

The global paradigm shift towards active ageing and beyond: an analysis of policy documents by international organisations

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This study analyses the evolution of the active ageing paradigm and the varying support by international organisations in extending it beyond an economic productivist approach, focusing on pre-and post-financial crisis rhetorical variations. Active ageing, a comprehensive strategy to maximise participation and well-being as people age, began to develop as a policy paradigm and has served as a key reference point in deliberations of international organisations and academic debates since the 1990s. The active ageing paradigm also consists of two widely opposed policy frameworks, the first is a productivist and economic approach that primarily focuses on older people's contribution through paid activities, and the other is a comprehensive and social approach, embracing the complete life course. To investigate which approach in active ageing international actors emphasise more and whether their focus differs over time and across the international actors, I carry out the thematic analysis using 21 documents that contain active ageing discussions published in the period from 2002 to 2020 by the World Health Organisation (WHO), the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the European Union (EU), and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). My findings reveal that institutional type and mission matter in predicting productivist rhetoric regarding active ageing. Also, despite the consistent emphasis on a productivist framework, a dynamic process of social construction since the financial crisis led to a more holistic and social investment focussed approach to active ageing discourses of international organisations, especially as advanced by the European Union. This study concludes that a comprehensive and effective approach to active ageing is desired on both the rhetorical and policy levels in international and national contexts.