

Age- and gender-based differences in poverty and income inequality: a spotlight on older persons

Eradicating poverty and reducing inequality are two central goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. An area of concern on both fronts is whether the prevalence of poverty differs between women and men depending on their age—and whether each group faces different obstacles to overcoming poverty. Despite the 2030 Agenda’s call for data disaggregated by age and sex, there are few cross-country comparable estimates of the prevalence of poverty among older women and men. The main reason for this shortage is that most poverty estimates are based on data at the household level.

In the absence of individual-level data, this presentation will introduce a new set of relative poverty estimates by age and sex. The estimates, based on household surveys, show that older persons live more often in poor households than the working age population, as do children and youth, in both rich and poor countries with data. It also suggests that old-age poverty is primarily a women’s issue. Differences in living arrangements, place of residence, labour market participation and access to social protection affect this gender gap.

Gender differences in the prevalence of poverty are only one (very incomplete) dimension of inequality within different age groups. Estimates of disposable income inequality by age differ substantially between countries: inequality is higher among older persons than among people of working age in developing countries with data, but lower in rich countries. The presentation will address some of the reasons for the different trends observed in rich and poor countries.