





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!



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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](#)



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



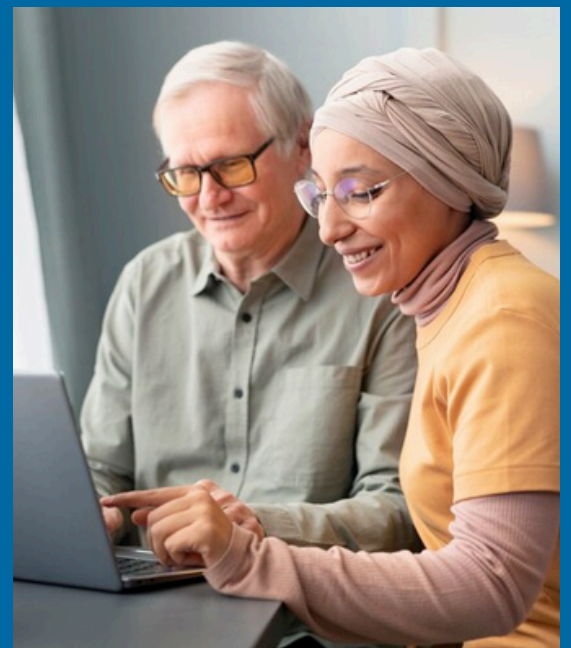
Mr. Miguel Ortiz Haro
Professional Immigration Manager
Envoy Global

“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](#)





Decade of healthy ageing



Department of
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