posts of this kind have here been **traditionally** held by men.

Other problems arise in the re-classification of women workers and employees who throughout their lives have performed specialized or unskilled work. In such cases, it would seem better to assign these workers to jobs requiring less endurance, speed or physical effort.



According to the survey made by the Industrial Welfare Society,<sup>1/</sup> re-assignment to light work would seem to be fairly widely practised in the United Kingdom. A relatively high percentage of women over sixty years of age are assigned to such work: 53 per cent in the textile industry, 49 per cent in the food, drink and tobacco industry. The actual numbers involved, however, are not large: 193 women sixty and over engaged in light work in firms employing a total of 10,476 women of all ages; fifty-three women in the food, drink and tobacco industry, employing a total of 7,647 women of all ages.

It would seem, from the recent French Survey<sup>2/</sup> already mentioned, that in certain undertakings in France older workers are usually given jobs as maintenance men, storekeepers or caretakers. With more particular reference to women, the following are some examples of the type of work to which they are assigned:

Chemical industry: packaging.

Food and agricultural industries: scraping and cutting of casings.

Textile industries: burling and hackling of textiles, handlers  
(transporting cloth) Bundlers (putting yarn in bundles  
before and after dyeing) in dye works; sorting of wool  
in sheep wool processing mills

Garment-working and fabrics processing: hand-finishing in the lingerie and  
dress-making industries; control and  
inspection of goods; linters.

It can be seen that the type of work involved is not always easy or pleasant. Since older women are often prepared to accept any kind of work, care should certainly be taken to ensure that employers, on the pretext of giving them a job or retaining them in employment, do not invariably assign them to work which no other employee is willing to perform.

Another scheme which would help to encourage the employment of older women workers is the establishment of special workrooms in which working conditions can be adapted to the needs of older workers. In a sugar refinery in the Ardennes (France), for example, the older women workers are all employed

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<sup>1/</sup> The Employment of Elderly Workers, op. cit., tables.

<sup>2/</sup> Employment of Older Workers, - O.E.E.C. memorandum, op. cit.

in a packing room, in a spinning mill they work together in a burling room; in a cigarette-paper factory the older women are assigned to the rag-sorting rooms. However, the establishment of special workrooms for older women workers is not always advisable, particularly when the experience of older workers is useful in the training of younger employees.

(c) Role of personnel and health services

It would be desirable if by developing mechanization, increasing the number of machine-tending jobs and perfecting the use of automatic devices in many types of maintenance work greater opportunities could gradually be created for employing older workers in many tasks and occupations which do not require the specific abilities of workers in the prime of life. But for any systematic re-classification of older workers on the basis of such a development it is essential to have the collaboration, within each undertaking, of qualified personnel services and more particularly, of staff counsellors and welfare workers and in very large undertakings, of company physicians and psycho-technical experts.

By making a thorough study of the jobs in each particular undertaking and their requirements in terms of physical exertion, moral qualities, physical and mental capacity and acquired skills, these services will be able to foster a more rational and equitable distribution of jobs on the basis of individual abilities. Hitherto, studies of this kind have been directed mainly towards the evaluation of jobs for the purpose of fixing wages or production schedules. They should be directed more towards ascertaining which jobs are especially suitable for older workers and towards evolving practical solutions which might help to facilitate their employment, such as changes to be made in machines, tools, production schedules, working hours, rest periods, and pace of work.

In a large United States bank,<sup>1/</sup> the personnel services devised a method of using mechanical processes so as to make it possible to employ older women workers without previous experience. Once again it should be noted that the problem was to alleviate a labour shortage in a minimum of time.

<sup>1/</sup> Older Women as Office Workers, United States, Department of Labour, Women's Bureau, Washington, 1953, pp 27-37.

The importance of personnel services however, cannot obscure the essential role of industrial medical services and medical officers, whose responsibility it is to ascertain whether older workers are satisfactorily placed in a job suited to their health and physical capacity. The introduction of periodical medical examinations after the age of forty, similar to those given in some occupations, would make it possible to avoid in time the risks incurred by women workers in poor health or employed in jobs too strenuous for them. These examinations should cover the heart, the senses, and the pelvic organs. The medical officer's efforts should be supplemented by a systematic attempt to organize the work in the undertaking with a view to distributing the jobs among the staff according to their vocational and physical abilities. Apparently however, much still remains to be done in this field, since it is the policy of the personnel services of most undertakings and civil service departments to recruit new staff to fill vacancies as and when they occur, rather than to take the opportunity to make internal re-assignments which would increase the possibility of giving each individual the job for which he was best fitted. Moreover, the medical officer should be familiar with the jobs in the undertaking and their requirements; otherwise, on discovering inaptitude or poor health, he may be led to recommend dismissal unnecessarily. This indicates how great is the need for close co-operation between the medical and the personnel services of large undertakings.

In France under the Decree of 27 November 1952,<sup>1/</sup> the duties of industrial medical services include responsibility for supervising the fitness of workers for their jobs, the adaptation of work techniques to human physiology, and time studies. In addition, the company medical officer must be consulted in working out any new production technique and his opinions taken into account. That is a legislative provision which may play an important role in preventing the premature aging and the physical wear and tear which have been shown to affect large numbers of skilled workers and machine operators.

(d) Wages

As men and women grow older, the disparity between their average wages undoubtedly tends to increase. This disparity is largely due to the fact that very few women are advanced to higher posts while men with equal qualifications

<sup>1/</sup> Decree No. 52-1263 of 27 November 1952, containing provisions for giving effect to the Act of 11 October 1946 respecting the organization of industrial medical services. ILO Legislative Series 1952, Fr. 3, page 5.

have much greater opportunities of gradual promotion to more skilled jobs. That is one more reason for recommending the increasing advancement of women workers to higher posts.

Furthermore, the continued employment of older women workers, whether through re-assignment or transfer or on a part-time basis, raises problems of wages and of social security, the solution of which lies with the labour inspection services and in the application of collective agreements. It is essential to ensure that on the pretext of providing employment for older women workers, the differences in wage scales which women workers still encounter in most countries are not further accentuated. Though outside the scope of this study, the problem is closely linked to that of the employment of older women workers, and clearly should be considered with due regard to the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value enunciated in a convention (No. 100) and a recommendation (No 90) adopted by the International Labour Conference in 1951.

Rules which offer an equitable solution of the problem of the remuneration of older workers whose efficiency has fallen too low owing to their age are generally to be found in the collective agreements such as exist in certain large industries, for example in the United States. In France, the study<sup>1/</sup> already referred to indicates a fairly wide variety of solutions, the essential feature of which is generally a system of employment on a piece-work basis, supplemented in some cases by bonuses where the wage is obviously inadequate. For example, under the terms of the collective agreement for the textile industry in certain Departments of north-eastern France, a special wage scale is established for each individual case after consultation with the staff physician, the works council and the Inspector of Labour.

Another arrangement which may be mentioned is that followed in a French automatic box factory where older workers are re-assigned to easier jobs while retaining their previous salaries.

<sup>1/</sup> Employment of Older Workers. O.E.E.C. memorandum, op. cit.

2. Measures to be taken by placement and training services

(a) Placement and vocational guidance

The employment services may play a vital role in effectively helping unemployed older women to find suitable employment, and in assisting women who are trying to resume work after a long period of inactivity.

Experience has shown that the measures appropriate for the placement of workers generally, which have been set forth in Convention No. 88 concerning the organization of the Employment Service,<sup>1/</sup> are also most suitable for the placement of older workers and that, if the latter are afforded special attention by the placement services, it is relatively easy to direct a certain number of them to suitable employment. Two fundamental principles which govern the placement of all workers are especially applicable in the case of those who, like older workers encounter special difficulties on the employment market: firstly, each case must be studied individually; secondly, the problem must be considered from the point of view of what an older worker is capable rather than incapable of doing. These principles, which apply equally to men and women, do not however, exclude the need, in the interests of the persons concerned, to determine medically the disabilities and counter-indications limiting their sphere of activity.

In order to carry out their task in accordance with these principles, the staff of employment services must be trained in the use of the special private interviewing techniques which the psychology of older workers requires and must be familiar with the special problems of these workers. In the United States the staff responsible for the placement of older persons must have, in addition to the qualifications usually required in such services, a good knowledge of the special incapacities of older workers, of insurance law and practice and of the labour requirements of the various occupations in relation to the possibilities of older workers.

The staff of employment services must also have wide experience of the technique of analysing occupations and classifying them in "families", according to similarity of the skills and knowledge required. This technique makes it

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<sup>1/</sup> See article 6. See also Recommendation No. 83 concerning the organization of the employment service.

possible to correlate the individual abilities of applicants and the requirements of the available posts and, if necessary, to direct to other, more suitable occupations workers whose capacity and qualifications no longer correspond to those needed for their usual jobs.

Employment service personnel may also be called upon to assist the employers themselves in determining how best to distribute their staff within their undertakings. This collaboration is particularly important for undertakings whose size does not warrant the establishment, within them, of the highly-developed medical, social and psycho-technical services which, as has been seen, play a primary part in promoting the retention in employment of older men and women workers.

In order to carry out these complex tasks, employment services must have a basis of sound technical documentation covering the possibilities of older women workers in relation to the requirements of the various major occupation groups. They must have up-to-date information on the employment problems of older women workers, the changes in industrial techniques affecting those workers and the creation of new occupations or employment suitable for middle-aged women. It may be mentioned in that connexion, that there exist lists of occupations suitable for older persons whose working capacity has decreased, which are made available to the personnel responsible for placing such workers. Because of these lists, however, there is the danger that officials may neglect to ascertain the real abilities of older applicants and confine themselves to directing them to posts in which those abilities are not fully used or merely to traditionally female occupations. The lists have the further disadvantage of creating the false impression that the range of occupations open to older persons, and more particularly to older women, is necessarily confined to the limited number of occupations in the lists. For these reasons, the United States employment service has declared itself to be opposed to them. Nevertheless, they could be very useful if they were to take into account the positive experiments of gerontologists on the working capacity of older persons and the present trend towards abolishing the traditional distinction between so-called women's activities and male occupations.

Although the work of employment services with regard to older workers should be carried out through qualified personnel, familiar with the special problems encountered by these workers and with their potentialities, it is nevertheless unnecessary to provide for separate special services for this purpose. A special placement service for older women workers set up at Zürich proved a failure because the women said they did not want to be dealt with separately.

On the other hand, the success of the work of personnel responsible for the placement of older workers usually depends on the time they are able to devote to extending their contacts with the applicants and their negotiations with employers. This fact was brought out in the United States during a special study made at five large New York placement offices. Twice as many workers, both men and women, aged 45 and over, could be placed if the persons to whom their cases were assigned could devote more time to advising them, appraising their skills, directing them towards appropriate employment and consulting employers about vacant posts which might suit them.<sup>1/</sup>

In Canada the best results were registered at the preliminary stage of consultation, through an experimental advisory service for unemployed older workers set up at Toronto under the public employment service. In the first year of its existence, it dealt with 1,234 applications for employment, 105 of them from women. Fifty-three of these women succeeded in obtaining jobs, 31 of them through their own efforts. The important feature of these consultations was that the officials concerned were required to investigate not only the occupational skills of the candidates, but also their personal interests and leisure occupations, in order to discover any latent abilities which might be turned to good account in terms of employment. This experiment, which was extended to other Canadian towns, proved the usefulness of preliminary advisory services in any attempt at placement. Such services are especially useful for middle-aged women who seek work after a prolonged period of inactivity and who are often reluctant to apply directly to the public placement services. They

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<sup>1/</sup> "The Public Employment Service Views the Older Job Seeker", in No Time to Grow Old (New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Problems of the Aging, 1951), pages 97-118.

could give these applicants the necessary preliminary guidance in the vast range of activities and possibilities open to women, while preparing them to take a realistic view of their position and, in certain cases, to accept the idea of undergoing training or re-adaptation.

Apart from the assistance they give to older men and women workers, employment services also have an important part to play in combating the discrimination from which such workers often suffer unjustly. It is their task to enlighten employers, to convince them of the possibilities of older workers and especially to show them the advantages of selecting staff on the basis of qualifications, rather than of age. In the United States, employment service personnel have specially prepared material they can use for this purpose - pamphlets, folders and texts of speeches and radio and television broadcasts, to be given to employers. The same method is used in other countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom, where the employment services have the task of detecting and combating employers' prejudices against older workers.

(b) Vocational training and retraining

The question of the retraining of older men and women workers has hitherto received little attention, as most official programmes for adult vocational training are planned mainly for younger workers. In the United Kingdom, a certain number of men and women aged 60 and over have been given training for new types of employment, but this programme formed part of the Industrial Rehabilitation Scheme.

As stated earlier, however, there are a number of women who seek re-employment after a prolonged period of inactivity: for them special arrangements are necessary. Such arrangements are particularly difficult to put into effect as most of these women are outside the scope of the employment services and try to manage through their own efforts. As we have seen, the establishment of specialized services, stressing preliminary guidance and consultation before attempting placement, would perhaps encourage such women to apply to employment services and would thus tend to alleviate the problem.



Generally speaking, these women seek employment in offices or shops, many of them having done some work of this kind in their youth, but they meet with unforeseen difficulties, especially in the form of competition from qualified women who are younger or of the same age. Their presence on the labour market helps to accentuate the low esteem in which older office and shop workers are often held and to worsen working conditions in these branches. This shows the importance of affording them opportunities of taking training and refresher courses.

Such a solution, however, cannot be very effective whenever there are large numbers of young qualified women unable to find employment. It can be considered only on a national or local basis, having regard to the long - medium-term labour market conditions.

In the United States, for example, in order to alleviate certain labour shortages and in towns where such shortages were acute, training and retraining courses were planned for older women seeking office work.<sup>1/</sup> Originally organized on an experimental basis in five cities by the local State Employment Service, with the support of the interested women's organizations, these courses were subsequently extended to several States. The employment services were instructed to select for these course applicants aged 35 and over who seemed likely to benefit by training in typing and stenography. One of the principal benefits from the experiment was that it enabled the women concerned to overcome their lack of self-confidence, which predisposed them to accept wages and posts not commensurate with their abilities. Most of them found suitable work as shorthand-typists, private secretaries, social workers, assistant librarians, etc.

In Switzerland,<sup>2/</sup> there are several retraining centres for former nurses and widows wishing to become family visitors. There is also a vocational school at Zürich for unemployed women garment workers. In Sweden, there is no special programme for the training or retraining of older women, but the Labour

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<sup>1/</sup> Older Women as Office Workers, United States Department of Labor, Bulletin of the Women's Bureau, No. 248 (Washington, 1953).

<sup>2/</sup> Information obtained by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women.

Market Administration has organized domestic science courses which are attended mainly by women between the ages of 35 and 55, while the Social Welfare Board has arranged courses of a much more vocational nature for training women between the ages of 35 and 40 to become family helpers. In an official report on assistance to widows and single women (Sweden, Official Report No. 36, 1952), it was suggested that women wishing to resume work late in life should be given the same benefits and training or retraining opportunities as physically handicapped persons.<sup>1/</sup> They should, in particular, be given State assistance in the form of grants, free equipment, family allowances where necessary, and loans repayable at their convenience.<sup>2/</sup>

### 3. Legislative and other measures

The existence of prejudice against older men and women workers not only calls for measures on the industry level and day-to-day action by public employment services, but also demands that the public authorities devote themselves seriously to overcoming this prejudice and increasing the employment possibilities of these workers. Moreover, the workers' and employers' organizations, women's organizations and private social, philanthropic and scientific bodies and institutions are in a position to support, to stimulate and even to guide such action through their own work. Some examples of measures taken or proposed in this connexion are given below.

#### (a) Legislative measures

The States of Louisiana and Massachusetts in the United States are virtually alone in having legislation prohibiting discrimination in employment on grounds of age.<sup>3/</sup> It would seem, however, that neither State has found it possible to implement that legislation effectively. Nevertheless by giving legal sanction to a principle which has been recognized as just, such a measure is capable of gradually effecting a change in public opinion.

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<sup>1/</sup> Information obtained by the International Federation of Business and Professional Women.

<sup>2/</sup> Statement made before the Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers of the ILO by Mrs. Svea Starrin-Reindahl, observer of the International Federation of Business and Professional Women.

<sup>3/</sup> See Discrimination in Employment State Legislation in 1950. The Monthly Labor Review, November 1950, Vol. 71, No. 5, United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Another approach to the problem on the legislative plane would be to require employers to hire a certain percentage of older workers. Although draft legislation on these lines has been introduced in a number of countries, it has seldom as yet been discussed by parliaments. In France,<sup>1/</sup> for example, a bill was submitted a few years ago inviting the Government to reserve 30 per cent of all temporary civil service posts for single women over 50. In Belgium,<sup>2/</sup> a bill submitted to the Chamber of Representatives in February 1953 provided that in firms employing not less than ten persons one-third of the posts should be reserved for employees over 35, in the case of women and over 45 in the case of men, on the understanding that their wage scale would correspond to their qualifications and length of service.

In the Federal Republic of Germany, a bill<sup>3/</sup> tabled by the Refugee Party provides for the mandatory employment of a certain proportion of wage-earning employees and professional workers in each undertaking. The bill was discussed by the Bundestag<sup>4/</sup> at the end of May 1954 and was referred for study to the appropriate parliamentary committee. The discussions showed that the Government and the majority in the Bundestag were opposed to the principle of compulsion and preferred action based on such measures as improved preliminary vocational guidance and the organization of training and retraining courses to enable applicants to brush up their knowledge, to readapt themselves and possibly to change their occupation.

Some collective agreements contain provisions designed to protect older workers against wrongful discharge or **reductions** in pay on grounds of age. In the Saar,<sup>5/</sup> for example, the collective agreements covering employees contain clauses protecting them against dismissal on age grounds. In the United States

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1/ Documents parlementaires de l'Assemblée nationale. Meeting of 3 August 1951 Annex No. 537.

2/ Chambre des représentants, 24 February 1953, No. 212.

3/ Behebung der Berufsnot der "älteren Angestellten.

4/ Deutscher Bundestag, 31st session, 26 May 1954, pages 1444 C-1458 C.

5/ Reply of the Saar branch of the International Federation of Christian Unions of Salaried Employees, Technicians, Supervisory Staff and Commercial Representatives to an inquiry from the Federation. Revue de la Fédération, Bulletin No. 2, June 1953, page 38.

of 2,425 agreements studied from this point of view, 247, or approximately 10 per cent, contain such clauses,<sup>1/</sup> which provide either for the mandatory hiring of a percentage of older workers in the undertakings covered by the agreement, or for the transfer of older workers to lighter work. In general, trade union organizations in the United States are opposed to any policy of age discrimination in connexion with hiring, dismissal or wages, the last of which must correspond to the work done. The unions favour the institution of medico-professional examinations which make it possible to determine objectively whether a worker's capacity has diminished on account of his age and whether he can continue his usual occupation.<sup>2/</sup>

We shall conclude these examples by noting that the principle of the mandatory employment of older workers is strongly opposed in most quarters. In Belgium, it is pointed out that if the proportion of older workers were established by law, employers would tend to dismiss a number of them whenever that proportion was exceeded. The result would be the opposite of what was intended.

Divisional labour inspectors in France have expressed the view that employers would be more willing to hire older workers or continue them in their jobs if they were granted certain benefits, such as tax reductions, the establishment of special compensation funds, and reductions in social welfare contributions; they have pointed out, however, that this last measure might hinder the recruitment of young workers.

Among legislative measures, mention should be made of assistance to unemployed men and women, in the form of manual or intellectual public works.

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1/ Unions and the Older Worker, by Albert J. Abrams, New York State Joint Legislative Committee on Problems of the Aging. Legislative document 1951, No. 12, "No Time to Grow Old", page 119.

2/ Unions and the Older Worker, Op.cit., pages 121-124.

For example, the federal law approved by the Swiss Parliament on 30 September 1954 on preliminary measures to combat economic slumps and to create employment stipulates that appropriate supplementary work and orders should be given to commercial and technical workers, to intellectuals and artists, and to middle-aged workers in all occupations.<sup>1/</sup>

Lastly, the public authorities should, as advocated by the Executive Board of the National Placement and Unemployment Office in Belgium,<sup>2/</sup> set an example by raising the age limits for the recruitment of Government and local administration officials. A similar recommendation was made by the National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women in the United Kingdom,<sup>3/</sup> where some departments have raised their age limits on recruitment to 60 years in some occupations - typist and telephonist, for example.

(b) Public information and research

A flow of information to the public at large, to employers and to the authorities concerned is essential not only to break down the prejudices which impede the employment of older women workers, but also to make known the results of conclusive experiments carried out in various branches of industry which employ older women workers or employees. Hence the importance of studies and research which may help to shed light on various aspects of the problem of the employment of older workers, and more particularly, of older women workers.

In Canada, a special effort was made by the national authorities to inform the public and employers through the National Employment Service and **branches** of the Department of Labour. This campaign consisted of radio talks and personal contacts with employers by National Employment Service placement officers, and journalists and members of the cinema industry were invited to participate.

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1/ Feuille fédérale, Berne, 30 September 1954, page 455.

2/ Première contribution à l'étude du problème du vieillissement de la population et de l'emploi de la main-d'oeuvre âgée by M.L. Reneau. Le Progrès social, Bulletin of the Association belge pour le Progrès Social, June 1954, page 31.

3/ National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women, Op.cit. page 40.

A film entitled "Date of Birth" was shown to about 60,000 business executives and has been seen by an estimated 200,000 persons.<sup>1/</sup> According to the Adviser to the National Employment Service,<sup>2/</sup> this campaign has already begun to produce results.

In the United Kingdom, the central services of the Ministry of Labour and National Service have endeavoured, by means of a general propaganda campaign accompanied by consultation on a nation-wide scale, to persuade employers to keep their older workers in employment even beyond the normal retiring age, when possible to do so without affecting the work. They have also urged employers when recruiting staff to be guided by the applicants' qualifications, rather than by their age. The local labour exchanges make their contribution to this campaign through their individual contacts with employers.

In addition, the British Government has set up a National Advisory Committee on the Employment of Older Men and Women to advise the Minister of Labour on his policy in the matter. The first report published by this Committee in October 1953 defines the problem as it existed in the United Kingdom and describes the measures taken up to that date. In the private sector, the work of the Nuffield Foundation and the surveys made by the Industrial Welfare Society show how thoroughly the question is being studied in the United Kingdom.

Information campaigns on the general question of older workers have also been undertaken in other European countries. In France, for example, the results of a sample survey carried out at a number of undertakings in all branches of industry throughout the national territory, have just been published. In addition, the National Demographic Institute has for some years been publishing studies and works on the question of the aging of the population and on its implications from the point of view of employment. Mention should also be made of the seminar on the scientific study of the aging of the population which was held in Paris in 1948 and at which papers were read on such questions as problems of the organization of labour in undertakings according to the aptitudes of older workers.

<sup>1/</sup> The Problem of the Older Worker. The Labour Gazette, Vol. LIII, No. 2, 15 February 1953, pages 213-214.

<sup>2/</sup> Job Counselling for Older Workers, The Labour Gazette, volume LIII, No. 8, 15 August 1953, page 1137.

It is in the United States and Canada, however, that the problem has received most attention from the public authorities, universities, research institutes, trade unions, specialists and private organizations. Here too, the question of older women workers and of single women seeking employment has been the subject of some special studies, although these have as a rule been, confined to office work and the retail trade. There can be no doubt that, to be fully effective, information campaigns, like the work of employment services and business personnel offices, must be based on specific research into the ever-changing requirements of industry and the qualities of the various categories of labour in relation to these requirements. Such research should include reconsideration of the possibilities opened to older women by modern industrial developments. It would be especially useful to try to determine short- and long-term employment trends, so as to enable better **guidance and training** to be given to young girls on the threshold of life. Such research should be undertaken, in the first place, at the national level, by the statistical services of the Ministry of Labour in each country.

Attention should also be drawn, however, to the value, on the international plane, of the work and research carried out for some years past by the International Association of Gerontology, which publishes a review devoted to the problems of senescence and whose congresses are attended by all the specialists in the field. Professional and other women's organizations also have a special part to play. An example of this is the enquiry which the International Federation of Business and Professional Women conducted among its members on the question of older women workers; the results of this enquiry have indicated certain useful factors in the study of the problem.

(c) General labour and social welfare policy

Wider participation by older women workers in occupational activities can be considered only within the framework of a general policy of national labour distribution. It will inevitably be influenced by demographic and economic trends in each country, and other factors, such as the existence in some countries of more or less extensive unemployment, will also have their effect.

Basically, however, it would seem that for any solution of the problem of older women workers, vocational training for women must be radically expanded so as to cover new opportunities, while taking into account the many occupations and professions already open to women. The competent technical services, especially the public employment services, will also have to keep abreast of trends and developments in occupations and techniques which present opportunities for older men and women workers. They must make a constant effort at all levels to adapt the infinite occupational possibilities of older men and women to the infinite job possibilities and openings in modern industry.

Finally, an attempt will have to be made to eliminate, wherever they exist working conditions and production schedules which, by ignoring the health and normal powers of resistance of men and women workers, accelerate physiological aging and lead to premature vocational incapacity. Such measures will inevitably facilitate the application of a general policy designed to ensure the best use of the labour force in relation to the jobs actually available.

#### 4. International action

The problem of older workers has already been studied by several international inter-governmental bodies.

##### (a) European inter-governmental organizations

The Brussels Treaty Organization, for example, has interested itself in the question of the employment of older workers in relation to the aging of the European populations and has recommended the following measures: collection and distribution of information; revision of staff regulations and job lists with a view to facilitating the placing of older workers; introduction of special methods and timetables and of better conditions of work; provision of separate workshops; changes in retirement schemes; and removal of all practical obstacles to the engagement of older persons.<sup>1/</sup>

Examining the problem from the standpoint of superannuation and the possibilities of employing workers aged 60 and over, the Council of Europe, at its Consultative Assembly of May 1954, made the following recommendation

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<sup>1/</sup> Collective Report prepared by the United Kingdom on the Employment of Older Workers. Brussels Treaty Organization. Social Committee, page 8.



stressing the social aspect of the problem of older workers:

"The possibility should be opened for older workers to continue their work if they so desire, through an appropriate organization of the working processes, so that the skill of these workers can be utilized, with due consideration to their physical abilities and without danger of overstrain. They should not, however, be forced to continue their work by any direct or indirect means, such as, for example, the raising of the ordinary pensionable age." <sup>1/</sup>

The aging of the European populations and its effect on the social security schemes and production capacity of those countries have also been examined by the Organization for European Economic Co-operation. In January 1954, the Organization addressed to its member countries a memorandum in which it considered the standpoint from which the question of older workers could be studied in co-operation with other competent international bodies, and invited its members to furnish any useful information on the problem as it existed in their respective countries.

(b) The ILO and the question of older workers

The International Labour Organisation had already begun to concern itself with the question of the employment of older workers before the war. As indicated earlier in this text,<sup>2/</sup> it had at that time included the question: "Discrimination against older workers" in its agenda. The preliminary report prepared by the International Labour Organisation on the subject was submitted to its Governing Body at its session in October 1938. Owing to events the matter was shelved for a long time and it is only in the last few years that demographic and social developments have again made it a question of vital importance to that body.

Thus, at its session in May 1954, the ILO Advisory Committee on Salaried Employees and Professional Workers examined the question of unemployment among these categories of workers. The basic report drawn up by the ILO for the Committee included a special chapter on the question of unemployment among older

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<sup>1/</sup> Council of Europe, Consultative Assembly, text adopted at the 6th regular session (Part I), page 3.

<sup>2/</sup> See Introduction.

workers. On concluding its work the Committee adopted a number of recommendations on this question. In them it draws attention to the fact that "special attention should be devoted to the problems of older women who are seeking employment for the first time or after a long interruption." "In particular, measures should be taken to ascertain the needs of these women and the possibilities for their employment, to organize suitable vocational facilities for them, and to extend job opportunities." Some paragraphs of the resolution adopted, which concern older employees generally recommend for example ensuring to unemployed non-manual workers additional jobs within the framework of development projects which have been undertaken for the purpose of action against unemployment, for instance the compilation of statistics ~~the~~ classification of archives, the preparation of catalogues, surveys and maps; spreading information on the favourable results obtained by employing older workers; organization of vocational training and retraining courses for older workers, with a view to enabling them: (a) to maintain and improve their professional ability and knowledge in order to meet the requirements of jobs open to non-manual workers; (b) to readapt themselves when they seek to change their employment after they have been given proper counselling. The resolution considers that when the conditions of admission to a pension fund hamper the employment of older workers, it would be desirable, in some countries, to envisage special measures which would allow for such difficulties to be overcome; such, for instance, as, the maintenance of rights of acquisition and the inter-availability of pension schemes.

The International Labour Organisation has also included the question of the retirement age on the agenda for its next European regional conference which is due to be held at Geneva in January 1955. The report drawn up by the International Labour Office to be used as a basis for the discussion, examines in particular the question of fixing the retirement age with reference to the employment possibilities of older workers. A chapter is devoted to the study of employability according to age and another to measures likely to facilitate the employment of workers who have reached retirement age.

As part of its research work, the International Labour Office has also made a study of the various aspects of the problem of the employment of older workers. In the June 1954 issue of the International Labour Review it published a summary of the question, defining it in relation to present-day economic and population trends and emphasizing its social and human aspects.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Examination of the difficulties encountered by older women in obtaining employment shows that many complex problems are involved. In the first place, a distinction must be made between two main categories of older women workers: women who have been continuously engaged in paid employment since their younger years, and women who have never had paid jobs or gave up their jobs when they were first married and are obliged to look for work late in life. While the former are accustomed to employment and have directly utilizable experience, the latter have lost contact with the working world and any skills they may have had have generally been blunted.

Moreover, the situation varies considerably from country to country. It would seem that the problems associated with the employment of older women workers arise in an acute form only in countries which have reached a certain level of economic development. Among these countries, a further distinction must be made between countries in which the whole female labour force is required to meet the needs of expanding industry, and countries where older female workers find it difficult to obtain employment. In view of the diversity of circumstances, it is difficult to draw any generally valid conclusions.

Finally, the question is in itself extremely complex. In order to define it with reasonable accuracy, it would be necessary to establish a number of correlations which alone would make it possible to determine the characteristics that make the employment of older women a special problem, distinct from those of the employment of older men or of women in general. The difficulty of making these comparisons is increased by the fact that comparable data for similar dates in various countries and for various groups of men and women workers are generally not available. Similarly, if we try to discover the trends in the employment of older women over the last twenty or thirty years, we are hampered by the inadequacy of the data for earlier years. All these difficulties could only be overcome by thorough, and inevitably time-consuming, research.

### General background of the problem

Before analysing the special aspects of the problem of older women, we should consider it in the context of the manpower position in general and of

trends in the employment of women. In the first place, one is struck by the contradiction between the existence of unemployment specifically affecting both men and women workers above a certain age but below retirement age, and the movement in favour of the raising of retirement ages. The latter is explained by the desire to reduce the social burden which aging imposes on the working population, owing to the increase in the number of persons over retirement age. Unless the number of employment opportunities is increased, it is clear that the continued employment of workers over retirement age may be reflected in increased unemployment among younger age groups. The solution of the dual problem of the re-employment of older unemployed men and women and the continued employment of older workers can thus only be envisaged within the framework of a dynamic expanding economy.

A number of factors which affect the employment of women in general must also be taken into account i.e. the increasing employment of women in several countries where until recently female employment was not on a large scale; the gradual disappearance of the distinction between female and male occupations, particularly in countries where there is a shortage of labour; finally, the multiplication, as a result of rationalization, mechanization and the development of the tertiary sector, of jobs requiring little physical or muscular effort which can therefore easily be carried out by women.

#### The employment of older women - general characteristics

The special position of older women workers must be considered against the background of this general development. The position varies considerably: the employment of older women has increased in some countries, but has declined in others; in some countries, the ratio of older women to older men has remained relatively stable but has substantially increased in others. On the other hand, there has been a fairly general increase in the proportion of older women in the female labour force. Moreover, it appears that generally speaking the ratio of older women to older men is higher in agriculture, domestic service, the textile industry, administration, health and hospital services and the professions. The greatest number of older women are employed in office work, industry (in particular textiles) and retail trade.

### Unemployment among older women workers

With regard to unemployment, it is found that in countries where there is specific unemployment of older workers, it affects older women workers more than male workers in the same age groups, although it does not seem to be of longer duration for women than for men. In examining the data, it must be remembered, however, that a substantial number of women, particularly those returning to the labour market after a relatively long break, seek employment on their own initiative and are not included in the unemployment statistics.

### Difficulties

The main difficulty for older workers is the existence of age limits either for engagement or separation. In many occupation groups, age limits for engagement or retirement result from the existence of pension schemes. If employers take on workers over a certain age, they have to pay larger contributions to the pension fund; the fact that contribution rates are often higher for women than for men aggravates the difficulty. So far as separation is concerned, the retirement age is often lower for women than for men. The fact that age limits for recruitment create more difficulties than age limits for the cessation of employment does not need to be stressed; the latter do in fact constitute a form of social progress which it is to be hoped will spread increasingly to all classes of men and women wage-earners.

Even outside the occupation groups covered by pension schemes, it may be noted that age limits for recruitment seem to be applied more frequently to women than to men. Similarly, the age barrier is applied to women earlier than to men. In order to justify these practices many employers assert that the performance and working speed of older workers are lower, that they are less adaptable, that they are more liable to illness and accidents and, so far as women workers in particular are concerned, that customers like to be served by young and attractive staff.

Research into the effect of aging on aptitude for employment and performance shows that the effects of age are felt differently according to the organ, function and the individual and according to living and working conditions and temperament.

Physical strength, acuteness of the senses, speed of work and the power of adaptation undoubtedly tend to diminish with age. Furthermore, working conditions and performance patterns in many branches of modern industry, especially on assembly-line work or piece-work, often wear out the workers prematurely. On the other hand, older workers have several advantages: the skills they have acquired, their stability, patience, regularity, sense of responsibility, and the body's faculty to compensate the handicaps due to old age on some other level or by a change in methods of work. The more, too, a worker carries out skilled work requiring care and intelligence, the less he feels the effects of aging. Even when he cannot meet production standards, full advantage may be taken of his abilities by transferring him and giving him a supervisory job or one in which he will train younger workers. Finally, the liability to illness and accidents does not increase appreciably until a relatively advanced age.

These general factors have a particular effect on the employment of older women. In industry, most of them are skilled workers or operatives operating machines which require speed and endurance, dexterity and acuteness of the senses - faculties which are often blunted by age. These losses are aggravated by the fact that in these jobs working conditions are often tiring and the body is worn out faster.

Moreover, very many women in industry, offices and commerce have received only an inadequate vocational training when young. Consequently, they do not possess the sound qualifications which might compensate for the handicaps due to age. This is particularly true of most women who enter business late in life or who seek to re-enter paid employment after many years' absence.

The branches of employment, such as retail trade or certain office jobs, in which the aesthetic factor is, rightly or wrongly, an argument against the employment of older women workers are precisely those which, from the point of view of the aptitudes required, would often be likely to suit older workers. It is fairly generally noted, too, that most employers in all occupation groups prefer to recruit young girls, whose wage requirements are less, to fill the lighter jobs.

Lastly, even when women have high qualifications, the fact that they do not have the same prospects of promotion within the firm as men is an impediment to their transfer to equivalent or better jobs with supervisory or training duties as they become older.

### Measures within undertakings

Various measures have been advocated to surmount the employment difficulties encountered by older women.

First of all, where the existence of pension schemes impedes the engagement of older workers, it has been proposed either that the workers concerned should forgo membership of the pension scheme or that they should themselves bear the increased cost resulting from their entry into the scheme at a relatively advanced age, or else that they should agree to draw only a reduced pension on their retirement, computed on the basis of the contributions actually paid by them or on their behalf into the pension fund. Under yet other proposals the State would compensate the employers for the increased cost resulting from the employment of older workers. Lastly, it has been recommended that measures should be taken to permit the preservation of rights in the process of acquisition and the co-ordination of the pension schemes in force in different occupation groups or undertakings.

The retention in employment of older men and women workers may be made easier in various ways. Experience shows that so far as possible it is preferable to take advantage of the experience acquired by the worker concerned by retaining him on the same work through material improvements (e.g. giving him a chair) or employing him part-time, the latter solution being used fairly widely in some countries for older women workers.

If, however, transfer to another job is found necessary, it would seem that it would be as much to the interest of the firm as to that of the persons concerned for older women with sound qualifications to be transferred so far as possible to supervisory or training jobs in which they could turn their experience to account. Where skilled or unskilled female operatives can no longer keep up with the speed of production, it has often been found useful to employ them in separate workshops where they are not required to satisfy the same output standards, or to transfer them to lighter jobs.

This implies the application within undertakings of an elastic policy with regard to the assignment of jobs and even, possibly, an elastic policy concerning the adaptation or reorganization of the work in keeping with the capacity of the labour employed. A policy of this kind is conceivable only if the personnel,

medical and psychotechnical services of the enterprises are well acquainted with the requirements of the various jobs as well as with the capacities and state of health of the workers employed. In this connexion the importance of job analysis combined with periodical medical examinations, especially after a certain age, should be stressed.

So far as possible, the principle of equal pay for equal work should be applied in the re-assignment or transfer of older workers. However, it may be observed that certain employers supplement the wage computed on an output basis with bonuses when the older workers' capacity for work is definitely diminished.

#### Function of employment services

The public employment services have an important function in guiding and helping older women workers on the employment market. They would probably be most likely to attract women who have difficulty in finding work by developing vocational counselling services. Special separate services would not be required, but it is important that the officials dealing with older employment seekers should be versed in the special problems generally encountered by them. In seeking employment for older women workers they should take into account the qualifications and experience each may possess rather than the handicaps due to old age. This indicates the importance of personal interviews with every older female employment seeker, supplemented, if need be, by a medical examination to find any reasons against particular employment. It also indicates how important it is that employment bureau officers should be well acquainted with the various trades and with changes resulting from technological progress, so that they can decide which of them, as being less exacting, may suit older workers. For this purpose they should have ready access to the latest documentation on the subject. They should also be given sufficient time for frequent contacts with the workers concerned and for approaching employers. In the course of these interviews with employers they can try to dispel the misconceptions and prejudices on which the bias against older workers too often rests and, if need be, help the employers to find jobs in their undertakings likely to suit older workers.



### Vocational training

The organization of courses of vocational training for older women might also be very useful. Hitherto few experiments along these lines have been tried. The main difficulty rests in the fact that many older women, especially among those who enter the employment market late in life, seek office jobs, whereas this sector has an abundant supply of young and well-qualified labour. It hardly seems wise in fact to organize training for overcrowded occupations. Accordingly, any attempt to train older women workers should be directed towards trades or occupations in which the women have a real likelihood of finding work.

### Encouragement to employ older workers

Various methods have been proposed to encourage the employment of older workers. In certain States of the United States discrimination based on age has been declared illegal. Although a prohibition of this kind is difficult to enforce, it may have a salutary effect by drawing the public's attention to the problem. In other countries, it has been suggested that employers should be compelled by law to employ a certain proportion of older people, but this suggestion is meeting with strong opposition. A solution which some find preferable would be to encourage employers to take on older workers on a voluntary basis and grant them tax reductions and relief from social security contributions. Such measures in favour of older workers should not, however, prejudice the recruitment of younger workers.

The authorities might set an example by raising or abolishing certain age limits and by taking on older men and women workers as is already the practice, particularly in the United Kingdom, in the case of telephone operators and typists.

Lastly, publicity campaigns by means of films, broadcast talks and the like intended to eradicate prejudice about older workers and to encourage their employment wherever possible have already had some success in some countries. Such campaigns should be based on a sound knowledge of industry, of technological progress and of the extent to which it is leading to changes likely to facilitate the employment of older workers. This implies research, which should also bear on general trends in employment and on the range of occupations open to women workers,

so that girls may receive better vocational guidance. In several countries it has been undertaken with good results not only by the authorities but also by private institutions, women's organizations and the like.

#### Preventive measures

If the evil is to be eradicated, action should relate to younger as well as to older women. If young persons are discouraged from flocking into over-full occupations in the offices and commerce, which often hold out no prospects, overcrowding in these occupations will be avoided, to the advantage of the older women workers, who will then no longer be debarred from employment as a matter of course. At the same time, the attention of girls should be drawn to the many new vocations open to women and to the importance of sound vocational training for steady employment throughout their working life.

Lastly, the more effectively men and women workers are protected against working conditions which in the long run impair their health, the smaller is the risk they will run of prematurely losing their fitness for employment. Similarly, the difficulties in adapting themselves to high and rigid output standards now encountered only too often by older workers, even though in the best of health, would be removed if those standards could be made more flexible.

#### International study of the problem

The problem of older workers in general is now arousing keen international interest, as is attested by the fact that several international organizations have emphasized its importance. The International Labour Organisation has been concerned with it since before the war and has already studied various aspects of the employment of older workers. It is pre-eminently a social question. As one of the problems of social justice, it comes within the context of the concern for improving living and work in conditions which are the starting point for all that agency's activities. Furthermore, the solution is inseparable from the achievement of full employment, which is one of the essential aims of ILO policy. Lastly, the question of older workers of both sexes cannot be separated from labour questions as a whole or from labour legislation. In the long run, the betterment of the circumstances of older workers will depend not only on what

steps may be taken for the immediate mitigation of the difficulties which these workers encounter but also on the solution of the problems of vocational guidance and training for young workers, on the evolution of labour legislation, on the development of the protection of workers and of social security - all of them questions with which the ILO has been concerned since its foundation. This should not overshadow the value of the work and discussions of the Commission on the Status of Women, for these are a reflection of the world wide interest in the question of older women workers and will help to illuminate some of its particular aspects.

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