

Productivity of women and retirees

Asia is aging, with the number of people living past the age of 60 increasing dramatically. Life expectancy is at an all-time high. Furthermore, those 85 years and older are among the fastest-growing segment of the population. Therefore a severe shortage of workers in the labor market is predicted by many experts, making it imperative to bring women and retirees back into the workforce. The APO study meeting on the Participation of Women and Retirees in the Workforce, Republic of Korea, 7–10 December, was the venue for experts on this topic and 12 participants to share experiences and practices in dealing with aging societies and their impacts on productivity. The Korea Productivity Center hosted the meeting.

Resource speakers and participants discussed the myriad problems and issues facing women and retirees actively considering workplace reentry options. The meeting found many consistencies among the participating APO member countries as well as the Republic of China, Republic of Korea, USA, and Australia from which resource speakers had been invited. The workforce landscape is changing with the prospect that the old will soon outnumber the young. Despite this, many aging countries still have compulsory retirement ages, and women's wages lag behind men's at an average of 78 cents per \$1.00 earned (in the USA).

The most compelling challenge facing women and retirees is a weaker attachment to the workforce, a phenomenon with profound economic implications. The attachment factor is a reflection of industry practices that often undervalue the role and contributions of female workers, essentially cutting them off from enrichment programs and opportunities. The meeting discussed how

to link women more strongly to the workforce and to strengthen connectivity with work. These are essential if workplaces are to be retooled to adapt to the growing number of older workers, increasing dependent to worker ratios, and productive aging.



Discussing how to bring women and retirees back into the workforce

The meeting highlighted the need to showcase best practices, i.e., workplaces that demonstrate exemplary standards for mature workers and that promote efforts to increase the participation of women and seniors in the workplace. It also underscored the importance of restructuring education and training opportunities to provide women and mature workers with opportunities to learn, acquire technological information, and pursue life-long learning.

Senior Policy and Research Officer Priya SaratChandran, Australian Human Rights Commission, recommended that the APO coordinate and conduct further research into these issues among its member countries and track best practices. SaratChandran called the meeting a success, saying, "It was an excellent and timely initiative from the APO in an area where many countries seem to be lagging behind." 