

Improving the Lives of Older Adults in South Korea: Addressing Mandatory and Involuntary Retirement¹

Jan Marie Fritz 

University of Cincinnati 

Cincinnati, United States

University of Johannesburg 

Johannesburg, South Africa

Received: 29 June 2025

Revised: 22 September 2025

Approved: 11 October 2025

Abstract

This article examines mandatory and involuntary retirement in South Korea. Information is first provided about human rights in relation to employment. This is followed by a section with information about Korea and the older adults who may have faced mandatory and involuntary retirement. The next sections are about ageism in Korea and about some of the attempts to improve the employment situation of older adults: a training program for middle-aged adults, the work of the national human rights organization, the national attention given to reform efforts and the initiatives of the organization of retired people. The conclusion provides 11 suggestions about what can be done to improve the employment situation for older adults.

Keywords: Clinical sociology, South Korea, mandatory retirement, involuntary retirement, employment, older adults

¹ This research was supported in part by grants from the Korea Foundation (Seoul, Korea) and South Africa's National Science Foundation (Grant #150605). The author is particularly appreciative of the invitation from Professor Junsoo Hur (Soongsil University) to begin field work in Korea.

1. Introduction

It is well known that the Republic of Korea (South Korea) faces challenges given the aging population and the very low fertility rate. While a lot of attention and policy developments are directed at improving the low birth rate² (e.g., Lee & Yi 2025), there also has been some attention in the last few years to improving the lives of older adults.

The existing research about older adults in South Korea (hereafter “Korea”) has often focused on their difficult situation (e.g., Kang et al. 2022; Fritz 2024). This research provides an addition to that research.³ It discusses the current situation as well as some of the approaches being taken to improve the employment possibilities for older people in Korea.

A qualitative approach is used for this research. Qualitative research begins with general ideas and allows information gained through approaches such as interviews, observation and focus groups to influence further steps in the research process. While quantitative information is included in this analysis, the focus of this research is on information obtained through a review of relevant documents (e.g., published research, newspaper articles, important documents), interviews with the heads as well as other employees of Korean organizations, and observations while in Korea.

Information is first provided about human rights in relation to employment. This is followed by a section about Korea and the older adults who may have faced mandatory and involuntary retirement and then a section about ageism. The next section is about some of the attempts to improve the situation in Korea: a training program

-
- 2 According to McCurry (2025), “the conservative administration of the impeached president, Yoon Suk Yeol, has spent billions of dollars on measures to arrest the decline, including financial incentives for newlyweds and expanded child care assistance.” Paternity leave was extended, monetary incentives were in place if both parents take parental leave, companies were given monetary incentives to support childbirth bonuses and the government will pay new parents’ salaries when they are on leave from small or medium-sized employers (Lee & Yi 2025).
 - 3 There is other research that does not just focus on the difficulties. See, for instance, Kang and Ihara (2025) who discuss “the importance of promoting exercise as a potential strategy to mitigate the detrimental mental health effects of age discrimination.”

for middle-aged adults, the work of the national human rights organization, the national attention given to reform efforts and the initiatives of the organization of retired people. The conclusion provides 11 suggestions about what can be done to continue to improve the employment situation for older adults.

2. The Human Rights of Older Adults and Employment

There are a number of human rights documents that might be discussed in relation to aging, but many of them, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, only have general statements which might refer to aging. As Fredvang and Biggs (2012, p. 12) have noted, “No treaty offers older persons a tailored, comprehensive and binding protection of their rights.”⁴

It should be noted that Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) indicates, in part, that “Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment.” Also, the United Nations International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1995) indicates that it is “the right of everyone” to make a living by work which is freely chosen or accepted. And in 2005, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights wrote that “every individual has the right to be able to work, allowing him/her to live in dignity.”

Because aging is not dealt with in a specific way, the United Nations General Assembly, in 2010, adopted Resolution 65/182, which established the “Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing for the Purpose of Strengthening the Human Rights of Older Persons.” The Group’s mandate was to review the existing international documents regarding the human rights of older adults, identify any possible problems and present “**at the earliest possible date**” a proposal with

4 Doran et al. (2018, pp. 306–307) wrote that “starting from the 1990s and with increasing momentum in the last decade,” age has been mentioned in connection to important documents (e.g., general comments of the Committee supervising the Covenant on Economic and Social and Cultural Rights, a general recommendation of the Committee supervising the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and comments of the UN Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons).

“the main elements that should be included in an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons” (UN General Assembly 2013, p. 3). In 2024, the Open-Ended Working Group was abolished even though no convention – not even a draft – had been developed in the 14 years the Working Group was in operation.

The work for a possible convention has now been taken up by the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. Many human rights groups and non-governmental organizations as well as a number of countries hope this work will result in a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. One question, of course, is whether the human right to employment will be included in the document and, if so, whether mandatory retirement and involuntary retirement will be mentioned.

The UN’s Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons prepared a report in 2025 about older persons’ right to social protection and their right to work (Mahler 2025). She concluded:

An internationally legally binding instrument dedicated to the human rights of older persons will offer an opportunity to develop the content of older persons’ rights to social security and to work, and to explicitly ban age-based discrimination in all private and public sectors... Practices that are discriminatory on the basis of age, such as age limits in recruitment or mandatory retirement ages, must be abolished, ensuring that older persons can retire at a prescribed age if they wish to do so.

3. Older Adults in Korea

In 2023, Korea had an estimated population of 51.71 million (Statista 2024); that population is 92% urban with half of the population living in or around Seoul, the capital. Korea is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The population is very homogeneous; in fact, Korea is one of the most homogeneous countries. The age structure in 2023: around 10.9% of the population was from 0–14 years, 70.69% were between 15–64 years and 18.34% were 65 and older. In late 2024, Korea officially became a “super-

aged society”⁵ with the oldest category (those 65 and older) being 20% of the population according to Korea’s Ministry of the Interior and Safety (Seo & Lau 2024; Ji 2025).⁶ In the oldest category, there are more women than men. Life expectancy is estimated to be 81.2 for men and 87.2 for women. Korea has an aging population as well as one of the world’s lowest fertility rates.⁷

The Korean government has three branches: executive, judicial and legislative. The National Assembly has 300 members, and they are chosen by direct and indirect election to four-year terms. In the assembly elected in 2024 just 61 (20%) were women while men held 239 seats (Statista 2025). The average age of those elected to the National Assembly was 56.3 years and the oldest member is now 83 (Shin 2024).⁸

According to an OECD country survey about trust (2024a):

Koreans place more trust in other people (53%), international organizations (52%) and the police (42%) than in the national government (37%). Around a third of the population reports high or moderately high trust in the national civil service (36%), local government (35%) and courts and the judicial system (33%). Political parties (20%), national parliament (21%) and news media (30%) are the least trusted institutions.

Factors that might have affected the thinking about the national parliament could include a lack of action and the very problematic activities of some politicians.

Korea has both mandatory retirement and involuntary retirement. **Mandatory retirement** refers to the age at which individuals who

5 The United Nations “classifies countries with more than 7% of the population 65 or older as an ‘aging society,’ those with over 14% as an ‘aged society’ and those with more than 20% as a ‘super-aged’ society” (Seo & Lau 2024).

6 There are many super-aged countries. See the list provided by Voronoi (n.d.).

7 According to the CIA *World Factbook* estimate (2024), only Taiwan (1.11) has a lower rate than Korea (1.12).

8 According to Ha-Nee Shin (2024), “The oldest among the elected candidates is the Democratic Party (DP)’s big-name politician Park Jie-won, former head of Korea’s National Intelligence Service and a four-term lawmaker who will be serving his fifth starting in May.” Jie-won Park is now 83. There are many older representatives: eighty between the ages of 61-70 and four between the ages of 71-80 (IPU Parline n.d.)

hold certain jobs or offices are required by business, custom and/or law to leave their work.⁹ **Involuntary retirement** is a term that sometimes is used when there is a focus on the custom for workers to be forced to retire by their employers because of their older age

The Korean government introduced the Act on Prohibition of Age Discrimination in Employment and Elderly Employment Promotion (AEPA) in 1991. It is the primary law dealing with age discrimination. It stated that companies must try to provide a retirement age of 60 or above. In May 2013, this law was amended, and the recommended retirement age became an obligatory statute by 2016 (for companies employing 300 or more) and by 2017 (for organizations with fewer than 300 employees). AEPA's Article 4-4(1) "expressly prohibits employers from discriminating, without justifiable grounds, against individuals on the basis of age regarding recruitment and employment; salary, education and training; placement, transfer, or promotion; and retirement or dismissal" (Yulchon 2013). The AEPA "applies to virtually all employers..." (Agediscrimination.info 2023).

In September 2024, the Korean Ministry of the Interior and Safety extended the retirement age for public workers from 60 to 65 (Goover 2024). The Ministry entered a collective bargaining agreement with the public workers' unions, and the retirement age will be phased in based on the year of birth.¹⁰ Lim (2024:2) has made an interesting point about retired government workers:

Retired government employees in Korea enjoy a relatively advantageous economic lifestyle compared to retired employees in the private sector, as they enjoy job security before retirement and are paid a monthly pension after retirement.

9 Tampubolon (2025) has written: "Often, judicial reasoning is laced with implicit biases that normalize dependency and support restrictive measures, like mandatory retirement... institutionalized ageism is clear in laws that set arbitrary age limits for employment..."

10 According to Goover (2024), "The new structure dictates that workers born in 1964, who would previously retire at 60 years, will now retire at 63 years. Workers born from 1965 to 1968 will retire at 64 years, and those born in 1969 and later will have a retirement age of 65."

There is a debate in Korea about raising the minimum retirement age. Joong-keun Lee, 83, chair of the Korean Senior Citizens Association, thinks the age should be raised to 75 (Jin 2024). Gwak and colleagues (2025) have said raising it to 65 is one of three possibilities being considered. The other two are “maintaining the current retirement threshold but allowing employees to be rehired under new contracts or eliminating the retirement age altogether” (Gwak et al.2025). And ten individuals from organizations representing older adults and academic experts¹¹ announced at a press conference in May 2025 that they had been meeting for several months and reached a consensus that 70, at this time, is the appropriate age to be considered a senior citizen. They also “called for a new system that continually reviews and adjusts that age, taking into account factors such as health, public perceptions and economic participation rates” (KBS World 2025).

Korea has a **seniority-based wage system**; this system requires the basic salary to rise depending on the number of years one has worked for an organization. Older workers earn more money, and this can encourage an employer to release older workers and save money.¹² According to Kang et al. (2022), “the seniority-oriented wage system should be reorganized into a job-based wage system.”

As workers often were let go when they were in their 50s or even their 40s, it was expected that a new policy would extend the retirement age of workers and provide them with “minimum employment up to the age of 60” (Lee & Cho 2022). Lee and Cho (2022) studied the situation and found:

First, post the introduction of the policy, the probability of workers retiring at the mandatory retirement age has decreased, whereas the probability of workers retiring early for involuntary reasons in their 50s has increased. Second, the workers who were predicted to benefit from

11 According to Hyun-se Cho (2025), participants included representatives of the “Korean Association of Senior Citizens, Korean Gerontological Society, Korean Consumers’ Union, Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs (KIHASA) and several professors... The people who played a key role in this discussion were Professor Soondoni Chung of Ewha Womans University and Researcher Eunna Kang of KIHASA.”

12 In 1922, 165 petitions alleging age discrimination were filed.

the policy had trouble retaining their jobs until the legal retirement age of 60. These results demonstrate the possibility that companies attempted to terminate their senior workers before they reached the mandatory retirement age of 60 by means of recommendations to resign and offers of honourable retirement. In conclusion, we found that it is difficult to provide actual employment protection up to the legal retirement age by making it compulsory through legislation.

It should be noted that many employers who did not like having to keep employees until they were at least 60 put in place a **wage-peak system**. The Korean government “introduced the wage peak system for public institutions, and it also has been adopted by major companies in Korea” (LIN 2023). This system meant that wages were regularly deducted (rather than having raises) from an employee’s paycheck until the employee reached the required age of retirement. There have been a number of court cases challenging companies’ wage-peak systems.

Hayoung Lee, Haeun Kim and Huyun Shin (2021) wrote the following about the situation of older people in Korea:

The number of retired people in their late 50s and early 60s is growing fast in South Korea. In 2010, 24 percent, or 1.7 million people between the ages of 58 and 66 retired, compared to 33 percent, or 2.4 million people, in 2019...

The 24 percent who had retired often did not do this voluntarily. A 2019 survey cited by Lee, Kim & Shin (2021) found 76 percent of this early retirement was not voluntary. (Korean authors frequently use the words “involuntary retirement” to describe this situation.) The percentage of involuntary retirement was 83.1 percent for household heads. Almost 60 percent of retirees have been found to hope for reemployment for financial reasons (Lee, Kim & Shin 2021). The authors note, however, that “only a fraction of all retirees aged 55–64 succeed in reemployment, and those who do find new jobs tend to work in low-paying ones (e.g., janitorial, caretaking, and

building security services).¹³ Now, “for the first time in history, the employment rate for those 70 and over... has surpassed 30%” (Han et al. 2024), an 11.4% increase from the previous year (Tan 2024).

There are an additional number of interesting points to be made about the labor situation in Korea. First, there is a low rate of unemployment, although it is rising. In 2023, it was 2.3% (Cho K. 2023), in 2024 it was 2.8% (OECD 2024b) and in April 2025 it was 2.9% (Statistics Korea 2025). Second, 86.9% of workers in Korea do not have a labor union organization to represent them¹⁴ (Statista 2025). Third, the pension system needs to continue to be improved. The 2022 Mercer report on global pensions (Mercer CFA Institute 2022, p. 9) gave Korea a C rating. Mercer (p. 54) noted the following about Korea:

Korea’s retirement income system comprises a public earnings-related pension scheme with a progressive formula, based on both individual earnings and the average earnings of the insured as a whole, and statutory private pension plans. (Among the ways South Korea could improve the system:)... Improving the level of support provided to the poorest pensioners... (and by) increasing the level of funded contributions, thereby increasing the level of assets over time...

While Mercer’s 2024 report gives no details, it does say that Korea has improved its standing. Its rating now is 52.2 which is just below Taiwan’s rating of 53.7 but nowhere near the top ratings which were obtained by countries such as the Netherlands (84.8) and Iceland (83.4).

13 As noted by Tan (2024), “In 2024, individuals aged 70 and above comprised 5.6% of the total workforce, up from 5.1% in January 2023. Among the older workforce, around half of the individuals continuing to work beyond the age of 70 were aged 75 or above... representing 18.8% of the 75 and above age group.... The Ministry of Labour’s classification of ‘simple labourers’, denoting non-specialists requiring minimal training, encompassed 42.1% of the older workforce. Meanwhile, 29.6% were specialists in the agriculture, fisheries, and farming sectors.”

14 A number of the unions have made extending the retirement age a priority. These include the unions representing workers at Kia, Hyundai, Samsung Group affiliates, POSCO, HD Hyundai affiliates, and Hanwha Ocean (Park, J. 2023).

Retirees and even those who have not yet retired have mentioned problems regarding preparation for retirement. In fact, 52.5% of household heads and their spouses said they were not “well prepared for their old age” (Statistics Korea 2024). One problem certainly is the amount of income. Lee, Kim and Shin (2021) noted that Koreans usually start to receive a pension at age 60, but 49 is the average retirement age; this means that someone might not have sufficient income for 5–15 years.¹⁵

At one time Korea was what could be called a “family care society.” This family system supported parents who were older, and this can decrease the need for a strong national care system. In the last 30 years the family situation has changed. Older adults less frequently live with their children and the number of households of only one or two older people is increasing.

Korea’s “senior citizens remain mired in poverty” according to a 2023 article in *Yonhap* and the poverty of older adults “is always mentioned at one of the most urgent social problems when discussing the issues facing Korean society” (Kang et al., 2022). Households of only one older person are often mentioned as having the highest poverty rate.

According to a 2025 report from Statistics Korea, income inequality in Korea has decreased over the last ten years. By age, however, “the relative poverty rate among those aged 66 and older is the highest at 39.8% (Park, S. 2025). This is a .2% decline since 2020. Kang, Park and Cho (2022) discussed the seriousness of the income problem:

Korea maintains one of the world’s top 10 GDP levels while showing the highest elderly poverty rate among OECD countries. On average, OECD countries do not have much difference in poverty risk by age, but in Korea, poverty risk increases rapidly in old age. The poverty rate of senior citizens in Korea... stood at... more than three times that of the OECD national average of 13.8%. (It also should be noted that) poverty among

15 Kang Park and Cho (2022) wrote that the involuntary retirement at an early age is due to “corporate labor cost avoidance.”

the oldest , those aged 75 and over, is more frequent (55.9%) than among the younger old, those aged 65–75 (35.5%).

A soup kitchen in Dongdaemun, a district in Seoul, provides lunch for some 500 people a day with most of them being older adults. As a worker in the kitchen there is quoted as saying, “They can’t work, they can’t ask for money from their children and they can’t eat... so they come here” (Anonymous 2024)

Kang, Park and Cho (2022) have concluded:

For the elderly to escape poverty on their own is practically challenging, if not virtually impossible. In order to realize an inclusive society, the government’s social security policy and labor structure need to be reformed in concert with individual efforts.

4. Ageism in Korea

Ageism has been defined “as the stereotyping, prejudice about and discrimination against people on the basis of their age” (UNECE 2019). It is seen as “largely implicit, subconscious and unchallenged in our societies” (UNECE 2019). Ageism has been described “as a form of oppression deeply imbedded in social structures” (Krekula et al. 2018, p. 33) and Swift and her colleagues (2018, p: 41) stressed that ageism “remains a relatively accepted form of prejudice, deemed to be an inevitable part of the aging process.” In fact, a survey of 83,034 participants in 57 countries found that “at least one in every two people... had moderate or high ageist attitudes” (Officer et al. 2020).

Writing in 2025, Kang and Ihara said the following about ageism in Korea:

Ageism in Korea is on the rise, fueled by intergenerational conflict stemming from competition for resources in an increasingly aging society. The rapid growth of the older adult population is contributing to shifting intergenerational dynamics. This demographic shift creates social and economic pressures that strain relationships between generations, leading to increased prejudice and discrimination against older adults... This includes the perception that older adults are dependent and place

a greater burden on the next generation. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated ageism in Korea. Media portrayals often focus on the vulnerability and dependency of older adults, reinforcing negative stereotypes and contributing to their social isolation. This has led to a measurable increase in reported experiences of age discrimination... The 2017 Survey on the Human Rights of the elderly found that 86.4 % of young adults believe age discrimination exists in Korean society.

One incident in Korea in 2023 got a lot of national as well as some international attention. A photo was posted online of a Korean café with writing on the café door that said “No-senior zone (no entry for elderly over 60).” The *Korea Herald* article (Lee, J. 2023) about the incident noted that “the post comes amid growing concerns over public displays of intolerance in the South Korean society.”

Kang and Ihara (2025) have concluded that “age discrimination is a significant issue in Korea, and in recent years, the level of animosity towards older adults has become increasingly alarming.” The authors are concerned not only about attitudes toward older people but also that older people often internalize these problematic views.

5. Employment Initiatives for Older Adults

As one might expect, there are different kinds of programs that are meeting or trying to meet the needs of older adults in Korea. There are, for instance, HelpAge Korea’s services for low-income older adults which include activities to organize themselves and reach out to younger people; programs that provide meals for those in need; and initiatives that encourage acceptance and employment (Cho 2023, 2024a). Hyun-se Cho (2025), the president of HelpAge Korea, is very concerned about the very low number of low-income people that benefit from the current retirement system.

There also is Everyyoung Korea. Everyyoung is a technology firm that employs about 300 people who typically work 4 hours a day for 5 days a week. The company hires people 55 years and older; offers “senior-friendly benefits” (e.g., rewards for your 60th or 70th birthday, job placement training) and “the official retirement age is set at 100” (ASEM Global Ageing Center 2024).

The focus in this section is on four initiatives that are related to employment. They are employment training, human rights initiatives, national efforts including pension reform and the work of KARP, the national organization of retired people.

Sangsanguri's training for employment. There are vocational training centers for older people in Korea. Some have said they focus on “simple work” such as cleaning and janitorial work while many jobs will need advanced training. As Lee, Kim and Shin (2021) have emphasized: “An employment system that effectively matches capable, middle-aged workers with businesses that need their expertise is essential to solving... (employment) issues.”

One such initiative has been Good Jobs 5060 which was frequently mentioned as either led by or connected to Hyundai Motor Company. Good Jobs 5060 was a five-year program, aimed at those 50–60 years old, that was put in place by four organizations – Hyundai; Korea's Ministry of Employment and Labor; Seoul 50+ Foundation; and Sangsanguri Company, Ltd., a for-profit company that provides job training (Shin 2024). Good Jobs 5060 aimed to create 1000 jobs for those between 50 and 60 years of age. It did provide some 600 jobs. The five-year program ended in 2022.¹⁶

According to Lee, Kim and Shin (2021),¹⁷ the program established important partners and was able to achieve “collective impact success.” The most important factors: incentivizing potential employers, establishing a hiring intermediary (participants did not need to directly contact potential employers) and aligning skills with expectations (particularly important when dealing with small and medium-size companies).

Sangsanguri Company, Ltd., a partner in Good Jobs 5060, was put in place by Chul-Ho Shin, the CEO, in 2013. In 2024, it had 70 employees and operated in five locations. Sangsanguri (translated by the CEO to mean We Work Together) proposed Good Jobs 5060 and it continues to be one of the programs of his company (Shin 2024).

16 Interestingly, the website was still active in 2024 with its last dated material from 2022.

17 Sangsanguri's CEO Chul-Ho Shin is not the Shin who is a co-author of this article.

Sangsanguri is not the largest job training company operating in Korea. That company would be Ingeus, which is based in Singapore and operates in several countries. Both companies would be aware that “businesses with 1000 or more employees must provide training on life planning to involuntary retirees who are 50 years of age or older” (Shin 2024).

Sangsanguri has received a lot of attention. It was recognized for its social innovation by Hyundai Motor Company in 2015, operated a middle-aged employment academy under the Ministry of Employment and Labor in 2016, co-launched Good Jobs 5060 in 2018 and, in 2021, was discussed in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* and the Korean edition of Collective Impact Best Cases (<http://www.sangsangwoori.com/>).

The current aim of the organization’s programs is to provide education and job matching services for those in their 40s and 50s. As the organization’s website notes:

Seven out of 10 people are involuntarily retired, and the actual retirement age is getting lower, with an average of 49.1 years old. However, the upper age limit for their desired working age is 73. They want to continue contributing to economic development.

The organization operates a number of programs, but its primary project in 2024 was Second Life, a program begun with the Hana Financial Group for those who are retired. A participant in one of the organization’s programs such as Second Life, if paying for the participant’s own involvement, agrees to pay the first month’s salary to the training organization if the participant does find a job. According to Shin (2024), some 60% of participants do receive jobs.

The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK). Korea adopted several specific equality laws that prohibit discrimination in different areas of life and provide a framework for promoting equality for particular groups. Notable among these laws is the 2016 Act on the Prohibition of Age Discrimination in Employment and Employment Promotion for Older People (the AEPA). The act is supplemented by a constitutional equality guarantee, which prohibits “discrimination in political, economic, societal or cultural

life on account of sex, religion or social status”. Age is not expressly listed as a protected characteristic in the Constitution, but the term ‘social status’ is broad in scope and could be interpreted to include protection based on age.

In 2001, Korea adopted the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) Act, which established a national human rights institution mandated to promote and protect the fundamental human rights set out in the Constitution. Age is listed as a ground of discrimination under the Act (Shin 2023). However, according to a HelpAge International 2022 report, the Commission’s enforcement powers are limited, creating barriers to justice for older people. To understand this comment, it might help to know a little about the history of the Commission.

The Korean National Human Rights Commission (hereafter “the Commission”) has had a very difficult history (Shin 2023). The idea to establish the Commission was brought forward first by civil society in 1993. The idea looked promising during the presidential election in 1997 and the front-runner in the election, Kim Dae Jung, promised to establish the Commission. It took four more years to do so. It was established in 2001, but it “only had a certain level of independence.” The Commission needed to be an independent institution, but this was often challenged.¹⁸

The Commission has regional offices across the country, and, in 2022, it handled 10, 573 cases with the highest number of complaints (about 20%) coming from prisons. The Commission now has an “A” status but, according to the chairperson of the Board of Directors of the Korea Center for United Nations Human Rights Policy, the Commission “has a long way to go until it satisfies all the criteria of the Paris Principles” which include a broad mandate, independence, pluralism and adequate resources (Shin 2023).

18 In the years before the Commission was put in place, it was suggested that it be under the Ministry of Justice and the Commissioners all would be political appointments. Civil society always was active during difficult times (and there have been many) over the 24-year history of the Commission. The Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (n.d.) has an accreditation process that requires institutions to be effective and independent. The Republic of Korea is accredited at the A level.

One of the important contributions of the Commission in 2024 was that it developed a 63-page draft of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.¹⁹ Yookyong Park (2024), Assistant Director of the International Human Rights Division, distributed the draft to interested Non-Governmental Organizations while the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing was still in existence and it was discussed at a side event to the Working Group's 2024 meeting (Lee, D. 2024). This draft is particularly important because the UN's Open-Ended Working Group was mandated to develop a draft but never did so in its 14 years of existence.

The Korean draft document says the following about the employment of older people:

Article 18. Right to Work

1. State Parties recognize the right of older persons to decent work on an equal basis with others, without discrimination on the basis of age.
2. State Parties shall take appropriate measures, including legislation, to protect and promote the realization of the right to work. This includes:
 - a. Prohibiting discrimination on the grounds of age in all matters relating to recruitment, working conditions and social security;
 - b. Promoting flexible, supportive and inclusive work environments that cater to the needs and capabilities of older workers;
 - c. Ensure trade union rights for older workers, even after retirement;
 - d. Protecting domestic and care workers, informal laborers, especially older women and older migrants;
 - e. Protecting older persons from unhealthy working conditions and forced or compulsory labor.

National reform efforts. Cho, Lee and Woo in 2016 noted that older workers in Korea, "with lower educational levels, tended to work

19 The Commission wrote this draft while it was chair of the Working Group on Aging of the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (National Human Rights Commission of Korea 2023, p; 144-45).

off and on repeatedly because there is no proper security in both the labor market and pension system.” The authors wrote that Korea has “a three-tier security system with national pension, corporate pension and personal pension.” They said that people who “have a stable position and high income level” are entitled to all of the above pensions while “those with a low income level such as small business owners and irregular workers and the current generation of senior citizens, are not properly protected by any institution.” So, what changes have been proposed or made by the government?

It is true that the Korean government in 2023 proposed a plan to increase the cap on working hours each week to 69 from the current limit of 52. It has been said that the government proposed this because of pressure from business groups. Labor unions as well as younger and middle-aged workers strongly objected, and a government representative said it would take a new “direction” after listening to public opinion (Chen et al. 2023). The original plan was not put in place.

In September 2024, the Ministry of Health and Welfare had a campaign to “raise awareness of its efforts to create jobs for older adults and help improve perceptions of those who remain active in the labor market in the later stages of life” (Jung 2024). The one-week campaign was to help those seeking employment by introducing them to possible training opportunities and by offering incentives to firms for hiring them. The Ministry also was planning to “hold various online events to spread positive images of such workers” (Jung 2024).

In March 2025, the National Assembly did vote to reform the national pension system. It had been 18 years since the last reform. According to Kim (2025), this would “pave the way to delay the depletion of the pension fund²⁰ by nine years.”²¹ A big problem is that the number of national subscribers continues to decline (“due mainly

20 Other countries can have this problem. The United States, for instance, has an aging population and less workers who pay into the social security system. At this point, the system would not be able to pay full retirement and disability benefits in 2034 (Thomas 2025).

21 A Reuters (2025) piece written the same day as the one by Kim indicated depletion could be delayed 15 years.

to the low birthrate”) while the number of recipients (the “aging population”) is increasing (Jun 2025). The pension contribution rate “would be raised to 13 percent from the current 9 percent, which would make people ‘pay more, and receive more’” (Kim 2025). Kim (2025) wrote that the pension system was designed in 1988 to “address the high poverty rate among elderly people” but now there were concerns that “with the nation rapidly aging and its birth rate plunging” that young people would not receive pension benefits even though they had contributed to the system.

Cho (2024b) has concluded that the Korean government is “in the very early stages of responding to the issues of older people with a rights-based approach.” He also noted that the change has been very slow.

The Korean Association of Retired Persons (KARP). The Korean Association of Retired Persons was put in place by Myong-ryong Juch in 1996 while he was working in New York City (Juch 2023, 2024). He was impressed by the work of the American Association of Retired Persons and decided this kind of national organization was needed in Korea. KARP is a not-for-profit, non-governmental organization that serves those 50 and older. It began with 20 original members and has now some 200,000. Juch was successful in having the organization receive ECOSOC standing with the United Nations. He (Juch 2024) describes KARP as an organization that wants “to improve the quality of life of the young and elderly.” In fact, the organization gives out a t-shirt that says just that:

YOU, Young Old United!
 Building an Age-Inclusive
 Multi-Generational Workforce
 Living, Learning & Earning Longer
www.karpkkr.org

According to Juch, “KARP has been active in providing tangible services not only to its members, but also to communities as a whole.” It has a number of programs including seminars and workshops. There also are its expert committees and, a main interest of Juch, is the committee that focuses on employment research. He is interested

in “changing the perception of Korean society that forces people to retire permanently rather than engaging in motivated activities once they turn 50.” Among KARP’s slogans: “Growing with Age – Living, Learning and Earning Longer,” “Collective Voice, Collective Purpose,” and “Tap the Untapped Senior Workforce.”

Juch is an activist. He submits statements regarding government deliberations and actions. For instance, he has spoken against the seniority-based wage system (the policy of having automatic wage increases), and he also has proposed extending the mandatory retirement age by 5 years. (He sees this 5-year proposal as an interim step to increase or remove a mandatory retirement age.) Juch holds monthly seminars regarding issues facing older adults in Korea. The seminars he runs can include a speaker from KARP, academics, researchers and government representatives. He says the seminars are covered by the news media.

Juch is now 77. He has devoted 28 years to this organization. The organization is facing financial difficulties; there is no foundation, government or business support. While KARP charges 100,000 Korean won (about \$88) a year for membership, he estimates that only a very small percentage pays the annual dues. Juch provides personal financial support for the organization. In 2024, Juch was looking for a very committed leader who also thinks this is an important initiative and will continue to develop KARP. Juch thought that the lack of consistent financial support had not yet attracted the right someone to take this volunteer position.

6. Conclusion

Kim Ji-yeon, a researcher at the Korea Development Institute, has been quoted as saying: “Workers in their 60s these days are as healthy and capable as younger workers. And education levels among seniors today are much higher than 20 to 30 years ago” (Jung & Lee 2024). While the situation regarding senior employment is improving,²² it is still not what it needs to be.

22 The city of Daegu’s Ministry of the Interior extended the retirement age of “certain public employees – those in roles such as cleaning and facility management – up to 65 years” (and some companies are doing the same). Dongkuk Steel agreed with its

It is true that some of those with adequate pensions may not want to continue their employment and would be happy to be involved in voluntary activities. But many others think they need an adequate income, want the camaraderie²³ that can come with working and/or actually enjoy working and would like to continue their paid employment.²⁴ It is a human right to be able to work; older adults should not be forced to quit working solely because they have reached a certain age.

What are some of the actions that need to be considered to improve the situation for older adults in Korea?²⁵ There needs to be (1) more education for young people (and policymakers) to understand that mandatory retirement is a systemic, structural barrier that contributes to people thinking there must be something wrong with people when they have reached a certain age; (2) more training and more kinds of training opportunities (at little or no cost) offered to older people;²⁶ (3) easy access to job opportunities (full-time, part-time or gradual retirement arrangements); (4) a continuing campaign to create a

labor union to extend the retirement age to 62... (and) Hyundai Motor Company and POSCO... have introduced 'post-retirement rehiring' allowing workers to re-enter on contract after retiring at 60, for up to two years" (Jung et al. 2024).

- 23 Many older people who no longer work are lonely and depressed. Junsoo Hur (Lee 2023) has suggested that one model for addressing loneliness is having an official position – a loneliness minister – as is the case (since 2018) in the United Kingdom, and I have seen how a community-based communication model works to stay in touch with people in communities in the northern part of Sweden.
- 24 According to a Statistics Korea survey of older adults who are working, "The main reason for older adults to seek employment is financial necessity. Among those aged 55-79 who plan to work, over half (55.8%) stated they intend to delay retirement to make up for insufficient pension income. Additionally, many cited 'enjoyment of work' (35.6%) and 'boredom' (4.3%)" (Han et al. 2024).
- 25 Claudia Mahler (2025), the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, and Human Rights Watch (2025) also have developed lists of what they think needs to be done. Human Rights Watch makes recommendations for the National Assembly, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Employment and Labor, as well as the Ministry of Health and Welfare.
- 26 Lee Seug-hee, a researcher at the Korea Development Institute, said "We need a system that matches seniors with companies where they can utilize the expertise they've built over 20 to 30 years. To do this, the government should expand retraining and job programs for retirees" (Koh 2024). And an OECD (2024c:8) report indicated that Korea should "channel... some of the funds that are currently used for direct job creation programmes to... training, especially for youth and older jobseekers."

general understanding (with enforcement) that age discrimination is not acceptable; (5) elimination of the seniority-based wage system; (6) elimination of the wage-peak approach; (7) sufficient pensions and security for all older people (not just for those who had more education or high-paying, secure positions in large organizations) that are enough to support those who live a long time; (8) forceful statements from organizations representing older people that say the organizations oppose mandatory²⁷ and involuntary retirement; (9) ways identified to receive continuing direct input from older adults concerning problems as well as opinions about relevant policy development and implementation; (10) remedies for the fact that women's pay is generally less than men's pay²⁸ particularly given that women will live longer;²⁹ and (11) mandatory and involuntary retirement need to be eliminated. Politely mentioning that the age of retirement should be raised a few years is not enough. We are dealing with a human rights issue.³⁰ Mandatory and involuntary retirement need to be called by their names; these discriminatory practices need to be clearly seen as unacceptable policies/practices and revised policies as well as adequate enforcement efforts need to be put in place.

Korea needs to address the issues of poverty and isolation of older citizens, deal with ageism as well as ensure that older adults who want to work can have adequate paid employment. In order to

27 In 2023, the head of HelpAge Korea wrote that his organization “helps low-income older people (and that) the discussion of the mandatory retirement system is not currently our priority” (Cho, H. 2023). And the assistant director of the Human Rights Division of the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea (Park 2023) wrote that to her knowledge her organization has not made any statement regarding mandatory retirement. She also indicated she did not know of any organization in Korea that has announced it is for abolishing mandatory retirement.

28 According to Choe (2025), the “gender-income gap” in Korea is “the widest among developed countries.”

29 A number of these kinds of suggestions and additional ones are in the OECD's *Working Better with Age: Korea* (OECD 2018).

30 According to Pace and Gabel (2025), “Commitment to a human rights-based approach appeared to have a stronger impact when integrated into domestic legislation, result in positive policy and programming outcomes, and potentially contribute to empowerment when incorporated into community action and organization.”

do this, the same kind of creative energy is needed that Korea has put into policy development and implementation to try to increase the number of Korean babies.³¹

References

- Act on the Prohibition of Age Discrimination in Employment and Employment Promotion for Older People (2016). January 27. https://elaw.klri.re.kr/eng_service/lawView.do?hseq=37583&lang=ENG
- Agediscrimination.info (2023). South Korea. August 31. <https://www.agediscrimination.info/international-age-discrimination/south-korea?rq=AEPA%20%E2%80%9C Applies%20to%20virtually%20all%20employers>
- Anonymous (2024). Japan and South Korea are struggling with old-age poverty. *The Economist*. May 2. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/05/02/japan-and-south-korea-are-struggling-with-old-age-poverty>
- ASEM Global Ageing Center (AGAC) (2024). The tech stage for the third act of life: Everyyoung Korea's vision for a life without retirement. August 28. https://asemgac.org/board/view?bd_id=at02&wr_id=217
- Chen, H., Soon, Y. & Raine, A. (2023). The country wanted a 69-hour workweek. Millennials and Generation Z had other ideas. *CNN Business*. March 19. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/03/18/asia/south-korea-longer-work-week-debate-intl-hnk/index.html>
- Cho, H. (2023). Personal communication from the president of HelpAge Korea. June 7.
- Cho, H. (2024a). Interview with the president of HelpAge Korea. May 21.
- Cho, H. (2024b). Presentation of the president of HelpAge Korea at an ASEM conference. August 16. https://asemgac.org/board/view?bd_id=fr02&wr_id=196

31 Yeonggwang-gun County, Jeollanam-do Province, for instance, has some 50 initiatives to increase the number of babies. These include “financial incentives for marriage, subsidized treatment for infertile couples, postpartum and newborn care expenses, gifts to congratulate birth and paternity leave payments” (Misun 2025). And the Korean government’s new pension reform gives “pensioners eligibility for a higher postretirement pay rate without contributing to the pension, as a reward for having their first child, through a 12-month ‘noncontributory credit period’ offered by the NPS. These rewards had previously been extended to families with at least two children only” (Son 2025).

- Cho, H. (2025). Personal communication from the president of HelpAge Korea. May 19.
- Cho, J., Lee, A., & Woo, K. (2016). A comparative study on retirement process in Korea, Germany, and the United States: Identifying determinants of retirement process. *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development*. 83/4:441-467. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091415016657556>
- Cho, K. (2023). Understanding S. Korea's bafflingly low unemployment rate. *Hankyoryeh*. November 24. https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/1117757
- Choe, S. (2025). Where South Korea's likely new president stands on Trump and North Korea. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/06/03/world/asia/south-korea-lee-jae-myung-policy.html>
- CIA World Factbook (2024). Country comparisons – Total fertility rate. <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/field/total-fertility-rate/country-comparison/>
- Doran, I., Numhauser-Henning, Spanier, B., Georgantzi, N. & Mantovani, E. (2018). Ageism and anti-ageism in the legal system: A review of themes. In L. Aalon and C. Tesch-Romer (Eds.) *Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism*. (pp. 303–319). Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73820-8_19
- Fredvang, M. & Biggs, S. (2012). The rights of older persons: Protection and gaps under human rights law. August. Working paper. Australia: Brotherhood of St. Laurence and the Center for Public Policy. <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/documents/fourth/Rightsfolderpersons.pdf>
- Fritz, J. (2024). Mandatory retirement and involuntary retirement: A social justice issue. In J. Zajda and Y. Vissing (Eds.) *Globalisation, Comparative Education and Policy Research*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-55478-0_9
- Global Alliance of Human Rights Institutions (n.d.) Members. Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions. <https://ganhri.org/membership/>
- Goover (2024). South Korea raises public retirement age. November 10. <https://seo.goover.ai/report/202411/go-public-report-en-7337bda4-3a94-4d06-9460-ab818672bc0d-0-0.html>

- Gwak, R., Kim, S. & Lee, H. (2025). South Korea looks to extend retirement age, but youth hiring concerns grow. THE CHOSUN Daily. March 20. <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2025/03/20/ZNWPCPIM7JEXXMEG4CCOUW6BDI/>
- Han, Y., Jung, S., & Lee, J. (2024). 70 and still working: S. Korea sees unprecedented senior employment rate. The Chosun Daily. July 15. <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2024/07/15/NIDPFVSA3NB6HAVXJNYITSYGHU/>
- HelpAge International (2022). Advancing Equality for Older People. chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.helpage.org/silo/files/age-equality-report_pub.pdf
- Human Rights Watch (2025). Punished for Getting Older: South Korea's Age-based Policies and Older Workers' Rights. July 8. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2025/07/08/punished-for-getting-older/south-koreas-age-based-policies-and-older-workers>
- IPU Parline (n.d.) Republic of Korea. <https://data.ipu.org/parliament/KR/KR-LC01/data-on-women/>
- Ji, D. (2025). South Korea now 'superaged,' but no progress on 'Population Ministry.' The Korea Herald. Asia News Network. May 11. <https://asianews.network/south-korea-now-superaged-but-no-progress-on-population-ministry/>
- Jin, E. (2024). Korea wants to raise its retirement age. Its younger workers aren't happy. Korea JoongAng Daily. October 29. <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-10-29/business/economy/Korea-wants-to-raise-its-retirement-age-Its-younger-workers-arent-happy/2165077>
- Juch, M. (2023) Personal communication with head of KARP.
- Juch, M. (2024). Interview with the head of KARP. June 3.
- Jun, J. (2025). Concerns grow over sustainability of national pension fund amid decreasing subscribers. The Korea Times. February 9. <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/society/20250209/concerns-grow-in-south-korea-over-sustainability-of-national-pension-amid-plunging-subscribers-in-aging-society>
- Jung, H., Lee, J., Park, J., & Kim, M. (2024). S. Korea considers raising retirement age amid pressures on 'sandwich generation'. The Chosun Daily. November 1. <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2024/11/01/OMXZD55PURAXTJEIRK7IMDS2KQ/>

- Jung, M. (2024). Korea promotes positive images of older workers amid aging population. *The Korea Times*. <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/southkorea/society/20240923/korea-promotes-positive-images-of-older-workers-amid-aging-population>
- Jung, S. & Lee, J. (2024). South Korea's over-65 workforce surpasses young workers for the first time. *The Chosun Daily*. September 20. <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2024/09/20/XZJFCV5W5RAPBMRD5UAECD2WHU/>
- Kang J., Park J. & Cho J. (2022). Inclusive aging in Korea: Eradicating senior poverty. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. February 14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042121>
- Kang, J. & Ihara, E. (2025). Age discrimination and depression among older adults in South Korea: Moderating effects of exercise. *Aging and Health Research*. 5/1: March. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ahr.2024.100218>
- KBS World (2025). Experts propose gradually increasing 'senior citizen' age from 65 to 70. May 9. https://world.kbs.co.kr/service/news_view.htm?lang=e&Seq_Code=192917
- Kim, N. (2025). S. Korea's rare pension reform to delay fund depletion by 9 yrs by 'paying more, receiving more.' *Yonhap News Agency*. March 20. <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20250320009300320>
- Koh, E. (2024). How South Korea is tackling its demographic crisis. *Time*. February 19. <https://time.com/6696414/south-korea-elderly-workforce/>
- Krekula, C., Nikander, P. & Wilinska, M. (2018). Multiple marginalizations based on age: Gendered ageism and beyond. In L. Ayalon and C. Tesch-Römer (Eds.) *Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism*. 19, 33–50. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73820-8_3
- Kwon, S., Kang, W. and Park, S. (2024). Four in ten South Korean seniors still working as population ages. *The Chosun Daily*. September 20. <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2024/09/20/EP7MDRZG6FAJDNYB3HKFIBTNPM/>
- Lee, D. (2024). Presentation by the Deputy Director of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea at an ASEM conference in Seoul, Korea. August 16. https://asemgac.org/board/view?bd_id=fro2&wr_id=196
- Lee, H. (2023). Elderly population outgrows social safety net. *The Korea Times*. https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/08/113_343139.html

- Lee, H., Kim, H. & Shin, H. (2021). Tackling involuntary retirement in South Korea. *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Global editions. October 20. https://ssir.org/articles/entry/tackling_involuntary_retirement_in_south_korea
- Lee, J. (2023). 'No-senior zone' sparks major controversy in South Korea. *The Korea Herald/ANN (Asian News Network)* <https://asianews.network/no-senior-zone-sparks-controversy-in-south-korea/>
- Lee, J. (2025). South Korea jobless rate hits 3-1/2-yr high amid political uncertainty. *Reuters*. January 14. <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/south-korea-jobless-rate-jumps-3-12-year-high-december-2025-01-14/>
- Lee, J & Yi, Y.Y. (2025). South Korea's policy push springs to life as world's lowest birthrate rises. February 26. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-koreas-policy-push-springs-life-worlds-lowest-birthrate-rises-2025-02-26/>
- Lee, T. & Cho, J. (2022). Unintended consequences of the retirement-age extension in South Korea. *Asia-Pacific Economic Literature*. 36/1:105-125. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apel.12351>
- Lim, D. (2024). Participation and continuation factors of volunteer activities among retired Government employees: Evidence from South Korea. *SAGE Open*. July-September:1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440241285185>
- LIN (2023). Recent cases on wage peak system in Korea. August 2. https://www.law-lin.com/en/news/news_sub01_view.html?idx=388
- Mahler, C. (2025). Intersection between older persons' right to social protection and their right to work. Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons. United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council. A/HRC/60/24. July 17. <https://docs.un.org/en/A/HRC/60/24>
- McCurry, J. (2025). South Korea's birthrate rises for the first time in nine years amidst surge in marriages. *The Guardian*. February 26. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/feb/26/south-korea-birthrate-rises-marriages-surge>
- Mercer CFA Institute (2022). Mercer CFA Institute Global Pension Index. <https://www.mercer.com/en-ca/insights/investments/market-outlook-and-trends/mercercfa-global-pension-index-2022/>

- Mercer CFA Institute (2024). Mercer CFA Institute Global Pension Index. October 15. https://www.mercer.com/search-result-index/?q=2024%20Global%20pension%20index&size=n_15_n
- Misun, J. (2025). 2024 fertility rate of 0.75 marks first growth in 9 years. KOREA.net. February 27. <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Society/view?articleId=267262>
- National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2023). The Report on Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Korea 2022. July.
- National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2024). Draft Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2024a). OECD survey on drivers of trust in public institutions, 2024 results – country notes: Korea. July 10. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-survey-on-drivers-of-trust-in-public-institutions-2024-results-country-notes_a8004759-en/korea_ab1a95c7-en.html
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2024b). OECD employment outlook 2024- Country notes: Korea. July 9. https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/oecd-employment-outlook-2024-country-notes_d6c84475-en/korea_636e4c7a-en.html
- OECD (2024c), Strengthening Active Labour Market Policies in Korea, Connecting People with Jobs. Paris: OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/44cb97d7-en>
- OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2018). Working Better with Age: Korea. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264208261-en>
- Officer, A., Thiyagarajan, J., Schneiders, M., Nash, P., & Fuente-Nunez, V. (2020). Ageism, healthy life expectancy and population ageing: How are they related? *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17093159>
- Pace, R. & Gabel, S. (2025). Evidence for the impact of the human rights-based approach in social policy and programming: A scoping review. May. *International Social Work*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728251336086>
- Park, J. (2023). Big businesses face growing union pressure to extend retirement age. *The Korea Times*. May 30. <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/business/companies/20230530/big-businesses-face-growing-union-pressure-to-extend-retirement-age>

- Park, S. (2025). Korea's income inequality improves, but elderly poverty hits OECD's highest Rates. ChosunBiz. March 24. <https://biz.chosun.com/en/en-policy/2025/03/24/T37Y7GLIXZFWNGFIAJSM72UPNE/>
- Park, Y. (2023). Personal communication from the assistant director of the International Human Rights Division of the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea. June 7.
- Park, Y. (2024). Interview of the assistant director of the International Human Rights Division of the National Human Rights Commission of the Republic of Korea. June 5.
- Reuters (2025). South Korea approves reforms to shore up \$830 bln state pension fund. March 20. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/south-korea-approves-reforms-shore-up-830-bln-state-pension-fund-2025-03-20/>
- Seo, Y. & Lau, C. (2024). South Korea becomes 'superaged' society, new data shows. CNN World. December 24. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003490081-3>
- Shin, C. (2024). Interview of the CEO of Sangsanguri Company, Ltd. May 29.
- Shin, H. (2023). The National Human Rights Commission of Korea and the efforts of civil society to secure its independence. Focus. 114. <https://www.hurights.or.jp/archives/focus/section3/2023/12/the-national-human-rights-commission-of-korea-and-the-efforts-of-civil-society-to-secure-its-indepen.html>
- Shin, H. (2024). Korea elects its oldest-ever National Assembly. April 15. Korea JoongAng Daily. <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-04-12/national/general2024/Korea-elects-its-oldestever-National-Assembly/2024310>
- Son, J. (2025). South Korea's National Assembly passes bill for first hike in pension payments in 28 years. Asis News Network. May 18. <https://asianews.network/south-koreas-national-assembly-passes-bill-for-first-hike-in-pension-payments-in-28-years/>
- Statista (2024). Statistics and facts. October. Statista.com
- Statista (2025). Gender distribution of national parliament. April. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1455106/south-korea-gender-distribution-of-seats-in-parliament/>
- Statistics Korea (2024). The survey of household finances and living conditions in 2024. Press release. December 9. https://mods.go.kr/boardDownload.es?bid=11737&list_no=434516&seq=2

- Statistics Korea (2025). Unemployment rate for April 2025. https://kostat.go.kr/board.es?mid=a20105020000&bid=11732&act=view&list_no=436580
- Swift, H.J., Abrams, D., Marques, S., Vauclair, D., Bratt, C. & Lima, M. (2018). Ageism in the European region: Findings from the European Social Survey. In L. Ayalon & C. Tesch-Romer (Eds.) *Contemporary perspectives on ageism*. 19, 441–459. Cham: Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-73820-8_27
- Tampuboton, M. (2025). Legal semiotics: Understanding ageing, discrimination, and protecting rights in law. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law*. April 24. https://www.google.com/search?q=&rlz=1C1CHBD_enUS1053US1053&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8&udm=50&aep=48&cud=1&qsubts=1765862692860
- Tan, J. (2024). South Korea sees surge in elderly workforce participation. *Hrmasia*. February 26. <https://hrmasia.com/south-korea-sees-surge-in-elderly-workforce-participation/>
- Thomas, K. (2025). Social Security's potential insolvency date moves up one year. *The Wall Street Journal*. June 18. https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/social-security-insolvency-retirement-benefits-outlook-3eeec2ea?gaa_at=eafs&gaa_n=AWETsqc_sbbK6bBDjRnSoDNHD5iWzVXTquv5VRjLh9DexGfrv_Tnkc9v5BCsdqVxSa0%3D&gaa_ts=6940f218&gaa_sig=5WUao1DaHVtBFnoMjv-PNXAKr4Lcj1mq02HMnrKenQC4SH4EJNyUKfVIBLDeayDRYnIQle9y2zeifoFMe6UJjg%3D%3D
- UNECE (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe) (2019). Combating ageism in the world of work. UNECE policy brief on ageing No. 21. February. https://unece.org/search_unece_content?keyword=policy+brief+on+ageing
- United Nations (1948). Universal Declaration of Human Rights. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>
- United Nations (1995). International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights>

- United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council (2013). Towards a comprehensive and integral international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons. Resolution 67/139. Adopted on 20 December 2012. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/743962?v=pdf>
- Voronoi (n.d.) All the countries where seniors are a significant share of the population. Virtual Capitalist. <https://www.voronoiaapp.com/demographics/-All-the-Countries-Where-Seniors-Are-a-Significant-Share-of-the-Population-5418>
- Yoon, L (2025). Trade union membership rate South Korea 1977-2022. Statista. March 12. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/648966/south-korea-union-membership-rate/>
- Yulchon (2023). Korea. Agediscrimination.info. August 31. <https://www.agediscrimination.info/international-age-discrimination/south-korea?rq=Yulchon%20%20%20South%20Korea>

Jan Marie Fritz, Ph.D. is a Certified Clinical Sociologist (C.C.S.). She is a Professor at the University of Cincinnati (USA), a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg (South Africa) and a Mediator for the city of Cincinnati's legal/prosecution division. Her email is jan.fritz@uc.edu

Creative Commons License terms: You must give appropriate credit, provide a link to the license, and indicate if changes were made. You may do so in any reasonable manner, but not in any way that suggests the licensor endorses you or your use.