

# REPORT



ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

*Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation*

With the support of:

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# I. PARTNERS/ACRONYMS

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <b>UNITAR</b>               | The United Nations Institute for Training and Research                     |
| <b>UNDESA</b>               | The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs               |
| <b>UNFPA</b>                | The United Nations Population Fund   |
| <b>IOM</b>                  | The International Organization for Migration                               |
| <b>UNWOMEN</b>              | The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women |
| <b>UNHCR</b>                | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees                              |
| <b>WHO</b>                  | World Health Organization  |
| <b>OHCHR</b>                | Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights                           |
| <b>ITU</b>                  | The International Telecommunication Union                                  |
| <b>ILO</b>                  | International Labour Organization  |
|                             | The Group of Friends of the Human Rights of Older Persons UN Geneva        |
| <b>CIFAL Global Network</b> | International Training Centers for Authorities and Leaders                 |
|                             | WHO Global Network for Age-friendly cities and Communities                 |
| <b>HPOD</b>                 | Harvard Law School Project on Disability                                   |
| <b>INPEA</b>                | The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuses               |
|                             | International Longevity Centre   |
| <b>ILC Global Alliance</b>  | NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva   |
| <b>GIA</b>                  | Global Initiative on Ageing Foundation                                     |



## II. FOREWORD



As the world navigates evolving global challenges and demographic transformations, UNITAR remains steadfast in its mission to empower individuals, governments, and institutions through transformative learning and multilateral collaboration.

The year 2024 has been marked by significant global issues that profoundly intersect with the realities of older persons. Social exclusions, technological disruptions, armed conflicts, and widening inequalities are exacerbating the vulnerabilities faced by this group.

In this complex landscape, UNITAR is committed to ensuring that older persons are not merely beneficiaries of progress but active participants in shaping sustainable futures. UNITAR has consistently worked to enhance the effectiveness of the United Nations through capacity-building initiatives that promote the rights and well-being of older persons.

UNITAR is grateful to organize this series in partnership with our International Training Centers, CIFAL Global Network, UNDESA, UNFPA, IOM, UNWOMEN, UNHCR, WHO, OHCHR, ITU, ILO, the Group of Friends of the Human Rights of Older Persons UN Geneva; the Global Initiative on Ageing Foundation, GIA; the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuses; the International Longevity Centre; the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva; and the Harvard Law School Project on Disability.

During these three years, this initiative brought together nearly 80 prestigious speakers and 1367 beneficiaries with different backgrounds. These figures reflect not only scale but also intentional inclusivity, with participation disaggregated by gender, region, and sector to ensure marginalized voices are amplified. From 2022 to 2024, 2447 persons have received access to the events.

Since its launch in 2022, the series has played a crucial role in addressing the rights of older persons. In the first year, the series focused on taking stock of the current scenario of ageing and the human rights of older persons. The second year expanded on these discussions, exploring access to justice, labor markets, political participation, health and social care services, as well as cultural and leisure activities.

Central to this effort is our Virtual Roundtable Series: Mainstreaming Knowledge on Ageing, launched in 2022. Over the past three years, the series has evolved into a cornerstone of global dialogue on ageing, uniting policymakers, academics, civil society leaders, and older persons themselves.



This year's thematic focus—Quality of Life for Older Persons—aligns with the aspirations to contribute to Our Common Agenda and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. We aim to make a tangible difference in people's lives by strengthening multilateral agreements and protecting the human rights of older persons. The series explored themes such as the global demographic scenario, gender dynamics, migration, the digital divide, and conflicts. By involving diverse stakeholders as co-sponsors, experts, speakers, and attendees, we aimed to enhance discussions and build stronger synergies towards achieving our common goals.

We have considered age, gender, geographic, sector balance, as well as other diversity elements to invite distinguished speakers to enrich the discussions. Their inspiring experiences as well as the participation of attendees from all regions motivate us to keep working together on upcoming initiatives.

After each session, UNITAR prepared "Takeaway" documents, part of this report, by highlighting core ideas and adding relevant links as complementary information. The video recordings of the sessions are also available at our Youtube channel and Moodle platform, with the certificates of participation to those who joined us at least 70% of the time.

Looking ahead, the demographic clock is ticking. UNITAR's role in bridging this gap is clear: We shall bring people together to scale capacity-building programs, share insights on the legal frameworks, and foster intergenerational partnerships.

The rights of older persons are a critical component of the broader human rights agenda. UNITAR remains dedicated to promoting these rights through our series. By fostering inclusive learning and dialogue, we aim to create a world where older persons can live with dignity and fully participate in society.

We look forward to continuing our work with partners and stakeholders to address the challenges faced by older persons and to build a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

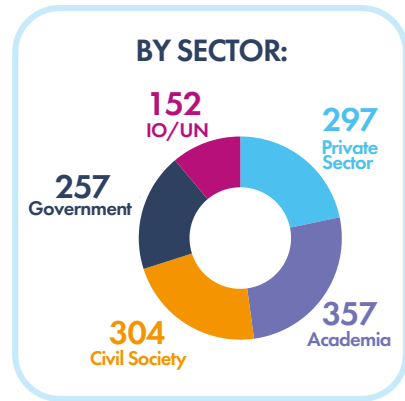
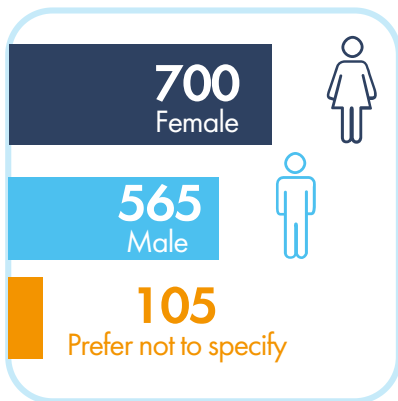
**Mr Nikhil Seth**  
UN Assistant Secretary-General  
Executive Director, UNITAR



## RESULTS 2022-2024



participated in the events of the series since 2024



Total number of participants who have received a certificate of participation



## HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT THE SERIES "MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING"



1. Sharing suggestions, including on the topics to be covered in the series next year.
2. Participating as speakers or recommending profiles.
3. Sharing information within your networks about the series.
4. Considering in-kind or financial contributions to develop learning tools based on the series, interpretation or translation services, or related initiatives. As you know, UNITAR is a donor based funded UN entity, so any support in this regard will be more than welcome.
5. Raising awareness and using knowledge about the sensitivities around ageing and the human rights of older persons.
6. Placing this important topic as one of the priorities in your agendas!



## III. OVERVIEW ON THE WHOLE SERIES

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Since the Virtual Roundtable Series “Mainstreaming Knowledge on Ageing” started in 2022, the partners and participants have successfully taken stock on the current scenario of ageing and the human rights of older persons in the first year, and on access to justice, labor markets, political participation, health and social care services, as well as cultural and leisure activities in the second year. This year, the series will be focused on quality of life for older persons. This initiative is aligned with the efforts envisaged at “Our Common Agenda” to strengthen and accelerate multilateral agreements, particularly the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, towards making a tangible difference in people’s lives<sup>1</sup>; in the same vein, it considers relevant aspects on the protection of the human rights of older persons.<sup>2</sup> In our series, we view national, regional, and international standards, as well as public policies, programs, and other initiatives as key learning elements. In the same vein, we consider that heightening awareness of ICT/digital accessibility implementation from design is relevant to better understand how older persons can benefit from digital products and services as means to actively participate in political, cultural, and socio economic activities. By involving diverse stakeholders as co-sponsors, experts, speakers, and attendees, we aim to enhance discussions and build stronger synergies towards achieving our common goal. The human rights of older persons and frontier issues, such as the demographic worldwide scenario, gender, human mobility, digital divide, and climate change, will continue as the heart of our discussions. In this endeavour, UNITAR and its International Training Centres for Authorities and Leaders -CIFAL Global Network-, UNDESA, UNFPA, IOM, UNWOMEN, UNHCR, WHO, OHCHR, ITU and ILO; together with the Group of Friends of the Human Rights of Older Persons UN Geneva; the Global Initiative on Ageing Foundation, GIA; the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuses; the International Longevity Centre; and the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva; and the Harvard Law School Project on Disability, have joined efforts to put together this initiative as a contribution to inclusive learning in the framework of the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Fostering knowledge on the impact of including older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements.
2. Learning from some good practices and challenges, including laws, policies, and strategies on accessibility issues, from different stakeholders.
3. Identifying existing initiatives and possible ways to improve quality of life for older persons.
4. Recognizing possible synergies for strengthening the protection as well as promoting the free, active, and meaningful participation of older persons.



## TARGET AUDIENCE

The event is open to different actors interested in Ageing and the rights of older persons, including:

- Public sector officials, policy makers and practitioners
- International Organizations
- Civil Society
- National Human Rights Institutions
- Academia
- Private sector

This event as well as the upcoming ones from the virtual roundtable series were open and free to All. Each event presented a specific focus.

## FORMAT

Online. Due to the worldwide situation caused by the pandemic, these events will be celebrated online with spirit of inclusion to allow participants from different parts of the world to join us.



# IV. TAKEAWAYS

This document has been prepared by the Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fengzhi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team, and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!

## Key focus of each event



## FIRST EVENT

# “The impact of including older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements”

## BACKGROUND

Including the perspective and needs of older persons in multilateral agreements and policies is crucial for promoting and protecting their human rights. It acknowledges their agency and autonomy, allowing them to actively engage in shaping the policies that affect their lives. They can contribute through their unique perspectives and experiences to the development and implementation of laws and policies; they can help to identify potential barriers or challenges and advance more effective strategies for implementation. Furthermore, taking into account their views, enhances the legitimacy, effectiveness, and inclusiveness of different processes, leading to better outcomes for all members of society. In the same vein, their participation in fora focused on making visible and overcoming problems of ageism, together with gender and other forms of discrimination, as well as the intergenerational divide, which have increased due to various frontier issues, in particular new technologies, human mobility, and climate change, ensures that their voices are heard and their needs are considered, leading to more representative decision-making processes. Likewise, it fosters a sense of social cohesion, cooperation, and solidarity across generation while recognizing their contributions, ultimately leads to more effective, and responsive policies that benefit all. In this regard, there are ongoing processes at the multilateral level are taking place as part of the efforts to promote and advance the older persons' agenda. Learning about their key aspects and their latest progresses is important to raise awareness and empower participants to take further action.





ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

*Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation*



## The impact of including older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements

📅 30 May 2024

🕒 9.30 a.m. – 11.10 a.m. (NY time) / 3.30 p.m. – 5.10 p.m. (CET)

With the support of:



This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fenghzi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



**MODERATOR**

**Mr. Alex Mejia**  
 Director, Division for People and Social Inclusion UNITAR



**COORDINATOR**

**Ms. Analucía Jácome**  
 Senior Coordinator of the Series UNITAR



## WELCOME REMARKS



**H.E. Amb. Luis Gallegos Chiriboga**

UNITAR’s Chair of the Board of Trustees;  
 President of the Global Initiative on Ageing, GIA  
 Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Ecuador

*“All the strengths and needs of older persons shall be visible, and impactful actions shall be taken to ensure their effective, active, and meaningful participation, including the decision-making process.”*

- 1 The 3rd year of virtual roundtable series focuses on enhancing the quality of life of older persons, aligning with Our Common Agenda and the 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development, and addressing gaps in the protection of human rights of older persons.
- 2 Under this umbrella we are celebrating five events, including the impact of including older persons in implementation of multilateral agreements and settings today; the use of new technologies for promoting mental health, accompaniment, and support to improve the lives of older persons; the implications of demographic shifts on social and economic security through labor markets and leisure activities; the intersectionality of discrimination faced by older persons; and protection of older persons in times of peace and war.
- 3 Older persons bring a wealth of experience, wisdom, and perspectives to different fields enriching processes and outcomes in several significant ways. They possess a deep understanding of historical context and the evolution of issues while providing valuable insights in multilateral discussions. Further their inclusion contributes to mentorship, enabling the transfer of knowledge and skills to younger generations.
- 4 The lifelong experiences of older persons are crucial for mediation in peace negotiations and navigating complex scenarios. With age comes patience and resilience which are qualities essential for enduring lengthy and complex negotiation processes that help foster international cooperation and advocate for a significant cause. Their participation in multilateral processes offers numerous benefits, including enhanced historical perspectives, experienced negotiations, mentorship opportunities, and the ability to leverage extensive networks. It’s important to create platforms for internet intergenerational dialogue within multilateral forums, fostering innovative solutions grounded in historical understanding.

### HIGHLIGHTS ON THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON AGEING

The Global Initiative on Ageing and Longevity (GIA Longevity) is the first global, cross-sectoral partnership addressing the ageing and longevity ecosystem. The mission is to design a new society that empowers everyone to thrive throughout their longer lives. By working together with UN agencies, business leaders, governments and society, GIA Longevity is shaping a world where every person is included, respected, valued and cared for throughout their lifespan. It places emphasis on addressing the unique challenges faced by older persons and offers valuable guidance to support their well-being and meaningful participation in society.



SPEAKERS

# Focus Barriers and good practices in access to justice at international level



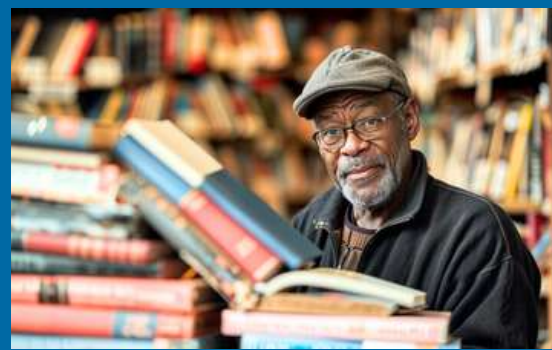
**H.E. Amb. Héctor Virgilio Alcántara**  
Permanent Representative of Dominican Republic to the UN in Geneva

*“Inclusion of older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements is a matter of human rights and an opportunity for protecting the dignity and respect for older persons towards an equitable and just society.”*

- 1 Inclusion of older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements is crucial for inclusivity and sustainability. Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 1 emphasizes that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. This fundamental principle guides our policies and actions.
- 2 Older persons have the same human rights as other demographic groups, which are free and equal rights to dignity, including the right to housing, work, learn, and right to autonomy. However, older persons often face discrimination, social exclusions, and economic vulnerabilities, which requires international cooperation to recognize, protect, and promote their rights.
- 3 Inclusion of older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements is about justice and practicality. Older persons often offer valuable perspectives and historical experiences that help navigate different challenges including in contribution to social cohesion and conflict resolution.
- 4 Older persons are traditional keepers of knowledge about the sustainable use of natural resources and strengthen intergenerational ties which contribute towards sustainable solutions and more resilient societies.
- 5 With the world population ageing, it’s an opportunity to tap into volunteerism and entrepreneurship. To achieve the true inclusion of older persons in the implementation of multilateral agreements, inclusive policies shall be adopted to help remove legal and social barriers that prevent their participation.
- 6 It’s crucial to guarantee social protection systems that ensure the wellbeing of older persons including decent pensions, access to quality health services and social support. Besides, the promotion of continuing education and training will improve access to employment and promote healthy ageing.
- 7 Active participation of older persons in decision-making platforms is important for decisions at national and international levels. Data and research, including robust evidence, also help to meet the targeted needs and support the contribution for older persons.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC FOR OLDER PERSONS

The Dominican Republic is an example of the formative action for multilateralism in the protection of older persons. As of 2021, almost 800,000 persons were aged over 65, representing 7% of the national population. In recognition of the growing importance of addressing the needs of older persons, the Dominican Republic has made considerable strides in promoting their human rights. A law was specifically dedicated to the protection of older persons and the National Council of the Ageing Person (CONAPE), a government agency was established to implement public policies in relation to older persons.





## DID YOU KNOW?

According to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that the population of individuals aged over 65 years will outnumber those under the age of 15 in the WHO European Region by 2024. This trend means new social, economic and health challenges, which demand a focus on healthy ageing to mitigate the impact of an ageing population.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) | [Link](#)
- Promoting physical activity and healthy diets for healthy ageing in the WHO European Region | [Link](#)
- Dominican Republic: UN expert to assess human rights of older persons | [Link](#)



# Focus: The protection of older persons within the global human rights framework



**Dr. Chitralekha Marie Massey**

Chief, The Rights of Older Persons, Development and Economic and Social Issues Branch, Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

*“Law does not function in vacuum; it follows real life. We all have to work through this legal framework to adapt and ensure that the impact on the lives of all the persons in everyday settings is going to be positive.”*

- 1 UN Mechanisms including Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) are integrated in almost every constitution in the world. The declaration has become customary international law, but even after 75 years there are still challenges ahead of us.
- 2 Universal Periodic Review (UPR) has politically been one of the most successful mechanisms within UN framework. However, with four cycles over twelve years and garnering numerous recommendations regarding the rights of older persons, only a few of them cover meaningful participation by older persons. For example, recommendations on the right to health have slightly improved since COVID pandemic, but other issues such as housing and water are still a challenge amongst Member States. These basic issues seem to be falling through the cracks, even within one of the most politically successful mechanisms.
- 3 Within the human rights framework, the Open-ended working group has been active for 14 years, with over 800 documents submitted. This is the first time a significant moment has been achieved where people recognize the conflicts and gaps that exist, and the need to address additional issues in line with the realities of the world. Meaningful inclusion and real participation of the disadvantaged groups shall be ensured.
- 4 Looking at the UPR recommendations over the past twelve years, there is an increase in reporting and concerns around violence and discrimination experienced by older persons. On the other hand, economic independence appears to be declining due to issues with insurance and taxation. This is particularly important when considering multilateral treaties and how Member States, particularly the developing countries, will be impacted.
- 5 “Nothing about us without us.” If we are serious about ensuring social protection and a life of dignity for everyone, we must recognize that aging is inevitable. This is a pivotal moment for planning and collaboration to face this challenge as an international community.
- 6 The deliberations and outcomes of the Open-ended working group, combined with global and regional developments, present a crucial opportunity for us to come together in closer partnerships. We need a more ambitious vision to ensure all rights for all people and truly leave no one behind. This is not just a mantra; it must be a reality.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) strives to ensure that older persons are given space and weight in the human rights agenda. Together with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, OHCHR supports the work of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing as its secretariat. OHCHR supports the mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, and the work of UN human rights mechanisms and national human rights institutions to monitor and provide guidance for the promotion and protection of human rights of older persons.





## DID YOU KNOW?

Australia has bilateral agreements with a number of countries to share responsibility for social security coverage. These agreements focus on social security and pensions, aiming to ensure a better quality of life for individuals who have worked as migrants or expatriates in multiple countries and have moved between them. In 2023, Australia and Singapore signed a Memorandum of Understanding that looks at strengthening health cooperation.

Japan and Thailand have a cooperation agreement focused on ensuring healthy aging and aging with dignity. In January 2016, Thailand's Ministry of Public Health (MOPH) and National Health Security Office (NHSO) together with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) launched "the Partnership Project for Global Health and Universal Health Coverage". The project aimed to promote and support global health and universal health coverage in ASEAN countries and beyond. It shows that while there are gaps and there are challenges, a lot is happening on a very positive front.

## CURIOUS FACT

We are all going to age, and by 2030, the global population increase will be over 31%.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The recognition of older persons' rights varies widely. In some countries, all ages are respected so much, and in some countries it's not. We shall not just take it for granted and assume that this is going to allow people to function well. We need to ensure that this is not a question of charity or a moral choice that we make.

We are on the brink of a breakthrough after fourteen years of work. But now we must ask "What next?" How do we push this envelope forward and ensure that all these pieces come together in meaningful ways? Whether comprehensive or piecemeal, we must ensure that our efforts have a real impact.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by OHCHR | [Link](#)
- Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons | [Link](#)
- Memorandum of Understanding signed between Singapore and Australia on health cooperation | [Link](#)
- Partnership Project for Global Health and Universal Health Coverage launched by Thailand and Japan | [Link](#)



# Focus: How the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging contributes to the protection of older persons



**Ms. Julia Ferre**

Social Affairs Officer, Programme on Ageing Section, Social Inclusion and Participation Branch, Division for Inclusive Social Development, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA)

*“The review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA establishes channel of communications and different mechanisms for participation and dialogue with various stakeholders and older persons themselves.”*

- 1 In 2002, Member States convened in Madrid for the second world assembly on aging and adopted two key documents: the Madrid International Plan of Action on Aging (MIPAA) and a political declaration.
- 2 MIPAA comprises 239 recommendations related to 35 objectives across 18 different issues, organized around three priority areas: older persons and development, advancing health and well-being into old age, and ensuring an enabling and supportive environment. The drafting process was highly inclusive, involving governments, UN entities, academia, and civil society.
- 3 Some key elements of MIPAA include the celebration of longevity, addressing age discrimination, adopting a life-course approach, and highlighting intergenerational solidarity. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing older persons as active contributors and the need to support their contributions, strengths, and humanity.
- 4 Turning to the implementation of MIPAA, it is closely tied to the review and appraisal process occurring every five years. The fourth review was recently completed, and the fifth is under preparation. The implementation and review processes are interdependent, with the review findings informing policy actions and promoting public awareness and stakeholder engagement.
- 5 The heavy lifting of the MIPAA review falls on the five UN regional commissions, which facilitate interregional cooperation, provide regional forums, and conduct detailed reviews. The synergy between national, regional, and global levels ensures that regional outcomes inform the global review in New York. In the fourth review (2019-2023), four out of seven Member States participated, and all five regions held their own processes, with several at the ministerial level and three resulting in political outcomes. This demonstrates that Member States are actively using MIPAA as a key policy tool.
- 6 As we prepare for the fifth review and appraisal, we are excited about its potential to provide Member States with the data and insights needed to understand population aging and develop policies that improve the lives of older citizens. These reviews also offer stakeholders an opportunity to voice their concerns and priorities to governments.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS (DESA)

The primary action of the Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) of the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) programme on ageing is to facilitate and promote MIPAA including: designing guidelines for policy development and implementation; advocating means to mainstream ageing issues into development agendas; engaging in dialogue with civil society and the private sector; and information exchange.





### DID YOU KNOW?

MIPAA was the first development plan to place aging and old age on the international agenda, linking aging to existing frameworks for social and economic development and to human rights. Before MIPAA, population aging was often seen as a standalone issue or an afterthought. Its adoption by the UN General Assembly recognized that population aging has profound consequences for individuals, communities, countries, and the international community.

### REMEMBER

The political declaration adopted in 2002 along with MIPAA is often overlooked. However, the declaration is crucial as it outlines countries’ commitments to addressing aging. It emphasizes population aging as an opportunity, not just a challenge, and introduces the concept of a “society for all ages”. It also highlights the role of the international community and other stakeholders in promoting cooperation at both national and multilateral levels.

### IMPORTANT

The review and appraisal of MIPAA follow a bottom-up participatory approach, starting with older persons and their representative organizations, moving through national and regional levels, and culminating at the global level. This approach ensures that older persons have a voice in decisions directly affecting them.

### USEFUL SOURCES

- Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by OHCHR | [Link](#)
- Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons | [Link](#)
- Memorandum of Understanding signed between Singapore and Australia on health cooperation | [Link](#)
- Partnership Project for Global Health and Universal Health Coverage launched by Thailand and Japan | [Link](#)



# Focus: The Colombian Constitutional Court's decision in the protection for the rights of older persons



**Ms. Marcela Bustamante**

Regional Representative  
HelpAge International  
Bogotá, Colombia

*“The obligation of shared responsibility, solidarity, and collaboration among state, family and community guarantees the rights of older persons.”*

- 1 In May 2024, the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG) has been considering the development of a binding instrument to protect the rights of older persons. While the future path remains uncertain, the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Older Persons serves as a valuable reference for the international community and the processes that will follow these significant steps.
- 2 Loneliness in older persons is a barrier to accessing medical services. The Colombian Constitutional Court recently made a decision on the case of Mr. Carlos, which underscores the importance of having a robust framework to protect the rights of older persons. This case demonstrates how crucial it is for judges and courts to rely on binding instruments in their decisions. It also highlights the role that individuals can play in the implementation of multilateral agreements.
- 3 Based on the right to health developed by the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Older Persons, health services must be comprehensive, prioritized, affordable, specialized, and provided with a differential approach to older persons.
- 4 Balance between protection, autonomy, and independence, rights through comprehensive quality socio-sanitary services that should be a pillar of a National Care System Through innovative care services, environments sensitive to the needs of older persons, social care services focused on the specific characteristics of people, and above all, adapted to changes in family models or lifestyles.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON HELPAGE INTERNATIONAL

HelpAge International is a global non-profit organization that works to improve the lives of older persons around the world. They work through the HelpAge global network, an alliance of organizations committed to the wellbeing, dignity and voice of older persons.

Its mission is to promote the rights and well-being of older persons, and to help them live dignified and fulfilling lives. They address the challenges faced by older persons, such as poverty, social isolation, and discrimination. They also advocate for policies and programmes that support the rights of older persons and provide support to local organizations and communities working with older persons.





## THE CASE OF MR. CARLOS

Mr. Carlos is a 77-year-old man who needed to undergo a cardiovascular stress test, which was ordered by his doctor. Repeatedly, the medical center refrained from performing the test because Mr. Carlos arrived alone, and according to the institutional protocol for the stress test, it required him to come with a companion due to potential complications. The health center rescheduled the test, despite Mr. Carlos insisting on undergoing the examination without a companion, as his situation of being alone wouldn't change.

Mr. Carlos had to appeal to the Tutelage Judge for the violation of his fundamental rights to health. The first Judge considered that Mr. Carlos was not being denied any rights because the health center was complying with protocol by rescheduling the test and indicating the requirement for a companion.

Mr. Carlos appealed against the decision of the first Judge, arguing that his right to health and life continued to be violated. The second Judge similarly considered that the health center was complying with protocol.

Mr. Carlos turned to the Constitutional Court, requesting that his case be chosen for review, considering his situation of being alone and as an older person facing physical and emotional abuse.

## CONSIDERATIONS OF THE COLOMBIAN CONSTITUTIONAL COURT: THE RULING T-077 OF 2024

The Colombian Constitutional Court emphasized the importance of an age-friendly approach in health services, balancing protection with autonomy and independence. The court highlighted several key points:

- **Care as a Fundamental Right:** The court recognized care as a fundamental right linked to human dignity, autonomy, independence, recreation, and health.
- **Minimum Vital Level of Affection:** The court introduced the concept of a minimum vital level of affection, emphasizing that older persons have the right to basic needs such as housing, healthcare, food, and clothing. Additionally, they should have access to social networks and community support systems to ensure a minimum level of emotional well-being.
- **State Responsibility:** The court's decision set an important precedent, stating that the obligation to provide caregivers or companions for such tests falls on the state, not on older persons living alone.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- 14th Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, 20 to 22 and 24 May 2024 | [Link](#)
- Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Older Persons | [Link](#)



# Focus: Achieving a treaty to protect the rights of older persons requires strong partnerships with civil society



**Dr. Michael Ashley Stein**

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability,  
Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School

*“Civil society must not only encourage their own governments but also engage with treaty bodies to ensure that the needs and concerns of older persons are reflected in international frameworks.”*

- 1 We are all working expeditiously towards achieving a specialized treaty to protect and promote the rights of older persons. One reason for this focus is that the universality of UN human rights treaties has proven not to be truly universal in practice.
- 2 This was the case with persons with disabilities, which led to the development of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). Our research also highlights the importance of strong personalities in driving change. For example, Professor Yanghee Lee, when chairing the Committee on the Rights of the Child, prioritized the inclusion of children with disabilities, leading to a significant increase in related jurisprudence.
- 3 Older persons face similar challenges. Though already covered under general human rights frameworks, they are often neglected in jurisprudence due to the lack of specific enumeration. This is why a specialized treaty is necessary.
- 4 Civil society plays a crucial role in reminding treaty bodies of these issues and submitting reports that address specific concerns such as access to healthcare, information and communication technology (ICT), and safe living conditions. While there are dedicated NGOs working on these issues, more support and engagement from civil society are essential.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY

HPOD has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to empowering civil society and other actors by fostering knowledgeable and discerning advocacy for Human Rights. Their endeavors encompass a range of activities, including the provision of comprehensive human rights training and education, the facilitation of international law and policy development, the promotion of inclusive practices in development, the dissemination of technical assistance pertaining to strategic litigation, and the cultivation of innovative perspectives regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to human rights.





### DID YOU KNOW?

International Disability Alliance have made significant interventions in the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) and other treaty bodies. The UPR process provides for the participation of all relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and regional mechanisms.

### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The need for a specialized treaty was driven by the recognition that existing treaties did not adequately address the specific needs of marginalized groups. For example, persons with disabilities were often excluded from UN programming and international agreements, such as the Millennium Development Goals. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have since improved this situation, but the principle of "nothing about us without us" remains crucial. Disability becomes one of many "vulnerable groups" mentioned in concluding observations, but without substantive engagement or implementation. The same issues happen with older persons.

### USEFUL SOURCES

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) | [Link](#)
- Millennium Development Goals | [Link](#)
- The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) | [Link](#)
- General Comment No. 9 (2006), The rights of children with disabilities | [Link](#)



## SECOND EVENT

“The use of new technologies for promoting mental health, accompaniment, and support to improve the lives of older persons”

### BACKGROUND

The use of new technologies to promote mental health and support for older persons has been useful for enhancing their overall well-being and quality of life. With the advent of telemedicine and online therapy platforms, older persons, especially those with reduced mobility or living in rural areas, can access mental health services more easily. This accessibility ensures they receive timely and appropriate care, breaking down barriers that previously hindered their ability to seek help. Additionally, continuous monitoring tools, such as wearable devices and health apps, enable early detection of mental health issues, allowing for prompt intervention and personalized care plans. Technological solutions also play a crucial role in reducing social isolation, a common issue among older adults that can lead to depression and anxiety. Video conferencing, social media, and virtual communities help maintain connections with family, friends, and peers, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing loneliness. These tools not only provide emotional support but also create opportunities for older persons to engage in social activities and community events from the comfort of their homes. By facilitating social interactions and community engagement, technology contributes significantly to improving their mental and emotional health. Moreover, new technologies empower older persons by promoting independence and self-management of their mental health. Educational platforms, mental health apps, and digital tools offer resources for learning coping strategies, mindfulness techniques, and other self-care practices. This empowerment allows them to take control of their mental health, leading to increased confidence and a better quality of life. Additionally, digital platforms integrate various support networks, including family, healthcare providers, and community services, ensuring comprehensive and holistic care. This integrated approach not only supports their mental health but also enhances the overall caregiving experience, making it more effective and coordinated.





ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation



## The Use of New Technologies for Promoting Mental Health, Accompaniment, and Support to Improve the Lives of Older Persons

27 June 2024

9.30 a.m. – 11.10 a.m. (NY time) / 3.30 p.m. – 5.10 p.m. (CET)

With the support of:



This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fenghzi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



### MODERATOR

**Mr. Alex Mejia**

Director, Division for People and Social Inclusion UNITAR



### COORDINATOR

**Ms. Analucía Jácome**

Senior Coordinator of the Series UNITAR



SPEAKERS

# Focus: The future opportunities for digital transformation in an ageing society



**Ms. Roxana Widmer-Iliescu**  
Senior Coordinator Digital inclusion  
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

*“Information and communication technology, when built with digital accessibility and universal design, can fundamentally transform our digital environment, making it more accessible and affordable, thus contributing to a healthier, more active, and empowered life for all.”*

- 1 Technology provides exciting opportunities for everyone, including older persons, enabling a healthy ageing environment. Essential services like telehealth and mobile applications ensure that older persons can maintain good health. This digital transformation is crucial as it offers new ways to support the ageing population, improving their overall well-being and quality of life.
- 2 The private sector, particularly the technology industry, sees these opportunities as attractive business ventures, driving innovation and growth in this market. With two-thirds of the global population projected to be 60 and above in the next 30 years, there is a clear business incentive to develop digital services and applications for older persons.
- 3 The silver economy underscores the need for countries to adapt to this digital evolution. In 2017, the global market for older care technology was valued at \$5 billion, and by 2022, it reached \$30.6 billion, with a growth rate of nearly 20%. This transformation requires integrating human rights into digital components, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity.
- 4 Emerging technologies like AI can significantly enhance mental health support for older persons by providing easy access to professional services and personalized applications. These technologies facilitate social interactions, reduce loneliness, and offer cognitive and memory support through virtual companions and smart home systems. ICT (Information and Communications Technology) advancements ensure consistent mental health care, promote independence, and improve overall well-being by making health services and daily tasks more accessible and efficient.
- 5 Joint efforts from organizations, government, the private sector, and academia should ensure accessibility for all individuals, regardless of age, gender, or socioeconomic status. Inclusive digital policies and strategies can be developed with an intersectional approach, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and partnership.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF ITU

The ITU is fully committed to contributing to the success of the UN Decade on Healthy Ageing by advocating for inclusive digital policies and strategies, raising awareness, developing guidelines and strategy advice, sharing good practices, and strengthening the capacity of its members to use ICTs. These efforts aim to develop innovative solutions with economic and social benefits, turning the ageing society challenge into a significant opportunity.





## DID YOU KNOW?

In Singapore, older persons have the opportunity to return to school and interact with their grandchildren or students from neighboring schools to learn basic digital skills, enhancing digital literacy and promoting digital wellness among the elderly population. Initiated by Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) in 2010, the Intergen IT Bootcamp was created in collaboration with schools and community partners to bridge the digital divide.

The Intergen IT Bootcamp, in collaboration with the Council for Third Age (C3A) and organized by Family Central, aims to foster intergenerational bonding by matching youths and older persons in a group learning environment. Youths from various educational levels act as cyber-guides, teaching older persons basic computer skills and social networking tools like Skype and Facebook. This initiative not only helps older persons stay digitally connected but also allows youths to apply their knowledge practically, building character and values such as respect for their elders.

## REMEMBER

Inclusive digital policies are essential in an ageing society to ensure that older persons can fully participate in the digital world. As technology increasingly becomes integral to everyday life, it's vital that older persons are not left behind. These policies promote accessibility, addressing barriers that may hinder older persons from using digital tools effectively. By fostering an inclusive digital environment, we empower older persons to maintain their independence, improve their quality of life, and stay connected with family and friends. Moreover, inclusive strategies encourage innovation that caters specifically to the needs of older persons, ultimately benefiting society as a whole by leveraging the skills and experiences of this growing demographic.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about "Ageing in a digital world" by visiting the official webpage of the ITU | [Link](#)
- The Intergen IT Bootcamp by Infocomm Media Development Authority | [Link](#)



# Focus: Cyber risks for the ageing population in the use of new technology



**Mr. Belisario Contreras**  
 Coordinator  
 Digi Americas Alliance

*“Since new technology is, and has been, a game changer, privacy protection is crucial not only for the ageing population but for everyone.”*

- 1 The ageing population represents a significant portion of the GDP in several countries. For both economic and inclusion reasons, proactive actions are needed to raise awareness about the unique needs and challenges faced by this demographic. This includes enhancing technology safety, identifying potential risks, and making technology easier to use for older persons.
- 2 Mental health is crucial for the well-being of older persons, who often face isolation and loneliness. Early proactive engagement and the use of new technologies, like telemedicine, are transformative, significantly improving care delivery, enhancing quality of life, and promoting longer, healthier lives through remote professional assessments.
- 3 However, the increasing reliance on technology also brings vulnerabilities, especially regarding the privacy and security of data collected from older persons using wearable devices and telemedicine. Ensuring proper safeguards, privacy regulations and consent mechanisms is essential to protect this sensitive information from misuse by third parties, especially for older persons relying on devices for personalized care.
- 4 The combination of mobile applications, wearable devices, and telemedicine serves as a game changer, significantly changing people’s mindset and life. Most internet interaction occurs through mobile devices, which include numerous applications designed to supporting mental health and well-being, such as reminders for physical activities and meditation practices accessible through wearable devices.
- 5 Government and the private sector are urged to join forces in fostering comprehensive frameworks of proper standards, regulations, and robust risk management procedures. These efforts are essential to effectively harness technology for safeguarding the well-being and security of older persons.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE DIGI AMERICAS ALLIANCE

The Digi Americas Alliance is a multi-stakeholder and interdisciplinary network of organizations from diverse sectors interested in cyber and digital issues. It aims to gather and coordinate input from its members to shape digital policy and address technical issues throughout the Americas.





## DID YOU KNOW?

Telemedicine has become more prevalent in Latin American countries, broadening access to care in both public and private systems, allowing patients to access care at a lower cost than an “in-person” visit to a medical office. It has even been found to aid in early diagnosis of diseases and reduce recovery time. Within Latin America, Ecuador, Chile, and Uruguay have been pioneers in the application of telemedicine services, including the development of legal frameworks to regulate its use.

Latin America’s demographic composition can be viewed as advantageous for the use of new technologies in the implementation of healthcare, as the presence of many young people in the region may reflect a greater willingness to use these technologies. However, older persons and residents of rural areas may require educational processes to adapt to new technological tools such as telemedicine services.

## REMEMBER

Older persons have significant health needs and concerns. Due to cognitive ageing and Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Diseases (ADRD), they are more susceptible to deceptive marketing. These factors make them prime targets for online health scams, with disadvantaged older persons at the highest risk of privacy-related harms. Given these risks, ongoing research and advocacy must be paired with efforts to identify and address threats to their data privacy.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about cybersecurity lessons from Latin America's battle against ransomware threats | [Link](#)



# Focus: Human rights of older persons in the digital world



**Ms. Silvia Perel-Levin**

INPEA, ILC GA, & Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing

***“A human rights-based approach that emphasizes participation and accountability would ensure that technology serves as a means for inclusion rather than a tool that risks further segregation and exclusion.”***

- 1 Technologies have the potential to enhance the well-being of older persons by improving social connectivity and reducing isolation. A human rights-based approach ensures technology promotes inclusion, while over-reliance on technology risks increasing social isolation.
- 2 Older persons should actively participate as co-designers and co-producers of new technologies rather than being seen merely as passive users. Inclusion in the design and use of these technologies ensures they meet the actual needs and preferences of older persons, rather than treating them solely as a market for selling new apps and devices.
- 3 Informed consent is crucial in using assistive technologies, allowing older persons to opt out at any time. Respect for autonomy and consent is essential for maintaining dignity and protecting human rights. Consent should be appropriately obtained without undue influence, ensuring older persons are fully informed about technology use.
- 4 Older persons are not merely recipients of tech knowledge from younger generations; many excel in tech careers and educate peers of all ages. Digital literacy encompasses media literacy, addresses biases, and ensures access to training in tech tools, challenging ageist stereotypes about their ability to learn and understand technology effectively.
- 5 Governments must uphold human rights principles by ensuring service providers comply accordingly. Adopting a convention on the rights of older persons, encompassing emerging technologies and addressing biases, is essential to combat discrimination and promote digital inclusion for all ages.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE INPEA

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) is a nonprofit organization that aims to increase society's ability, through international collaboration, to recognize and respond to the mistreatment of older persons in whatever setting it occurs, so that the later years of life will be free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation while at the same time acknowledging the diversity of culture, background, and life style of the world population.





### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

As technology evolves rapidly, it brings both opportunities and challenges for older persons. Including provisions for emerging technologies within a convention on the rights of older persons would ensure that older persons have equitable access to and benefit from advancements in areas such as digital healthcare, communication tools, and assistive technologies. It would also safeguard against potential risks such as data privacy violations, algorithmic biases, and digital exclusion due to age-related barriers.

Such a convention will establish a universal standard for protecting the rights of older persons in the context of emerging technologies. It compels governments to develop inclusive policies that promote digital literacy among older populations, support their access to technology, and ensure their voices are heard in technology design and implementation processes. This not only enhances the quality of life for older persons but also contributes to building more inclusive societies where technological advancements benefit everyone, regardless of age.

### DO NOT FORGET

A human rights-based approach guarantees that older persons have the right to participate in and benefit from the digital society without discrimination or barriers. It ensures that older persons' privacy and dignity are preserved in the digital realm, safeguarding against risks such as data exploitation and algorithmic biases. By embedding ICTs access within a human rights framework, governments and policymakers can create policies that promote digital literacy, bridge the digital divide, and foster an inclusive society where older persons can thrive and contribute actively.

### USEFUL SOURCES

- Report on “Strengthening Older Persons’ Rights: Towards a UN Convention” | [Link](#)



# Focus: Attention on brain health in the ageing society



**Mme. Silvia Neira**  
 Vice President  
 Global Initiative on Ageing Foundation (GIA)

***“The growing number of older persons, including more 80-year-olds than ever before, presents an opportunity that should be embraced with effective health-focused prevention strategies, despite any prevailing negative sentiments.”***

- 1 Addressing brain health is essential for fostering an inclusive society and ensuring individuals of all ages feel valued and purposeful within their families and communities. Brain health, spanning from youth anxiety to senior dementia and Alzheimer's, directly impacts personal well-being and work capacity. The substantial financial losses due to brain health disorders underscore the urgency of comprehensive strategies to promote cognitive well-being.
- 2 Technology should be developed to educate older persons on preventative measures and self-care, easing the burden on their families and communities amidst numerous severe Alzheimer's cases. Empowered by the new technology, primary healthcare providers such as nurses and caregivers can offer timely diagnostics and preventive care, enhancing brain health and quality of life while reducing healthcare costs through accessible, effective solutions.
- 3 Teaching youth simple brain health methodologies empowers them for the future, creating a knowledgeable community. Prioritizing brain health from a young age improves physical health, community involvement, and inclusivity, ensuring they can continue contributing to the workforce and society as they age.
- 4 Labor inclusion provides older persons the opportunity to remain employed as long as they wish, promoting inclusivity. People's mindsets must shift to recognize that older persons can continue working and offer solutions to many crises. Valuing their knowledge and experience is crucial, as those who came before have much to contribute to current and future challenges.
- 5 Private and public sectors can collaborate to advocate for inclusive policies and technologies that support older persons' financial independence and active labor market participation. Addressing age-based discrimination and leveraging digital solutions like flexible working hours can enhance opportunities for aging and longevity. Cross-sector collaboration accelerates the global implementation of these initiatives, helping evaluate effective strategies.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE GIA

The Global Initiative on Ageing (GIA) was conceived by a group of civic leaders in several countries, in coordination with different institutions of the United Nations. The objective of GIA is to work on an articulated strategy to address the issues of ageing from different perspectives that take into account human rights, labor issues, health, education and science. GIA's outreach is enhanced by partners in several countries and by virtual learning and policy platforms.





### INTERESTING PRACTICE

In recent years, a noticeable trend has emerged in the entrepreneurial landscape: more and more ageing individuals are starting new businesses and achieving remarkable success. This shift challenges conventional wisdom about retirement and ageing, highlighting a dynamic and resilient demographic eager to contribute their skills and experience to the business world.

One of the key reasons behind the success of senior entrepreneurs is their wealth of experience. After decades in various professions and roles, older persons bring a deep reservoir of knowledge, problem-solving abilities, and industry insights that are invaluable in starting and growing a business. This experience often gives them a competitive edge, allowing them to identify gaps in the market, understand consumer needs, and make informed decisions based on years of real-world experience.

The rise of senior entrepreneurs reflects a broader societal shift towards embracing the capabilities and contributions of older persons in the workforce and beyond. As they defy stereotypes of ageing and retirement, senior entrepreneurs demonstrate resilience, creativity, and a determination to remain actively engaged in economic and social spheres.

### IMPORTANT

Shifting societal mindsets to recognize that older persons can continue working is crucial for fostering a more inclusive and productive society. With years of experience, wisdom, and expertise, older persons can offer unique insights and skills that complement those of younger generations. Embracing their continued participation in the workforce not only strengthens businesses by diversifying their talent pool but also enriches workplace culture through intergenerational collaboration. Moreover, enabling older persons to remain active in their careers enhances their financial security, mental well-being, and overall quality of life. By challenging ageist stereotypes and creating inclusive work environments that support older persons, we create opportunities for lifelong learning, professional growth, and sustained economic contributions across generations.

### USEFUL SOURCES

- Find information on the Global Initiative on Ageing (GIA) | [Link](#)



# Focus: Technology transition in ageing



**Prof. Andrew Sixsmith**  
 Director, STAR Institute  
 Professor, Department of Gerontology,  
 Gerontology Department,  
 Simon Fraser University

*"The main challenge in addressing ageing is not the research itself, but rather transforming that research into products and services that will make a real-world impact."*

- 1 Efforts should be taken on the whole range of technologies that supporting an ageing society, not just technologies about health and ageing. These include inclusive technologies for living at home, smart home solutions, community-based technologies, and workplace innovations for an increasingly ageing workforce adapting to rapid technological changes.
- 2 The workforce is ageing rapidly, and the world of work is evolving swiftly, presenting significant adaptation challenges for both individuals and the workforce as a whole. Inclusive technology is essential to address these changes, rather than relying on exclusive approaches. Embracing inclusive technology will ensure that all members of the workforce can participate fully and benefit from advancements, fostering a more adaptable and resilient working environment.
- 3 Despite significant research efforts, the primary challenge remains translating research findings into real-world products and services. Many related projects did not progress beyond the initial stages, highlighting the gap between theoretical research and practical application, which calls for the need for better mechanisms to bridge this critical transition.
- 4 The focus needs to be on supporting research and connecting it effectively to the innovation pipeline, from initial stages through to commercialization. Small and medium enterprises and startups often face challenges like the "valley of death" and geographic barriers in this process. It is crucial to help them overcome these hurdles and develop products that attract investment while maintaining an ethical focus on improving the quality of life and health of older persons.
- 5 Training program emphasizes understanding technology within its socio-technical context. Technologies should be tailored to individual needs, considering their living situations and social contexts. The contextual awareness is crucial for effective technology application.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF GERONTOLOGY DEPARTMENT, SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

The faculty members of Department of Gerontology, Simon Fraser University are internationally known researchers in the areas of population aging, health care and health promotion, built environment, dementia care, families and community, technology, and the study of ethno-cultural and vulnerable group topics. They are active in knowledge translation activities and other engagements with various entities in the broader community, such as seniors' care and service providers, non-profit organizations, regional health authorities, local and federal governments.





### TO BEAR IN MIND

As the global population ages, inclusive technology emerges as a vital solution to the challenges faced by older persons. By prioritizing accessibility and user-friendliness, inclusive technology enables them to navigate essential services, maintain their independence, and enhance their quality of life. From telehealth platforms that facilitate healthcare access to smart home devices that promote safety and security, these innovations address the specific needs of the ageing population. By harnessing the power of technology to create an adaptable and supportive environment, we can empower older persons to thrive in an increasingly digital world.

### DO NOT FORGET

Training is essential for raising awareness of the context in which technology is applied in an ageing society. As the demand for innovative solutions to support older persons grows, training programs help stakeholders—including older persons, caregivers, and investors—grasp the unique challenges and opportunities within this demographic.

By equipping individuals with knowledge about the specific social and health needs of older persons, training fosters a more informed dialogue around technology deployment. This awareness not only enhances the effectiveness of technological applications but also demonstrates to investors the potential for impactful and profitable innovations in the ageing sector. As a result, strategic training initiatives can create a compelling case for investment, driving advancements that benefit both society and the economy.

### USEFUL SOURCES

- Article “Technology, aging, and mental health: opportunities and challenges” | [Link](#)



# Focus: Prospects of ongoing technological development for ageing society



**Dr. Michael Ashley Stein**

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability,  
Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School

*"It's a vastly different world in 2024 compared to the early 1990s when email emerged as a groundbreaking innovation. Back then, we had the choice to opt in or opt out of using technologies. Soon, however, we may find ourselves with no choice but to embrace them."*

- 1 The digital world has become integral to daily life, with technologies like smartphones and apps becoming essential for accessing services such as medical records and banking, leaving us with little choice but to adapt, despite the need for more inclusive options.
- 2 Marginalized older persons often lag behind in technology adoption in today's rapidly advancing technological landscape. The complexities inherent in digital devices, coupled with concerns over privacy and the prevalence of exclusionary practices, contribute to their difficulties.

While technology enhances social connections and access to information, it also risks increasing social isolation and loneliness, particularly if physical interactions decrease. Despite the benefits of digital communication, it cannot replace the need for real-world social connections, as humans are social animals.

- 3 Inclusivity is essential because many technologies exclude people with disabilities and older persons. Given human diversity and complexity, technology development must involve experienced individuals to ensure equitable and inclusive solutions for everyone, which prevents AI from reinforcing inequalities by favoring privileged individuals.
- 4 The rapid advancement of technology and science has outpaced regulatory frameworks, creating a significant gap that leaves many people excluded. This lag in regulations underscores the challenges in ensuring inclusivity, as people are struggling to keep up with the evolving technological landscape. The effort to make technology inclusive is falling far behind, leaving marginalized groups without the necessary support and access.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY

HPOD has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to empowering civil society and other actors by fostering knowledgeable and discerning advocacy for Human Rights. Their endeavors encompass a range of activities, including the provision of comprehensive human rights training and education, the facilitation of international law and policy development, the promotion of inclusive practices in development, the dissemination of technical assistance pertaining to strategic litigation, and the cultivation of innovative perspectives regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to human rights.





### FOOD FOR THOUGHT

In an increasingly digital world, the need for physical interaction remains essential from a humanist perspective. While technology offers unprecedented connectivity and convenience, it cannot fully replicate the depth and richness of face-to-face interactions that form the foundation of our social and emotional well-being. Physical presence fosters empathy, strengthens relationships, and nurtures a sense of community, all of which are vital for our mental and emotional health. As human beings, we thrive on the subtle nuances of body language, touch, and shared experiences that digital interactions often lack. By valuing and maintaining physical interaction, we uphold the core humanist principle that our connections and communal bonds are fundamental to a fulfilling and meaningful life.

### IMPORTANT

Technology and science have advanced at an unprecedented pace, outstripping the development of corresponding regulations designed to govern their use. To ensure that technological and scientific developments benefit everyone, it is crucial to implement inclusive regulations that address accessibility, equity, and ethical considerations. By aligning regulatory measures with the cutting-edge nature of today’s innovations, we can create a more inclusive and just society, where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from technological progress and scientific breakthroughs.

### USEFUL SOURCES

- The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities | [Link](#)



## THIRD EVENT

# “The implications of demographic shifts on social and economic security through labor markets and leisure activities”

## BACKGROUND

Demographic shifts, particularly the ageing of the population, have profound implications for older persons' social and economic security, primarily through labor markets and leisure activities. As the proportion of older adults increases, there is often a reduction in the working-age population, leading to labor shortages in key sectors. To address this, there may be a push for older individuals to remain in the workforce longer, either through delayed retirement or part-time employment opportunities. This can help sustain economic productivity and alleviate some pressure on pension systems. However, extending working life requires supportive policies, such as age-friendly workplaces, retraining opportunities, and flexible working conditions to accommodate the physical and health needs of older workers. The increasing number of older adults also puts a strain on social security systems, particularly with higher demands for pensions, healthcare, and long-term care services. Governments may face financial challenges in sustaining these systems without reforms, potentially leading to changes in retirement age, benefit structures, or increased contributions from both workers and employers. Additionally, older adults often face the risk of economic insecurity due to inadequate retirement savings, job discrimination, or underemployment, highlighting the need for robust social safety nets and inclusive labor market policies that ensure older individuals can maintain their economic independence and well-being. Leisure activities and lifestyle choices for older persons are also impacted by demographic shifts. As life expectancy increases, there is a growing demand for leisure activities that cater to older adults, such as wellness programs, cultural events, and community engagement opportunities. These activities not only contribute to the quality of life but also promote physical and mental health. However, access to leisure activities may be limited by financial constraints, health issues, or inadequate infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Policymakers and communities need to ensure that leisure facilities and programs are accessible, affordable, and designed to meet the diverse needs of an aging population, thereby enhancing social inclusion and overall life satisfaction for older persons.





ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation



## The Implications of Demographic Shifts on Social and Economic Security through Labor Markets and Leisure Activities

19 September 2024

9.30 a.m. – 11.10 a.m. (NY time) / 3.30 p.m. – 5.10 p.m. (CET)

With the support of:



This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fenghzi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



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**Dr. Ebru Canan-Sokullu**  
Associate Director, CIFAL Global Network  
Division for People  
UNITAR



### COORDINATOR

**Ms. Analucía Jácome**  
Senior Coordinator of the Series  
UNITAR



## SPEAKERS

# Focus: The current scenario and feasible solutions for older persons in the labor market



**Mme. Dorothea Schmidt-Klau**

Chief of the Employment, Labor Markets and Youth Branch of the Department of Employment Policy, Job Creation and Livelihoods, EMPLAB, at the UN International Labor Organization

*“We need comprehensive policies that intervene at macro, sectoral, enterprise, and individual levels.”*

- 1 We are witnessing a change of unprecedented magnitude. Societies are ageing, youth challenges remain unsolved, and there are limited and inaccurate perspectives on older persons.
- 2 Older persons have the lowest labor force participation rates and receive the least investment in reskilling compared to other age groups. For the youth, demographic pressure exists alongside unsolved employment problems. Population aging and increased longevity are often perceived as burdens on national economies, labor markets, health, and social care. Older persons are seen as expensive, unproductive, and incapable of adapting to new technologies.
- 3 With all these challenges and misperceptions, potential solutions may span from labor markets, using the potential of young people, older persons, migrants (in all cases especially women), overcoming ageism at the workplace and beyond, intergenerational solidarity, and respect for work outside of labor markets.
- 4 We need comprehensive policies that intervene at macro, sectoral, enterprise, and individual levels. Firstly, macro policies and investment policies shall be age-sensitive to ensure investment in sectors that profit from ageing and provide jobs for older persons. Secondly, we need to leverage technological progress to support aging societies and shrinking workforces. Thirdly, policies need to incentivize and motivate enterprises to adopt intergenerational approaches, fostering collaboration across age groups. Fourthly, a policy framework for lifelong learning is essential to ensure that older workers can continuously upskill and reskill. Finally, policies shall adopt a life course perspective to transitions.
- 5 Policies are essential in addressing the challenges of aging societies and youth employment. The success of countries like Singapore and Sweden in increasing labor force participation among older persons demonstrates the importance of policy interventions. We need to respect the contributions of older persons, promote intergenerational solidarity, and design policies that support all age groups.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE EMPLOYMENT, LABOUR MARKETS AND YOUTH BRANCH, EMPLAB, AND LABOUR MARKETS SERVICES FOR TRANSITIONS

The work of the EMPLAB branch is guided by international normative and policy instruments (notably the Employment Policy Convention No. 122) relevant to the promotion of employment and decent jobs for all.

The branch responds to the demands and needs of ILO constituents, and other relevant development stakeholders. Its services consider the specific circumstances of countries in terms of the economic and labor market situation, and sectoral composition, along with the challenges faced by different population groups (youth, working age, older workers) and different types of workers (formal, informal), including the most vulnerable ones.

EMPLAB seeks to influence policy change through social dialogue and participatory practices. Its Geneva-based staff teams up with ILO employment specialists in the different regions to offer coordinated responses to contextual, contemporary challenges.

EMPLAB supports governments, and workers' and employers' organizations to develop and implement gender-responsive employment and labor market policies with a focus on youth, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.





## CURIOUS FACT

Longevity has doubled since 1900, with the fastest change ever recorded. A child born today in a developed country has a 50% chance of living past 100 years old. The old age population (65+) will grow by over 300% this century, compared to the working-age population (15-65) which will grow by less than 50%.

13% of the young labor force is unemployed and 20% of young people were NEET (not in employment, education or training) in 2023.

## REMEMBER

When pensions were introduced in Germany in 1889, life expectancy was just above 40 years. Today, the average life expectancy is above 80, meaning most people will receive pensions for a very long time.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- ILOSTAT Statistics on the population and labor force | [Link](#)



# Focus: Social security, retirement, and the future of ageing populations



**Mr. Alejandro Bonilla**

Chair, NGO Committee on Ageing  
 President of the Association of Former International Public Officials for Development (Greycells)

*“Ask the pensioners and older persons what they want, what they need, and what they want to do. It's not something that we can decide without them.”*

- 1 At the family level, no one tells us that we will grow old. Schools don't prepare us for old age. Even in professional careers, there is little focus on aging, except for demographers and actuaries. This lack of preparation explains the scarcity of policies addressing older persons. For actuaries, it's crucial to avoid the perception that death only comes at the end of life. Mortality tables show that death can occur at any age, which is relevant not only for old-age pensions but also for widows' and orphans' pensions. This highlights the importance of comprehensive social security systems.
- 2 The social and economic insecurity drives demographic shifts. We have very little choice in life. We don't choose where we are born or the economic conditions we face—whether hyperinflation, war, recession, or political instability. These factors shape our starting points, which are far from equal.
- 3 Every economy wants to grow, and growth requires consumption. Lowering interest rates is one way to encourage consumption. However, cultural choices also play a role. In today's culture, immediate gratification through sports, music, and technology often takes precedence over saving for the future. Economic insecurity is leading many to delay having children, further skewing the ratio between young and old.
- 4 After World War II, many countries adopted the ILO Social Security Convention as a basic social contract and a driver of development. However, recent years have seen a shift from social insurance to individual savings for retirement. This change favors those with stable jobs, high education, and steady economies, but disadvantages informal workers, women (who face lower salaries and longer life expectancies), and those with low contribution density. This shift has also driven the privatization of pension systems.
- 5 In 2001, the ILO reached a crucial agreement on the new consensus on retirement and income security for older persons. This consensus emphasized ILO standards and the need to complement public and private systems, as well as insurance and savings. Successful countries use multi-pillar pension systems based on public financing, employment, and individual contributions. These countries distribute risk and integrate public policies, education, and civil society participation.
- 6 Public policies, education, and awareness are crucial, but there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Each country must tailor its approach to its specific situation. While public policies are important, we cannot rely solely on them for our future. We must take an active role in shaping our own futures.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

The NGO Committee on Ageing is affiliated with the Conference of Non-governmental Organizations (CONGO) and works to raise world awareness of the opportunities and challenges of global ageing. Throughout the year, the Committee works to promote the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), which contains many suggestions for actions which benefit older persons.





## IMPORTANT

It's essential to involve older persons in discussions about their needs and desires. As with other marginalized groups, the principle of "nothing about us without us" should apply. The ILO's discussions on social security could benefit from more direct involvement of older individuals.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- The ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) | [Link](#)
- The ILO Report on "Social Security: Issues, Challenges and Prospects", 2001 | [Link](#)



# Focus: Sustainable working lives and civil political participation in all ages



**Ms. Sarah Loriato**

Policy Officer on Employment and European Parliament Liaison,  
AGE Platform Europe

*“Aging policies must consistently refer to older persons as right holders. Leaving the labor market shall not mean leaving society.”*

- 1 The right to work is at the core especially when it comes to employment, ageing and other types of policies. Today’s policies are limited by an archetypical conception of lifecycle, which compromises current and future employment policies without reflecting what ageing on the labor market and in society means and implies.
- 2 AGE adopts a human rights-based approach in the advocacy work. It advocates for a new vision that includes a multistage life course approach. The first stage of life includes leisure activities, learning, and a progressive entry into the labor market. A middle stage is divided between work, education, care for children or older relatives, sabbaticals, and learning activities. As in the older age stage, work, leisure activities, and education might continue even after reaching retirement age. This vision is necessary to reveal and include the potential of older workers in employment policies and ageing strategies.
- 3 AGE gathered good practices from EU member states and drafted recommendations to support sustainable and quality working lives, which mainly focused on three aspects.
- 4 Firstly, we could provide support for older workers, which includes career management, managing an ageing workforce, lifelong learning and adult education, as well as minimum income and adequate pensions. Secondly, we need to fight against age discrimination in all its forms, including during recruitment and work, access to work and training, and intersectionality. Thirdly, workplaces shall be adapted for all ages by prioritizing health and security, mental health at work, flexibility of time, and digitalization.
- 5 However, access to leisure activities can be limited by financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure, and ageism. Decision-makers shall include accessibility and affordability of activities, places, and means for civic and political participation, as well as access to information and freedom of expression.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON AGE PLATFORM EUROPE

The AGE Platform Europe (AGE) is the largest European network of non-profit organizations of and for older persons. AGE has around 100 members and has existed since 2001. A human rights-based approach is adopted in the advocacy work. AGE advocates for a new vision that includes a multistage life course approach. It seeks to combat ageism, promote human rights throughout the life course, reduce inequalities and enable everyone to live a full and dignified life. It also raises the aspirations and needs of older persons bridging the gap between them and policymakers. The members’ experiences and ideas are also turned into policy proposals, advocacy, campaigning, dissemination actions and projects.





## GOOD PRACTICES FROM EU MEMBER STATES

In Belgium, a collective agreement concluded between social partners provides for the adoption of a plan to maintain or increase the number of employees aged 45 and over in private companies. Measures of the plan could relate to recruitment processes, skills and qualifications, care development or working conditions.

In Sweden, the employment rate of women aged 55-59 is 81.9%, compared to 87.3% for men of the same age. Both men and women are entitled to 18 months of parental leave, which must be shared over at least 6 months. In addition, as soon as the child is one year old, the municipalities must offer a childcare solution to the parents.

## TO BEAR IN MIND

It's essential to include older persons in decision-making and monitoring processes to ensure that policies are adequate and applicable in real life.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- AGE Platform Europe | [Link](#)
- AGE Barometer 2023 | [Link](#)
- Healthy Workplaces Campaigns launched by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work | [Link](#)



# Focus: Access to employment for refugees and older persons



**Mr. Ricardo Pla Cordero**

Protection Officer - Ageing and Disability Inclusion,  
Division of international Protection / Community Based  
Protection Unit  
UNHCR

*“Improving access to employment and social protection for older persons and refugees requires coordinated efforts across policy, administrative, and community levels.”*

- 1 A significant increase in formal employment access for refugees globally was observed. Several restrictions hinder refugees' access to employment, including administrative or practical barriers, no recognition of skills or certificates, lack of awareness among refugees' rights and opportunities for formal employment.
- 2 When applying this analysis to older persons in situations of forced displacement and statelessness, we find significant issues. Firstly, many older refugees lack necessary documentation, either because they left it behind or never possessed it. Secondly, many older refugees cannot access their pensions from another country due to non-transferability, lack of international agreements, or loss of documentation. Thirdly, there are difficulties for older persons to access information and digitalized services.
- 3 To address these challenges, promising practices and enabling actions can be implemented to improve the situation for older persons and refugees in the labor market.
- 4 Better monitoring of employment access and social protection schemes for older persons leads to more effective policymaking. States should include employment rates for refugees in their data, disaggregated by sex, age, and disability.
- 5 There is a need to remove policy and administrative barriers that hinder access to employment. Removing these barriers is crucial to ensure their protection in line with the 1951 Refugee Convention.
- 3 At the operational level, it is essential to ensure accessibility to information and premises. This includes providing information in multiple languages and offering alternative ways to access it, such as through human interaction.
- 4 Alternative measures to facilitate access to information and capacity building for older persons to access national services are crucial. These measures should focus on providing tailored support and ensuring that older persons can effectively engage with available resources and services.
- 5 By removing barriers, leveraging promising practices, and ensuring inclusive participation, we can create more equitable opportunities for these vulnerable groups.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a global organization dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights and building a better future for people forced to flee their homes because of conflict and persecution. During displacement, older persons can be particularly at risk of abuse and neglect. UNHCR works to support and protect older persons on the move, enabling access to basic services as they recover and rebuild after a crisis.





## CURIOUS FACT

According to the Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Report prepared by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 2023, despite having legal rights to employment, only 67% of refugees have formal access, and only 45% access it in practice.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Refugee women and older adolescents face additional challenges, primarily due to caregiving responsibilities. Nearly 70% of these individuals are burdened with household chores, childcare, and care for older persons or those with disabilities. This "care dilemma" highlights the need for state and civil society interventions to support these groups while ensuring dignified care for older persons and persons with disabilities.

## PROMISING PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

Several promising practices are emerging globally. For example, cash-for-work programs in Afghanistan eased the economic strain on vulnerable households and benefited the wider community. In India and Venezuela, we see cross-generational support and the transfer of traditional skills and land management techniques, which benefit younger populations. Additionally, efforts to make national protection systems accessible to refugees, as seen in Costa Rica and other countries, are gaining traction.

## PROMISING PRACTICES AROUND THE WORLD

States have a responsibility to protect refugees and older persons within their jurisdiction and should engage them formally as part of the workforce, as learners, and as individuals with full rights.

There are multi-country opportunities for states and stakeholders to collaborate. The Global Compact on Refugees provides a platform for multi-stakeholder pledges on economic inclusion and social protection. States, academia, and NGOs are encouraged to join and contribute to better economic integration and social protection for refugees. More partners, especially those with a focus on aging, are needed to strengthen these efforts.

## IMPORTANT

Participation in humanitarian and development assistance programs is crucial. Along with humanitarian assistance, it is important to adopt a development approach in countries hosting refugees. Collaboration with organizations like the ILO is essential in this regard. For example, UNHCR has adjusted eligibility requirements for cash-for-work programs in Rwanda to include older refugees, ensuring equal access to employment opportunities.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- UNHCR Global Survey on Livelihoods and Economic Inclusion Report (December 2023) | [Link](#)
- UNHCR Report "A Claim to Dignity: Ageing on the Move" | [Link](#)
- Global Compact on Refugees | [Link](#)
- The 1951 Refugee Convention | [Link](#)



# Focus: Leveraging intersectionality and support for older persons



**Dr. Michael Ashley Stein**

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability,  
Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School

*“Older persons deserve a life of dignity that includes leisure, recognition for their contributions, and respect for their experience and wisdom.”*

- 1 In a world increasingly influenced by neoclassical economics, we urgently need solidarity and allyship. Instead of fighting over limited resources, we should focus on expanding opportunities and increasing the overall availability of resources.
- 2 We must explore how to leverage these changing realities to improve social welfare, mental health, and social inclusion for older persons. Loneliness and social isolation are profound issues among older adults, with significant impacts on both mental and physical health. We should consider alliances between older persons and youth and explore how technologies like AI can enhance social connectedness.
- 3 In the labor market, we should reconsider efficiencies beyond just entry costs, salaries, and benefits. Older workers may have higher initial costs, but they also bring reduced training and onboarding needs, as well as valuable experience and institutional knowledge.
- 4 We must also recognize the intersectionality of aging and disability. As people age, they are more likely to experience disabilities, making this a cross-cutting issue. Similarly, gender intersects with aging, as women often face social stigma and are pushed into caregiving roles rather than earning positions. This limits their economic opportunities and educational attainment, creating further challenges when they enter the labor market.
- 5 Additionally, we shall look into the issue of pensions and emphasize social inclusion and leisure activities for older persons.
- 6 By addressing the intersectionality of aging, disability, and gender, and by leveraging technology and community support, we can create a more equitable and dignified future for older persons.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY

THPOD has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to empowering civil society and other actors by fostering knowledgeable and discerning advocacy for Human Rights. Their endeavors encompass a range of activities, including the provision of comprehensive human rights training and education, the facilitation of international law and policy development, the promotion of inclusive practices in development, the dissemination of technical assistance pertaining to strategic litigation, and the cultivation of innovative perspectives regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to human rights.





**FOOD FOR THOUGHT**

Women live longer than men, which means pensions incur greater costs for them. However, from a non-discrimination standpoint, we must ensure that women’s pensions are not discounted. This raises important questions about how to balance economic realities with equity and fairness.

**IMPORTANT**

In middle-income and high-income countries, there is a lack of community-based support for aging populations. Institutional care, such as nursing homes, is often the default solution, despite its many shortcomings. We must advocate for deinstitutionalization and the prevention of violence and abuse, as highlighted in human rights discussions.



## FOURTH EVENT

# “The intersectionality of discrimination faced by older persons”

## BACKGROUND

Raising awareness about the intersectionality of discrimination faced by older persons is essential for creating more inclusive and supportive societies for all. This group often experience discrimination not just based on age -ageism- but also due to factors like gender, race, disability, and socioeconomic status. Highlighting these overlapping forms of discrimination helps people understand that ageing is not a uniform experience and that many older persons face compounded challenges. Awareness is the first step toward advocating for policies and programs that address these multifaceted issues. Furthermore, bringing attention to these intersectional challenges breaks down harmful stereotypes about older persons, who are often viewed as a homogeneous group. By promoting awareness, society can develop a more nuanced understanding of ageing, recognizing the diverse realities within this demographic, and creating more targeted interventions that meet their varied needs. In this regard, it is also important to building empathy and solidarity. When people understand the multiple ways, older persons are marginalized, they are more likely to support efforts that protect their rights and well-being. Awareness campaigns and educational programs can mobilize communities to challenge discrimination against older persons and advocate for more inclusive laws and services that consider intersectional identities. Moreover, when intersectionality is recognized, policies can be designed to address the specific needs of various subgroups within the older population, such as older persons with disabilities or older immigrants. This approach ensures that resources and support systems are distributed more equitably, improving the overall quality of life for all older adults. Without awareness, policies risk being too generic, leaving some of the most vulnerable older adults without the assistance they need. Better understanding the intersectionality of discrimination faced by older persons aligns with global human rights initiatives. It contributes to change the mindset to foster older person’s inclusion, regardless of their background or identity, so they are seen as full members of society with rights to dignity, equality, and autonomy. Joint efforts in this regard can help shape a society where older persons are not only valued but also actively supported, including through the proper use of technologies by promoting a more just and inclusive environment for everyone, regardless of age.







ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation

## The Intersectionality of Discrimination Faced by Older Persons

 **17** October 2024

 9.30 a.m. – 11.10 a.m. (NY time) / 3.30 p.m. – 5.10 p.m. (CET)

With the support of:

This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fenghzi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



### MODERATOR

**Dr. Ebru Canan-Sokullu**  
Associate Director, CIFAL Global Network  
Division for People  
UNITAR



### COORDINATOR

**Ms. Analucía Jácome**  
Senior Coordinator of the Series  
UNITAR



## SPEAKERS

## Focus: Addressing invisibility and recognizing the rights of older persons



**H.E. Amb. Juan Esteban Aguirre**

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Republic of Paraguay

***“Human rights do not diminish with age. Older persons have the same rights as everyone else. These rights are the basis of independence, participation, care, self-fulfillment, and, above all, dignity.”***

- 1 Older persons need to change how they think, feel and act towards aging, fostering positive attitudes and challenging the invisibility and stereotypes that often limit their role in society. With changing demographics, rapid technological advances, and instant digital communication, discussions on the rights, needs, and interests of older persons require a focused approach, ensuring their valuable contributions to communities and the planet.
- 2 Economic and geographic disparities further exacerbate the invisibility and all other challenges, with limited support and social service for older persons in poverty and isolated rural areas. These factors contribute to the marginalization of older persons, whose needs are often deprioritized during resource constraints, as seen in the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 3 Current international human rights frameworks fall short of protecting older persons comprehensively, lacking specific obligations related to age discrimination. To address these gaps, Member States, civil society, and UN experts in the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing have proposed a legally binding instrument to secure the rights of older persons. For older persons to be visible and fully recognized as holders of human rights, they must also have a voice in decisions impacting their lives.
- 4 The proposed international instrument aims to secure older persons' right to participate in policy-making as part of their public and political involvement, guiding governments on creating inclusive policies. It would establish mechanisms for implementing, monitoring, and reporting on these policies, allowing older persons to hold governments accountable. Recommendations from these processes would contribute to policy and reform initiatives, enhancing alignment with human rights standards.
- 5 It's also an urgent task to collect data to address the compounded challenges older persons face. Data collection disaggregated by age, sex, and other characteristics supports the development of targeted legislation, policies, and practices addressing older persons' needs. Further breakdown by age cohort will help to better understand the diverse circumstances and contributions of different age groups within the older population, a rapidly growing demographic.

### HIGHLIGHTS ON PARAGUAY

In Paraguay, in general, the Human Rights of older persons are protected in the framework of various general laws, as well as in special legislation at all levels. For instance, Article 57 of the National Constitution of the Republic of Paraguay states that older persons have the right to comprehensive protection and that families, society and state institutions must promote their wellbeing through the provision of social services that fulfils their needs regarding nourishment, health, housing, culture and leisure. Since 2010, the Government of Paraguay is implementing the “National Plan of Public Policies for Older Persons” which aims to promote and protect the human rights of older persons and to support their social inclusion and participation in public life.





## DID YOU KNOW?

The United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) is a global collaboration, aligned with the last ten years of the Sustainable Development Goals, to improve the lives of older persons, their families, and the communities in which they live. Today, too many people around the world experience worse health than they should because of unsupportive environments that prevent them from maximizing their later years. The Decade aims to give everyone the opportunity to add life to years, wherever they live. It is a transformative collaboration of diverse sectors and stakeholders that focuses on changing how we think, feel, and act towards ageing; cultivating age-friendly environments; creating integrated and responsive health care systems and services; and ensuring access to long-term care for older persons who need it.

## REMEMBER

Older persons themselves are essential in reshaping perceptions of aging, as their attitudes can strongly influence societal views and policies. By adopting a positive outlook on aging, they actively challenge stereotypes but highlight instead their resilience, adaptability, and ongoing ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Through resisting ageist bias and advocating for their own needs and rights, older individuals foster respect and encourage younger generations to view aging with optimism, developing a society where all ages hold value.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Health data overview for the Republic of Paraguay | [Link](#)
- Open-ended Working Group on Ageing Report on Paraguay's Inputs | [Link](#)



# Focus: Bridging the digital divide for older women



**Ms. Loly Gaitan**

Programme Officer in the Digital Networks and Society Department  
International Telecommunication Union (ITU)

***“Older women are underrepresented in global internet usage, with more than 60% lacking basic digital literacy, which makes it more difficult for them to benefit from online services that provide social connections and economic opportunities.”***

- 1 The ITU has a dedicated focus on digital inclusion, emphasizing an intersectional approach. Their work supports Member States in addressing digital inclusion across five groups, including women and girls, youth, people with disabilities, older persons, and remote and indigenous communities. It aims to integrate these groups into the digital landscape by designing policies and regulations that account for intersecting challenges, such as age, gender, disability, and rural isolation.
- 2 Focusing on age and gender reveals unique challenges in digital inclusion, especially regarding the digital gender gap among older women. Older women face significant digital exclusion globally, with over 60% lacking basic digital literacy.
- 3 The digital gender gap among older women stems from several factors, including historical and cultural norms that have limited their financial resources, making technology and digital education less accessible. Additionally, most digital tools and platforms are designed with younger users in mind, often overlooking the needs of older users, particularly those with disabilities or low literacy.
- 4 This lack of digital literacy and access has substantial economic and social repercussions. During COVID-19, cyber abuse and financial fraud were on the rise, with older women over 60 increasingly targeted. FBI reported an 11% increase in cyber fraud against older individuals from 2022 to 2023, with financial losses exceeding \$3.4 billion. This highlights the urgency of digital inclusion initiatives, with efforts focused on digital skills training, and promoting accessible ICT to protect and empower older populations.
- 5 ITU collaborates with governments, the private sector, and academia to promote digital accessibility and equity at national, regional, and international levels. This collaborative approach emphasizes accessibility and inclusivity, striving to bridge the digital divide for older persons worldwide.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE ITU

ITU is working to raise awareness and promote the active participation of girls and young women in ICT and other STEM-related careers and other digital skills to fulfil the demand for future jobs on an equal basis. ITU’s work on gender equality is guided by Resolution 70: Mainstreaming a gender perspective in ITU and promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women through information and communication technologies, as well as by its Gender Equality and Mainstreaming (GEM) policy and action plan. Over the years, ITU has led several programmes and initiatives to include women and girls more closely in the digital transformation of economies and societies, whilst accelerating gender equality and mainstreaming in its internal processes, aiming to be a model organization in terms of gender equality.





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The lack of confidence among older women in using digital devices stems from the cumulative disadvantages they have faced throughout their lives, increasing vulnerability to social exclusion and reliance on others for accessing essential digital services. Despite having accumulated vast amounts of experience and knowledge during their life course, older women often lack the tailored educational financial resources necessary to fully leverage the opportunities presented by the modern digital landscape.

Older women's digital inclusion can be a driver for making new connections with people of different ages in different spaces. As well as gaining access to online services, digital skills can increase older women's access to decent work. While digitalization can strengthen older women's connections, it could also be a driver for social isolation and loneliness.

## CURIOUS FACT

In low-income and middle-income countries, only 14% of women over 50 own a smartphone, compared to 27% of men in the same age group.

## IMPORTANT

To promote older women's digital inclusion, key factors are access to digital learning, age-friendly design of digital services, ageism-free, ethical and safe digital environments that embrace the diversity of older women. We need to encourage intergenerational collaboration, to bridge the digital divide and break down social and cultural barriers to ensure that women of all ages have equal access to technology and the skills they need to use it effectively.

Intergenerational action can also foster a culture of lifelong learning. Specifically engaging older women in the design of policies and programmes can help ensure that initiatives are designed in a way that supports the needs of women of all ages, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable future.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- The Mobile Gender Gap Report by GSMA | [Link](#)
- Learn more about " Bridging the gender divide" by visiting the official webpage of the ITU | [Link](#)
- FBI Report "Americans older than 60 lost \$3.4 billion to scams in 2023" | [Link](#)



# Focus: Legal protections against ageism and challenges for older persons in Poland



**Ms. Anna Chabiera**

Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of Poland

*“Without timely and regular connections, older women may be more disadvantaged than older men due to cultural and social norms that historically placed men as drivers in families.”*

- 1 Ageism refers to stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) towards people based on their age, as defined in the World Health Organization’s 2021 Global Report. This can manifest at institutional, interpersonal, or self-directed levels. Institutional ageism is crucial, as it involves laws and policies that unfairly limit opportunities for individuals based on age.
- 2 The legal framework in Poland offers limited protection against age discrimination. The Polish Constitution states that all individuals are equal before the law and entitled to equal treatment by public authorities. The Act on Equal Treatment of 2010 addresses discrimination only in employment, leaving gaps in education, social services, and healthcare.
- 3 The intersection of age and migration reveals significant gaps in the legal framework affecting older migrants’ ability to apply for permanent residence in Poland. While legal provisions exist for younger migrants seeking education or marriage, older individuals face indirect discrimination. This issue is particularly pressing for older refugees from Ukraine, who may be forced to return to a war-torn country without adequate support. Therefore, urgent action is required to establish additional legal protections for older person in humanitarian crises to ensure they can live with dignity.
- 4 Access to social services is another critical issue, especially for older persons in rural areas. Without timely and regular connections, older women may be more disadvantaged than older men due to cultural and social norms that historically placed men as drivers in families. After a husband’s death, a woman may lack access to a car and, consequently, independent mobility.
- 5 Discrepancies in retirement age based on gender also present challenges, highlighting the intersection of age and gender discrimination. Survey results from Poland indicate mixed perceptions regarding the difference in retirement age for men and women.
- 6 The need for a new convention on the rights of older persons is underscored by the necessity for clear human rights standards and increased awareness of ageism and its effects.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS OF POLAND

The Commissioner for Human Rights is the constitutional authority for legal control and protection in Poland, accountable only to the Sejm (lower chamber of the Parliament). The Commissioner for Human Rights has a mandate to safeguard human and civil freedoms and rights, including the implementation of the principle of equal treatment. The Commissioner may carry out an investigation independently, request the examination of the case by competent authorities, or request the Sejm to order the Supreme Audit Office to examine the case. The Commissioner for Human Rights can also approach relevant authorities with proposals for legislative initiatives or for issuing or amending legal acts concerning human and civil freedoms and rights, especially on the protection of older persons.





## TO BEAR IN MIND

Ageism impacts not only individuals but also has broader economic implications. The world is facing a demographic crisis, with a shrinking workforce and increasing dependency ratio. Sidelining older workers could worsen labor shortages and lead to a loss of their valuable expertise and skills.

## IMPORTANT

Countering ageism is crucial not only for social justice, but also for organizational efficiency. Teams with diverse age groups benefit from a range of experience. Older employees bring stability, deep industry knowledge and the ability to handle difficult situations, while younger employees bring fresh insights, innovation and energy. An inclusive workplace where every employee feels valued and has a chance to grow can significantly improve the working atmosphere, increase employee retention and contribute to the organization's long-term success.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- WHO 2021 Global Report on Ageism | [Link](#)
- Learn more about the work of Polish Commissioner for Human Rights | [Link](#)
- UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) Update on the human rights situation of older persons in Ukraine in the context of the armed attack by the Russian Federation | [Link](#)



1

NO POVERTY

2

ZERO HUNGER

3

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

4

QUALITY EDUCATION

5

GENDER EQUALITY

6

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

7

AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

8

DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

9

INDUSTRIALIZATION, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

10

REDUCED INEQUALITIES

11

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES

12

RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION

13

CLIMATE ACTION

14

LIFE BELOW WATER

15

LIFE ON LAND

16

PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

17

PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

# Focus: How professional immigration policies help to reduce discrimination faced by older persons



**Mr. Miguel Ortiz Haro**  
Professional Immigration Manager  
Envoy Global

*“Older migrants, like all individuals, have the right to dignity, equality, and the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to society.”*

- 1 Professional immigration policies can be powerful tools for work inclusion of older migrants. Companies benefit from hiring older migrants not only for their expertise but also for mentoring, knowledge transfer, loyalty, retention, diversity, and interculturality. They can also provide companies with extensive international networks and connections, facilitating global expansion.
- 2 Age-inclusive immigration policies create a more equitable environment for facilitating the hiring of older migrants. Various economic incentives, such as tax reductions and exemptions, have been implemented to encourage companies to employ older migrants. These incentives alleviate the costs associated with hiring foreign nationals, allowing companies to hire more older individuals and enabling older migrants to enter into balanced competition with the younger workforce.
- 3 Age-inclusive immigration policies that prioritize skills enable older migrants to not only secure employment but also establish their own businesses. Older migrants, who may have held significant roles in their home countries, often bring networks, loyalty, and experience in navigating global markets. These policies allow qualified older migrants to establish businesses or operate as freelancers, with access to financial assistance based on the type of business rather than the founder's age.
- 4 To facilitate the full integration of older migrants into their new countries and cultures, it is essential for states to enhance support systems that include language training, healthcare, and other resources tailored to senior populations. Immigration laws should explicitly protect all workers from discrimination and encourage companies to adopt inclusive hiring practices that prioritize skills, experience, and knowledge rather than age. Policymakers are urged to continue refining immigration laws to ensure they are age-inclusive.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON ENVOY GLOBAL

Envoy Global is a global immigration services provider offering the only immigration management platform that helps companies hire and manage an international workforce. Through their platform and services, Envoy Global empower companies to hire the best talent regardless of where they live, manage their entire global workforce and enable employees to take advantage of business opportunities around the globe.





## INTERESTING PRACTICE

Countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have developed immigration policies that prioritize work experience over formal educational qualifications for specific visa categories. For instance, Canada's Express Entry System enables skilled workers to apply for permanent residency based on their work experience, language skills, and age, without the strict requirement of a diploma. Similarly, Australia's General Skilled Migration Program assesses applicants primarily on their skills and experience in designated occupations, allowing individuals with substantial work history to qualify for visas even in the absence of a formal degree.

New Zealand's Skilled Migrant Category further exemplifies this approach by offering pathways for immigrants based on practical skills and experience, enabling applicants to gain points for relevant work experience and apply for residency. These countries acknowledge the significant value of practical experience and skill sets, especially in the case of older migrants who often possess extensive expertise and may have held strategic positions in their home countries.

## DO NOT FORGET

Professional older migrants offer significant advantages to host countries and their labor markets. With extensive work experience, they bring a wealth of industry knowledge and expertise that can enhance organizational performance. Their years in the workforce have often equipped them with effective problem-solving skills and the ability to mentor younger employees, fostering a culture of learning and innovation within organizations. Additionally, older migrants contribute to workforce diversity, providing varied perspectives that can lead to better decision-making and creativity.

In the face of labor shortages caused by aging populations and declining birth rates in many countries, integrating older workers into the labor force is increasingly vital. By valuing the contributions of older migrants, businesses can not only fill critical gaps in their workforce but also create a more inclusive environment that harnesses the strengths of all employees, regardless of age. This recognition of the value that professional older migrants bring can lead to enhanced productivity and growth within organizations, ultimately benefiting the broader economy.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about the work of Envoy Global | [Link](#)



# Focus: Understanding lifelong discrimination and rights of older persons



**Ms. Tchaurea Fleury**

Independent Consultant

Expert on the rights of persons with disabilities

***“Older persons often experience discrimination throughout their lives, rooted in various barriers that prevent them from fully and equally participating in society.”***

- 1 The “Game of Life” activity is an interactive exercise to facilitate discussions about the various experiences individuals face as they navigate their life journeys, particularly in relation to rights and discrimination. Participants assume different roles and encounter situations that can either benefit or detract from their life trajectories, illustrating how experiences such as job promotions or losses can impact one’s path.
- 2 To illustrate the effects of discrimination, consider a deaf-blind girl in rural Uganda who lacks access to education. Such experiences can profoundly influence her adulthood and later life, underscoring that the consequences of discrimination persist across a person’s lifespan. Conversely, a boy from a wealthy family may start at a more advantageous position, yet still face challenges, such as rejection for his sexual orientation. This comparison emphasizes that privilege does not shield individuals from the complexities of life.
- 3 Older persons often face lifelong discrimination that stems from various barriers inhibiting their full participation in society. The accumulated effects of discrimination throughout life can intensify as individuals age, leading to unique challenges for older adults. It is essential to recognize both the historical context of discrimination faced and the specific age-related discrimination that arises later in life.
- 4 Various forms of discrimination interact, emphasizing the need to address not only the unique characteristics of individuals but also the broader social, economic, and environmental barriers they encounter. This requires not only recognition of the issues at hand but also concerted action to remove obstacles that hinder participation in society.
- 5 To address these challenges, we shall ensure that older individuals receive the same level of protection under international law as other vulnerable groups. Advocacy for an international treaty specifically focused on the rights of older persons is essential for safeguarding their rights and addressing systemic discrimination. The ongoing discussions and calls for an international treaty reflect the need for an inclusive approach that recognizes and protects the rights of all individuals, regardless of age or background.





## DID YOU KNOW?

The Twin-Track Approach is a strategy for promoting disability inclusion that involves two parallel efforts. The first track focuses on mainstreaming disability within broader development initiatives, policies, and programs. This means integrating considerations for individuals with disabilities into areas such as education, healthcare, and employment, ensuring they are included in all aspects of societal development.

The second track emphasizes providing targeted support specifically designed for individuals with disabilities. This includes tailored interventions, such as rehabilitation services, access to assistive devices, and social protection programs that address their unique needs.

By combining these two tracks—mainstreaming disability into general policies while also offering specific support—policymakers and organizations can effectively uphold the rights of individuals with disabilities, enabling both inclusion and the provision of necessary resources to overcome barriers they face.

## IMPORTANT

The mental health of older persons with disabilities exemplifies the urgent need for an intersectional approach. Individuals at the intersection of old age, disability, and mental health issues often face significant discrimination, which compounds their challenges and negatively impacts their overall well-being. This demographic is particularly vulnerable, belonging to a group that experiences some of the highest suicide rates worldwide, with older persons being the most affected. Therefore, addressing their mental health requires a comprehensive understanding of the unique factors at play, including societal attitudes, access to resources, and systemic barriers. An intersectional perspective is crucial for developing effective support systems that cater to the specific needs of this population.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Report on the rights of older persons with disabilities by the Special Rapporteur | [Link](#)
- Learn more about the “Twin-Track Approach” | [Link](#)



# Focus: Advancing the rights of older persons through intersectionality with a comprehensive convention



**Ms. Silvia Perel-Levin**  
INPEA, ILC GA, & Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing

*“A convention on the rights of older persons, with intersectionality as a central theme, would enhance the effectiveness of other treaty bodies that currently do not address this issue.”*

- 1 After fourteen years, the Open-Ended Working Group has finally completed its work in New York. It is now time for the Human Rights Council to take up the recommendation of the General Assembly and move forward with a resolution to establish a drafting group for a treaty body.
- 2 However, we must also address the significant barriers of digital inclusion that are becoming increasingly prevalent. In today’s world, many processes are conducted solely through digital means. People who lack digital skills are often excluded from training opportunities, either because they are not part of the workforce or because they live in rural areas with limited internet access and poor connectivity. This exclusion prevents them from accessing appropriate services.
- 3 We all agree that a convention is necessary to address these issues, as well as the broader topic of intersectionality. This is not just about older persons; it’s about creating a comprehensive framework that benefits everyone. For example, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities has provided valuable tools for other treaty bodies and existing conventions.
- 4 Intersectionality is a reality that affects all of us, especially in the later stages of life. By incorporating intersectionality into a convention on the rights of older persons, we can create a powerful tool that not only supports older individuals but also strengthens existing conventions. This approach would allow all conventions to better address the rights of older persons and improve the overall framework for human rights protection.
- 5 We need to move forward with a drafting group for a treaty body, address digital exclusion, and prioritize intersectionality in our approach to the rights of older persons. This will not only benefit older individuals but also enhance the effectiveness of our broader human rights framework.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE INPEA

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) is a nonprofit organization that aims to increase society’s ability, through international collaboration, to recognize and respond to the mistreatment of older persons in whatever setting it occurs, so that the later years of life will be free from abuse, neglect, and exploitation while at the same time acknowledging the diversity of culture, background, and life style of the world population.





## BEAR IN MIND

A convention on the rights of older persons, with intersectionality as a central topic, would provide valuable tools to existing treaty bodies. It would bring the issue of intersectionality to the forefront, helping not only the convention on the rights of older persons but also other existing conventions to better address the rights of older persons.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about the Open-ended Working Group (OEWG) | [Link](#)
- Learn more about the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INFEA) | [Link](#)



## FIFTH EVENT

# “Protection of older persons in times of peace and war”

## BACKGROUND

Throughout the years, the role and protection of older persons in times of peace and war has triggered several impacts and challenges at individual and collective levels. While their needs and strengths have barely been made visible, limited actions have been taken to meaningfully address different realities in all regions. Peacetime has not necessarily been availed as an opportunity to include this group as one of the priorities in the States and other actors’ agendas. Wartime has shown that their situation has even worsen although they can assume a protective role of some members of their families because younger adults go to combat or there is sexual violence against women as a weapon of war. The social and economic impact has also placed a lot of burden in people reaching the retirement age. On the one hand, those who have lost their jobs will find it increasingly difficult to re-join the workforce, considering age related stigma and discrimination. In such cases, older persons may face financial difficulties, being forced to anticipate their retirement, or make use of their pensions in advance. In cases of migration, refugee or displacement, the social impact of physical distancing can have broader effects in the elderly, increase vulnerabilities and neglect. For example, older persons living in institutions and care homes have faced a growing number of mistreatment and neglect. Similarly, they can face higher risk of domestic violence and abuse. Social isolation can also increase depression and anxiety, creating physical and emotional impacts for the well-being of older people. Face to difficult circumstances, the perseverance and resilience of older persons is admirable. Their role in the society has been prominent, not just as part of the health staff in the frontline, but also as caregivers for their grandchildren during school lockdowns as a source of courage and patience for facing difficult circumstances. Learning about the protection of older persons fosters a society that values all generations and promotes social cohesion. When they are safeguarded and empowered, communities benefit from their wisdom, experience, and cultural continuity. This understanding encourages intergenerational solidarity, which strengthens the fabric of society by ensuring that everyone, regardless of age, is included and protected. Understanding the measures needed to protect older persons in peace and war underscores the importance of robust legal frameworks and international policies. Knowledge in this area drives the creation and enforcement of laws that defend their rights, ensuring that their needs are addressed under national and international law, in particular International Human Rights Law in peace and war times and in international humanitarian law in war time. This focus leads to better resource allocation, policy development, and training of personnel to support and protect older populations effectively.






ROUNDTABLE SERIES

# MAINSTREAMING KNOWLEDGE ON AGEING

Bridging paths towards strengthening protection and participation



## Participation and Protection of Older Persons in Times of Peace and War

 **21** November 2024

 9.30 a.m. – 11.00 a.m. (NY time) / 3.30 p.m. – 5.00 p.m. (CET)

With the support of:

This document has been prepared by the **Division for People and Social Inclusion at UNITAR**, Ms. Analucía Jácome, Senior Project Leader and Human Rights Expert, Ms. Fenghzi Huang, Zhuoqing Cao, SDP Team and Ms. Julieth Vital and Israel Ledesma, Graphic Designers.

We hope you enjoy it!



**MODERATOR**

**Mr. Alex Mejia**  
 Director, Division for People and Social Inclusion UNITAR



**COORDINATOR**

**Ms. Analucía Jácome**  
 Senior Coordinator of the Series UNITAR



## SPEAKERS

## Focus: Challenges faced by older persons during times of conflict



**Ms. Claudia Mahler**

UN independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons

*“Older persons are frequently overlooked, with their significant contributions to society often going unrecognized, as well as the specific challenges they face, such as isolation, limited access to vital information, and the difficulties of adapting to new environments, especially during times of conflict.”*

- 1 Raising awareness about the human rights of older persons is essential, as their contributions to society are often overlooked. Older individuals frequently face neglect in their specific circumstances, such as loneliness, residing in rural areas, or being left behind in societal advancements.
- 2 During crises, especially armed conflicts, older persons are among the most vulnerable. Many struggle to access timely information, particularly in an era dominated by digital communication. For instance, in Ukraine, an elderly woman shared her difficulty in receiving warnings about airstrikes due to a lack of access to smartphones and social media. Her physical limitations, such as navigating several flights of stairs to seek shelter, further illustrate the barriers faced by older individuals in emergency situations.
- 3 Humanitarian aid often falls short in addressing the unique needs of older persons. Refugees from this demographic face additional challenges, including a lack of assistive devices, healthcare, or support to navigate displacement. Many are forced to leave their homes without essential belongings, making it difficult to rebuild their lives. These realities highlight the need for tailored responses that consider the physical and emotional needs of older persons, ensuring their well-being during displacement and resettlement.
- 4 The experiences and wisdom of older persons are invaluable, particularly in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Their insights can contribute meaningfully to shaping peace agreements and fostering sustainable recovery efforts. However, their inclusion in these processes remains limited. Recognizing and integrating their perspectives into decision-making could enrich peace initiatives and create more inclusive outcomes.
- 5 While International Humanitarian Law acknowledges the needs of older persons, it lacks dedicated protections comparable to those for individuals with disabilities. The absence of a specific convention on the rights of older persons creates gaps in their protection, both during armed conflicts and in peacebuilding efforts. Establishing such a convention would strengthen the global framework for safeguarding the dignity and rights of older individuals, ensuring their inclusion in society and their protection during times of crisis.





## IMPORTANT

Older persons are a relevant, distinct, and heterogeneous group that requires intentional and specific attention. Among older refugees, their role as holders of cultural heritage is particularly significant. They transmit valuable cultural knowledge to the receiving community and younger generations, fostering intergenerational connections. This contribution is especially important for refugee children and young people, as engagement with their cultural roots and values plays a crucial role in shaping their identity within the new community.

In addition to preserving cultural heritage, older persons are often regarded for their wisdom and life experience. They provide essential advice and emotional support to their children and grandchildren, reinforcing family cohesion. Older refugees also contribute to the integration of their families through active involvement in childcare and domestic responsibilities, easing the transition for younger family members in resettlement societies.

## REMEMBER

Older persons are an essential part of society, and their unique needs and contributions must not be overlooked. They bring invaluable wisdom, cultural heritage, and support to their families and communities, especially in times of crisis. Recognizing their roles as cultural custodians and sources of guidance fosters stronger intergenerational connections and helps build more inclusive and resilient societies.

Supporting older persons, particularly during displacement and resettlement, ensures they can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding, integration, and economic participation. Investing in their dignity and rights is not only an act of justice but also a critical step toward creating sustainable and unified communities.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- A/79/167: Future generations of older persons - Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler [|Link](#)



# Focus: Challenges to the enjoyment of the right to life for older persons in conflict and humanitarian settings



**Ms. Chitralekha Marie Massey**

Chief of Section, Rights of Older Persons  
Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)

*“International humanitarian law and human rights law emphasize the right to life and prohibit torture and inhuman treatment. However, older persons still face sexual violence, humiliation, and inadequate living conditions.”*

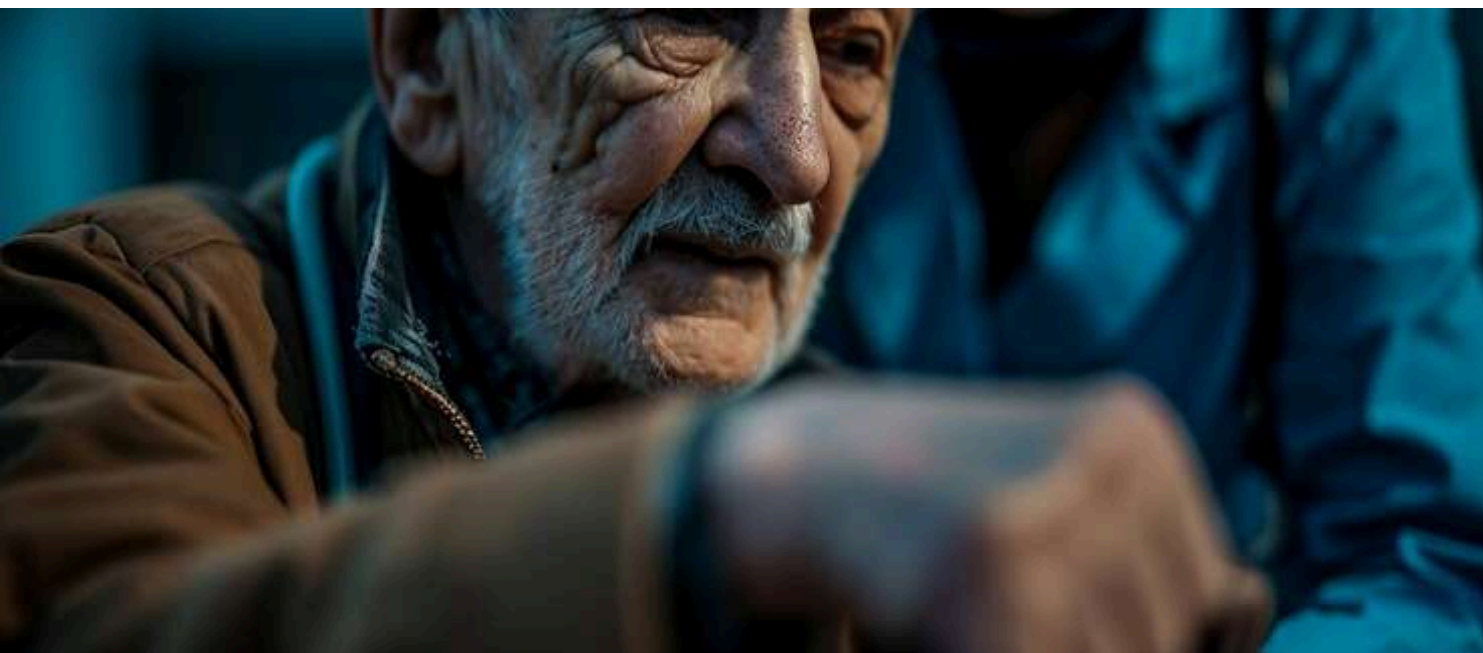
- 1 The challenges faced by older individuals, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, are multifaceted and highlight the universal need for adequate living conditions. These conditions include access to food, water, healthcare, and safety, which are core elements of fundamental human rights such as the right to life and the right to health. Those rights are particularly at risk in conflict zones or natural disasters. For example, in Ukraine, limited mobility, lack of communication, and insufficient evacuation support have put the lives of older individuals at significant risk. These scenarios underscore the need for inclusive policies that adequately address the rights and requirements of older persons.
- 2 Despite the theoretical protections guaranteed by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Geneva Conventions, rights of older persons are often violated in practice. Reports of sexual violence, inhumane treatment, and inadequate living standards reveal the systemic neglect faced by older individuals in conflict zones.
- 3 Economic challenges further compound the vulnerabilities of older persons in conflict zones. Inflation, disrupted access to essential services, and diminished financial security exacerbate their difficulties. For example, in Ukraine, the costs of necessities such as food and rent have skyrocketed, disproportionately impacting single pensioners, most of whom are women living below the poverty line. These economic barriers further exacerbate their vulnerabilities in already dire circumstances.
- 4 These challenges are not confined to one region or conflict but are present in various humanitarian crises, including those induced by climate change. Whether in conflict zones or disaster-hit areas, older persons face unique and often overlooked challenges. Addressing these issues requires coordinated action by governments, humanitarian organizations, and human rights agencies to ensure their dignity and rights are protected, and their specific needs are met in policy and aid responses.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE OHCHR

The OHCHR plays a key role in amplifying the voices of those who are often overlooked, ensuring their inclusion in the human rights agenda. A particular focus is placed on advocating for the rights of older persons and encouraging governments to take necessary measures to protect and promote these rights.

In collaboration with the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, OHCHR serves as the secretariat for the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing. Additionally, OHCHR supports the mandate of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons and works with UN human rights mechanisms and national human rights institutions to monitor and provide guidance on the protection and promotion of older persons' rights.





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The risks faced by older persons in Ukraine are profound and demand urgent attention. Those who have fled the main war zones and those who remain in affected areas require targeted support to address their unique vulnerabilities. Meeting their specific needs entails ensuring access to essential resources such as food, water, shelter, health care, medicines, and assistive technologies. Equally vital is providing mental health and psychosocial support to address the trauma and isolation they endure.

In addition, older persons must be guaranteed access to critical entitlements disrupted during conflicts, including pensions, transportation, and reliable information. These provisions are crucial not only for their survival but also for preserving their dignity and ensuring their inclusion in relief efforts. A comprehensive and inclusive approach is essential to protect their rights and uphold humanitarian principles during this crisis.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In areas of intense fighting, all age groups, including older persons, face serious threats to their lives. However, older persons who have chosen to remain in their homes are often confronted with specific challenges in finding appropriate shelter, basic necessities and other supplies due to infirmity, small social networks and lack of digital literacy, among other things. This harsh reality must be addressed urgently.

The war has also brought forced separation and isolation. Those older persons who have relocated to other areas within Ukraine have undertaken arduous journeys, beset with risks, lacking access to basic health care and other needs while on the move – all while being away from their families and loved ones. Many of those who have remained in their own towns have also experienced limited access to services and a breakdown of their social networks.

Furthermore, those who have managed to flee to neighbouring countries face an uncertain future, with few options to earn an income, often managing chronic health conditions, and without knowing when or if they will ever be able to go home.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) | [Link](#)
- The Geneva Conventions and the Commentaries | [Link](#)



# Focus: Education for older persons in conflicts and peace



**Ms. Stacy Dry Lara**

Executive Director  
Graduate Women International (GWI)

*“Education is not just for the young; for older individuals, it provides a foundation for continued personal and societal growth. As a lifelong pursuit, education supports development throughout one's life. Access to lifelong learning promotes self-resilience, both during times of peace and in the face of conflict.”*

- 1 Education is essential for older persons, especially in conflict and crisis situations, as it enhances their resilience and well-being. Lifelong learning helps older individuals maintain dignity and adaptability, especially during challenging times. In peaceful contexts, education tailored to their unique needs equips them with critical knowledge and skills to navigate a rapidly changing world.
- 2 In conflict or disaster situations, education prepares older persons to respond to emergencies and protect their safety. Programs focused on health, first aid, and emergency preparedness empower older individuals to care for themselves and others. Additionally, education on conflict resolution and peacebuilding helps older persons act as mediators and community leaders, drawing on their life experiences to foster social cohesion. Rights awareness ensures that older individuals are informed about legal protections and available assistance, which is vital during displacement or wartime challenges.
- 3 Older persons often take on caregiving roles for displaced family members and vulnerable individuals during conflict. Providing education on caregiving, legal protections, and rights awareness helps them fulfill these responsibilities while safeguarding their dignity. Education also reinforces their role as active participants in their communities, challenging the stereotype of older individuals as passive recipients of care. Instead, they become active contributors to peacebuilding and community resilience.
- 4 Inclusive education policies must prioritize the specific needs of older persons, particularly during conflict. Education for older persons should be seen as an investment in societal strength, enabling them to engage meaningfully in their communities. By equipping older individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate their environments, education strengthens their roles as agents of peace and social cohesion, ensuring a more inclusive and resilient society.
- 5 Governments, civil society, and international organizations must work together to ensure that older persons have access to education that addresses their specific needs, especially during conflict. Education is not only a means of improving individual lives but also a tool for rebuilding societies and fostering lasting peace.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE GRUDUATE WOMEN INTERNATIONAL

Graduate Women International (GWI) advocates for women’s rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality secondary and tertiary education, and training up to the highest levels. GWI emphasizes the importance of lifelong learning, as education is essential for personal growth, societal advancement, and the empowerment of older individuals. In conflict zones, GWI works with affiliates to raise awareness about the rights and protections of older persons. The GWI Hegg Hoffet Fund assists graduate women (and in special cases tertiary women students) who have been displaced because of war, political upheaval or other serious emergencies.





## DO NOT FORGET

Older women face heightened risks, particularly in conflict situations, due to their social and economic vulnerabilities. On average, they outlive men, often leading to higher rates of widowhood and social isolation. These women are more likely to experience physical, financial, familial, and sexual abuse, particularly if they are less educated, unskilled, or living in poverty. In conflict contexts, these risks are exacerbated, as older women's limited resources and support systems make them more vulnerable to exploitation and neglect.

Moreover, health conditions such as impaired physical mobility, diminished sensory awareness, or chronic illness further hinder older women's ability to prepare for or adapt to conflict. Their diminished physical capacity, coupled with social and economic disadvantages, significantly impairs their ability to access shelter, obtain humanitarian aid, or secure basic needs. This intersection of gender, age, and vulnerability amplifies their exposure to violence and displacement. It is crucial to address these factors through targeted support that empowers older women to navigate conflict situations with the necessary resources, protection, and care.

## TO BEAR IN MIND

Education is a powerful tool for empowering older women, particularly in conflict situations, by providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate challenges and protect themselves. Lifelong learning programs can enhance their resilience by equipping them with essential survival skills such as health and first aid, which are especially important in times of crisis. Digital literacy programs help older women stay connected with loved ones, access vital information, and remain informed about their rights and available humanitarian services. Financial literacy education is also crucial, enabling them to manage limited resources effectively and safeguard themselves from economic exploitation. Furthermore, educating older women about their rights and legal protections helps them understand their entitlements and access the assistance they need during displacement or wartime.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about the Graduate Women International (GWI) | [Link](#)
- Learn more about the Hegg Hoffet Fund for Displace Women Graduates | [Link](#)



# Focus: Technology, accessibility, and older persons in conflict situations



**Mr. Jonathan Andrew**

Research Fellow

Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights

***“It is essential to work closely with the technology sector to ensure that advancements are made accessible to people in our communities. Focusing on inclusion and leveraging emerging technologies is not only beneficial for individuals but also in the best interest of the broader society.”***

- 1 Technological advancements are crucial in supporting older persons in conflict zones, but many technologies remain inaccessible to them. For example, applications designed to warn civilians of missile strikes are often not user-friendly for older individuals with mobility or sensory impairments. To improve accessibility, technologies should include features like screen readers and voiceovers. Despite existing for decades, assistive technologies are underutilized, limiting their benefits for older populations.
- 2 Older persons are particularly vulnerable to the consequences of cyber attacks. These disruptions have a disproportionate impact over older persons, who rely heavily on services for daily living and maintaining connections with others. Furthermore, older individuals often depend on telecommunications for accessing public services and staying connected to their families, making them more susceptible to isolation in the event of a cyber attack.
- 3 Disinformation and cognitive warfare pose additional challenges for older persons in conflict zones. Isolated older individuals or those lacking digital literacy may struggle to identify false information or propaganda, which can fuel division and alter public perceptions of the conflict.
- 4 Biometric technologies, including gait recognition, are being used in conflict zones by occupying forces to monitor populations. For older persons with mobility impairments, these technologies present privacy concerns. As biometrics become more widespread, it's essential to consider how they affect vulnerable populations and ensure their privacy rights are protected.
- 5 Involving older persons in the design and development of technologies, particularly those related to public safety, is essential. Current technological development often excludes older individuals, as surveys and online tools used for consultation are inaccessible to many. Engaging older persons in these processes will ensure that technological advancements benefit everyone, including the most vulnerable.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE WORK OF THE GENEVA ACADEMY OF INTERNATIONAL HUMANITARIAN LAW AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Geneva Academy's three-year project, *Human Rights in a Digitalized World: Mapping Risk, Strengthening Regulation, and Promoting the Development of International Human Rights Law*, addresses the emerging challenges of digital military technologies, harmful content, and neurotechnology. By working with the HRC Advisory Council and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights, the project aims to provide key stakeholders with a shared understanding of these risks and strengthen the international human rights framework. The project will result in guidelines for the development and use of these technologies in compliance with human rights, with targeted dissemination to the technology and corporate sectors, encouraging them to integrate human rights perspectives into their innovation and regulatory practices.





## DID YOU KNOW?

Older persons in conflict zones face unique digital challenges that significantly hinder their access to critical information and services. Many older individuals have limited digital literacy, which makes it difficult for them to use the technology designed to help them during emergencies. In conflict areas, where access to reliable communication channels is essential, older persons often struggle with mobile apps and digital platforms designed for emergency alerts, safety protocols, and health information. The rapid shift to digital services can leave them isolated, unable to access necessary resources like healthcare, legal assistance, or even communication with family members, exacerbating their vulnerability during times of crisis.

In addition to issues of digital literacy, older persons also face physical limitations that make using digital devices challenging. For example, impairments in mobility, vision, or hearing can make it difficult for them to navigate small screens or use applications effectively, especially in environments where power outages or technical disruptions are common. Furthermore, the lack of accessible designs, such as screen readers or large-font options, often means that older persons cannot access vital information when it is most needed. These digital barriers create a significant gap in emergency preparedness and response, leaving older individuals more at risk during conflicts and disasters.

## TO BEAR IN MIND

To address the digital challenges faced by older persons in conflict zones, technology must be made more accessible and user-friendly. This includes designing platforms with features like larger text, voice-assisted tools, and simplified interfaces. Additionally, offering digital literacy programs tailored for older individuals can help them navigate technology effectively during crises. Governments, NGOs, and international organizations should collaborate to ensure older persons are not excluded from digital resources in emergencies.

The private sector also has a key role in creating inclusive technology. Companies should adopt accessibility standards and work with human rights experts to design products for all users, including the elderly and those with disabilities. Public-private partnerships can help develop affordable solutions for older individuals with physical limitations. Integrating older persons' perspectives into the design process ensures their needs are met, empowering them to access critical resources and stay connected in times of conflict.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about the Geneva Academy's Report "Human Rights in a Digitalized World: Mapping Risk, Strengthening Regulation, and Promoting the Development of International Human Rights Law" | [Link](#)



# Focus: Interdependence of human rights in the protection of older persons



**Mr. Pier Pigozzi**  
Vice-Rector of International Affairs  
Ludovika University

*“It is crucial to focus not only on general and abstract concepts but also on practical solutions that address real, individual needs. The normative framework should allow space for this approach, promoting solutions based on actual needs.”*

- 1 The implementation of human rights for older persons, both in times of peace and war, presents a complex challenge that must address the interdependence of these rights. This approach must address the multifaceted challenges faced by older persons, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, and ensure their rights are protected alongside those of other vulnerable groups.
- 2 Human rights frameworks, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, emphasize the interdependence of rights. These rights should not be seen as competing but complementary, offering solutions to complex social problems through their interconnectedness. For example, debates on young parents' participation in Europe's labor market highlight the interdependence of rights of women, mothers, and children. Similarly, protecting older persons' rights requires considering their full scope and how they intersect with others' rights in various contexts.
- 3 To effectively address the rights of older persons, a human rights-based approach. This approach requires direct engagement with individuals to understand their specific challenges and needs. For instance, the issue of malnutrition and obesity in São Paulo's slums highlights the need to account for related factors such as unemployment, housing, and education when addressing the right to food. By recognizing the interconnectedness of these issues, more effective solutions can emerge that address multiple needs simultaneously.
- 4 The experience of tackling human rights challenges illustrates that addressing the rights of older persons is not about creating rigid hierarchies of needs but about understanding the complex web of issues that individuals face. This requires flexibility and responsiveness to the actual needs of people in real time, without disregarding other rights that may also be at stake. The rights of older persons must be approached in this comprehensive and integrated manner, ensuring that their unique needs are met while also considering the broader social context in which they live.
- 5 To effectively protect and promote the rights of older persons, policies must be designed with a local, flexible, and needs-based approach. While public policies and authorities play an essential role, the key to addressing complex human rights challenges lies in the ability to meet the real needs of individuals, ensuring that rights are implemented in a way that is both practical and comprehensive. The normative framework surrounding the rights of older persons must accommodate this adaptable, case-by-case approach to ensure the realization of interdependent human rights.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON LUDOVIKA UNIVERSITY

Ludovika University mentors and orients new generations of creative, educated, community building, ambitious young people who want to learn, respect national values, solidary and cooperative, who are also responsible for the future, in order to build Hungary and Europe with their best knowledge.





## DID YOU KNOW?

Older persons are particularly vulnerable in conflict situations due to several factors. First, there is a lack of available data on the number of older individuals remaining in conflict zones and their specific needs. Second, the sudden loss of their social safety net—such as support from family, neighbors, or community members—makes it harder for them to access basic resources like food, medicine, and shelter.

Additionally, older persons are generally less mobile, making it difficult or impossible for them to flee to safety or reach bomb shelters during attacks. As a result, they are more likely to stay in their homes, increasing their risk of exposure to artillery attacks, capture by fighting parties, and becoming victims of burglary, violence, or worse.

## DO NOT FORGET

There is an urgent need for governments, international organizations, and the United Nations to recognize the specific risks and needs of older persons in conflict zones. Protection efforts must be tailored to their unique vulnerabilities, ensuring they have access to essential services such as healthcare, legal support, and safe shelter. Older individuals should also be included in peacebuilding efforts, as their experiences and knowledge can help rebuild communities. Immediate action is crucial to safeguard their rights and well-being, and ensure they are not overlooked in humanitarian responses. Addressing the needs of older persons in conflict is vital for achieving a more inclusive and just recovery process.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- United Nations Principles for Older Persons | [Link](#)
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights | [Link](#)



# Focus: Recognizing the contributions of older persons



**Ms. Márcia Canário**

Expert and trainer in Human Rights  
Eleda Consulting

***“Older persons play vital intergenerational and familial roles, serving as key contributors to maintaining a strong sense of community. They uphold and pass down traditional values, fostering unity and solidarity within their communities in the truest and most meaningful sense of these ideals.”***

- 1 The concept of "old age" has transformed significantly over the past century, driven by increased life expectancy. Older individuals, once seen as frail or nearing the end of their productive lives, must now be recognized for their enduring contributions to society. Their longevity is an asset, as they embody a wealth of knowledge and experience, often described metaphorically as libraries of wisdom.
- 2 While older persons face vulnerabilities, such as health challenges and difficulty adapting to technological advances, they hold a distinct privilege: a lifetime of accumulated experience. This makes them invaluable as repositories of human knowledge and traditions. Despite this, systemic biases persist in both corporate and humanitarian contexts, often excluding older individuals from labor market participation and revenue-generation programs, whether in peacetime or during conflicts.
- 3 Older individuals actively contribute to formal and informal economies through diverse roles, such as small business operators, caregivers, and custodians of traditional skills like agriculture and artisanal crafts. They also uphold family structures and community cohesion, embodying and transmitting core values.
- 4 Age diversity enriches organizations and societies. Research shows that age-diverse teams perform better, combining the strengths of younger and older workers to achieve superior outcomes. Integrating older individuals into labor markets fosters inclusivity and leverages their unique skills while also benefiting younger workers. This collaborative approach strengthens societal solidarity and organizational success.
- 5 The recognition of older persons as valuable members of society and the workforce is essential for both ethical and practical reasons. Underestimating their contributions equates to discarding vast reserves of knowledge and potential, likened to "burning libraries." As aging is an inevitable phase of life for many, fostering inclusion and respect for older individuals is not only a moral imperative but a strategic advantage for communities and economies.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON ELEDA CONSULTING

Eleda Consulting, headquartered in Geneva, specializes in empowering private, public, and international organizations to fulfill their social responsibility by promoting inclusion, equity, and diversity in meaningful and impactful ways.





## CURIOUS FACT

In 1904, life expectancy in Brazil was just 34 years old. By 1960, it had risen to 45, and today it averages 77 years. This dramatic demographic evolution challenges outdated stereotypes about aging.

## INTERESTING PRACTICE

The value of knowledge goes far beyond learning new things—it can also have a profound impact on a person's overall health and well-being. For older adults, sharing their experiences and wisdom helps keep the mind active while enhancing a sense of connection with others. When older adults pass down what they have learned throughout their lives, it can significantly improve their seniors' health and well-being. This act strengthens their mental and emotional health, benefiting not only them but also the communities they interact with.

When older adults share stories or teach skills to others, it creates a bond that helps them stay socially engaged. This social interaction reduces feelings of isolation and gives them a reason to stay involved in community activities. Such bonds not only enrich their lives but also bring comfort and support from those around them. When older adults teach what they know, it exercises their brain in meaningful ways.

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Older persons play a crucial role in society by serving as repositories of knowledge and experience, often bridging the gap between generations. Through their accumulated wisdom, they pass on invaluable insights, traditional practices, and life lessons that younger generations might otherwise miss.

For example, older individuals often mentor younger colleagues in the workplace, guiding them with practical knowledge and nuanced understanding of challenges. In communities, they contribute by preserving cultural traditions, maintaining a sense of identity, and fostering social cohesion. Their participation in caregiving, whether for grandchildren or other family members, not only supports family structures but also alleviates pressures on social systems.

Beyond their cultural and familial contributions, older persons remain active participants in economic and civic life. Many engage in small businesses, agriculture, or other informal economic activities, driving local economies and sustaining livelihoods. Research highlights that age-diverse workplaces benefit from higher productivity and reduced employee turnover, as older workers bring reliability, organizational commitment, and enhanced customer satisfaction. Additionally, they actively volunteer and engage in community-building initiatives, promoting intergenerational solidarity and strengthening the social fabric. Recognizing and harnessing the multifaceted contributions of older persons enriches societies and ensures a more inclusive, equitable, and resilient future.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about the International Day of Older Persons | [Link](#)



# Focus: Advancing the rights and inclusion of older persons



**Dr. Michael Ashley Stein**

Co-founder and Executive Director of the Harvard Law School Project on Disability,  
Visiting Professor at Harvard Law School

*“The perception of productivity shapes societal attitudes toward certain groups, such as older persons, refugees, asylum seekers, and internally displaced persons. These individuals are often unfairly viewed as burdens or drains on resources, a stigma rooted in outdated notions of economic value.”*

- 1 Older persons face multidimensional challenges in both peace and war, including health, technology access, food security, and education. These challenges reflect their vulnerabilities and the societal stigma of perceived unproductiveness, rooted in outdated economic models. This stigma undermines the valuable experience, wisdom, and contributions of older individuals.
- 2 Current policies often overlook the needs of older persons, particularly in social protection and emergency relief. Unlike persons with disabilities, older persons lack a dedicated international treaty to safeguard their rights, leaving them vulnerable during crises like natural disasters and conflicts.
- 3 The success of the disability rights movement in securing international recognition through a dedicated convention offers valuable lessons. A similar treaty for older persons could integrate existing frameworks into international human rights and humanitarian law, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- 4 Demographic shifts further emphasize the urgency of protecting older persons. By 2040, those over the age of 60 are projected to outnumber individuals under 30. This shift necessitates robust social protection systems and inclusive policies to address the growing needs of an aging population. Additionally, emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, present both opportunities and challenges for older persons, requiring proactive measures to ensure equitable benefits and protections.
- 5 Optimism and solidarity are essential for progress. Despite political and logistical challenges, collective efforts can create pathways toward greater inclusion and empowerment for older persons. This involves not only recognizing their rights but also acknowledging their invaluable contributions to society. By addressing the gaps in protections and building on shared experiences, societies can move toward a more inclusive future that benefits everyone.

## HIGHLIGHTS ON THE HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROJECT ON DISABILITY

HPOD has demonstrated a steadfast dedication to empowering civil society and other actors by fostering knowledgeable and discerning advocacy for Human Rights. Their endeavors encompass a range of activities, including the provision of comprehensive human rights training and education, the facilitation of international law and policy development, the promotion of inclusive practices in development, the dissemination of technical assistance pertaining to strategic litigation, and the cultivation of innovative perspectives regarding the capabilities of persons with disabilities and their entitlement to human rights.





## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

By 2024, the population of individuals aged over 65 years is projected to surpass those under the age of 15 in the WHO European Region, signaling a significant demographic shift. This trend presents a complex array of social, economic, and health challenges, including increased demand for healthcare services, changes in workforce dynamics, and the need for comprehensive social protection systems. These shifts necessitate an urgent focus on healthy aging strategies to ensure older adults can live active, independent, and fulfilling lives while mitigating the societal impact of an aging population.

In response to these challenges, WHO's report, "Promoting Physical Activity and Healthy Diets for Healthy Ageing in the WHO European Region," serves as a critical guide to navigating this transformation. The report outlines evidence-based recommendations for fostering healthy longevity, emphasizing the importance of regular physical activity and balanced nutrition in preventing chronic illnesses and maintaining quality of life among older adults. By promoting proactive health measures, the report not only supports individual well-being but also provides a framework for policymakers to address the broader implications of an aging society, ensuring sustainable health systems and inclusive development.

## REMEMBER

The need for the protection and inclusion of older persons is increasingly urgent due to the growing aging population. Older individuals often face barriers in accessing healthcare, education, and employment, while becoming more vulnerable during crises. Comprehensive protection frameworks are essential to ensure their rights, dignity, and well-being are upheld, preventing further marginalization and negative social and economic outcomes.

Inclusion is equally important, as older persons contribute valuable experience, wisdom, and knowledge to their communities. Overcoming stereotypes and societal biases that render older adults invisible is crucial for fostering intergenerational solidarity. Policies that provide equal opportunities, access to services, and protection from abuse and discrimination are key to ensuring the full participation and empowerment of older persons in society.

## USEFUL SOURCES

- Learn more about a new UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons | [Link](#)
- WHO's report on "Promoting Physical Activity and Healthy Diets for Healthy Ageing in the WHO European Region" | [Link](#)





### **USEFUL SOURCES**

UNITAR's Online Portfolio "Ageing & Older Persons" | [Link](#)

***Are you interested in exploring possible synergies to develop learning initiatives on Ageing and Older Persons?***

***Contact us!***

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You can find all the videos of the series **HERE:**

<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQ88YH-YIQS9wxgQw4vdFajL5q5SMMowD>

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# Decade of healthy ageing



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