



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

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2024



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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

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Senior Coordinator of the Series
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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.”

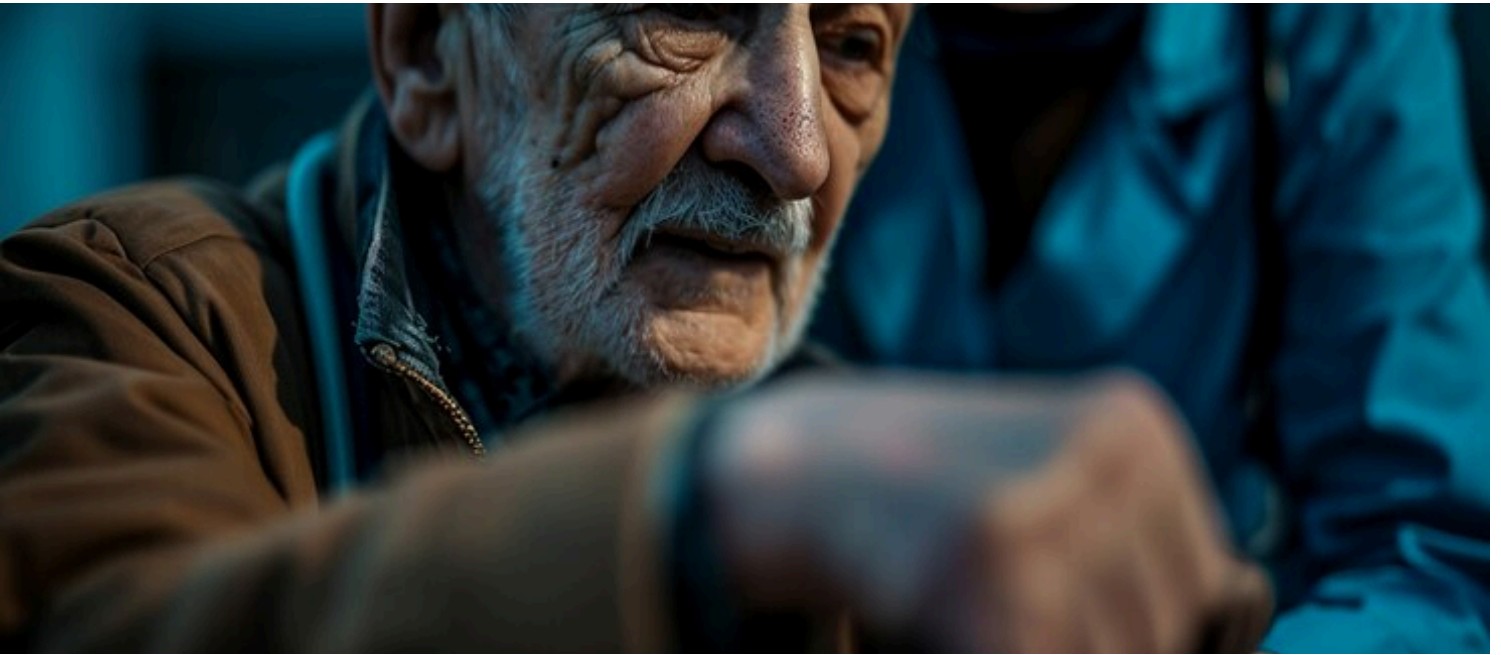
- 1 The challenges faced by older individuals, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, are multifaceted and highlight the universal need for adequate living conditions. These conditions include access to food, water, healthcare, and safety, which are core elements of fundamental human rights 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 GRADUATE 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 Hoffer 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 Hoffer 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

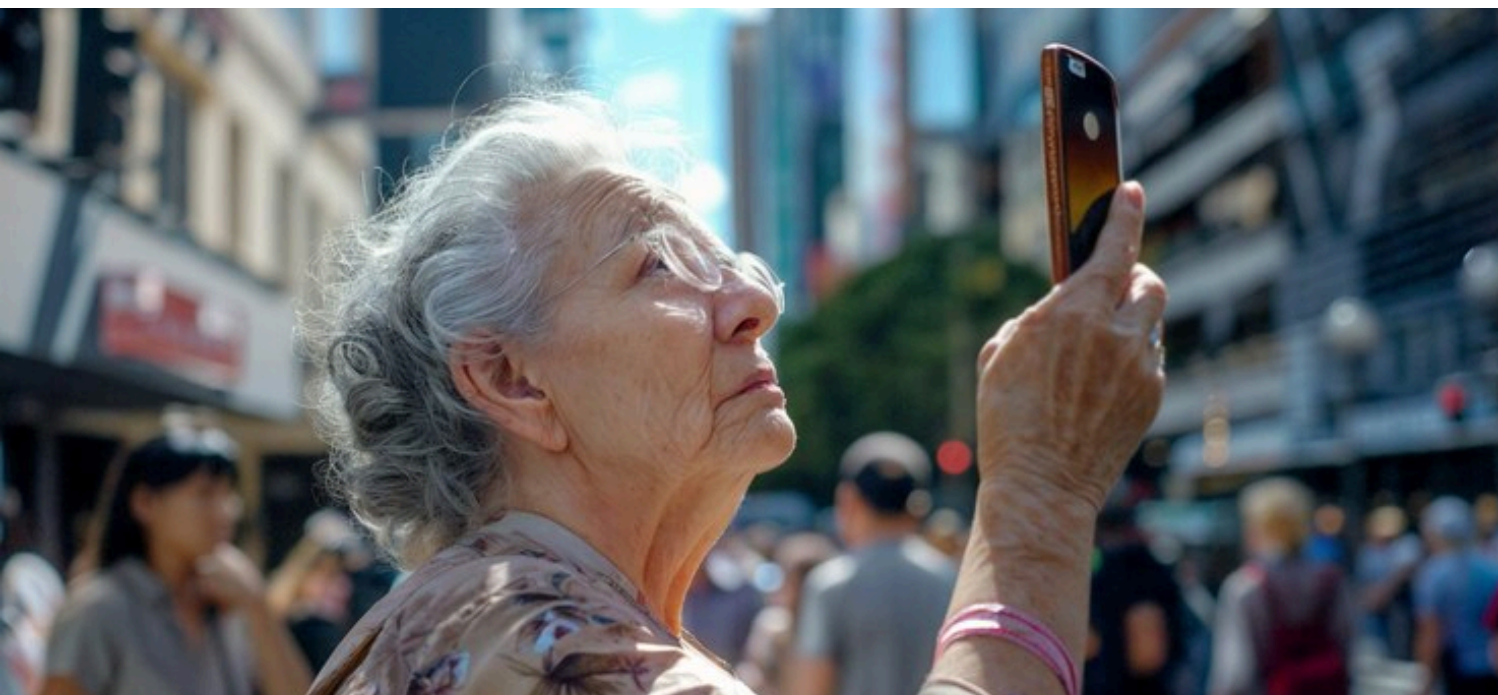
“It is essential to work closely with the technology sector to ensure that advancements are made accessible to people in our communities. Focusing on inclusion and leveraging emerging technologies is not only beneficial for individuals but also in the best interest of the broader society.”

- 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

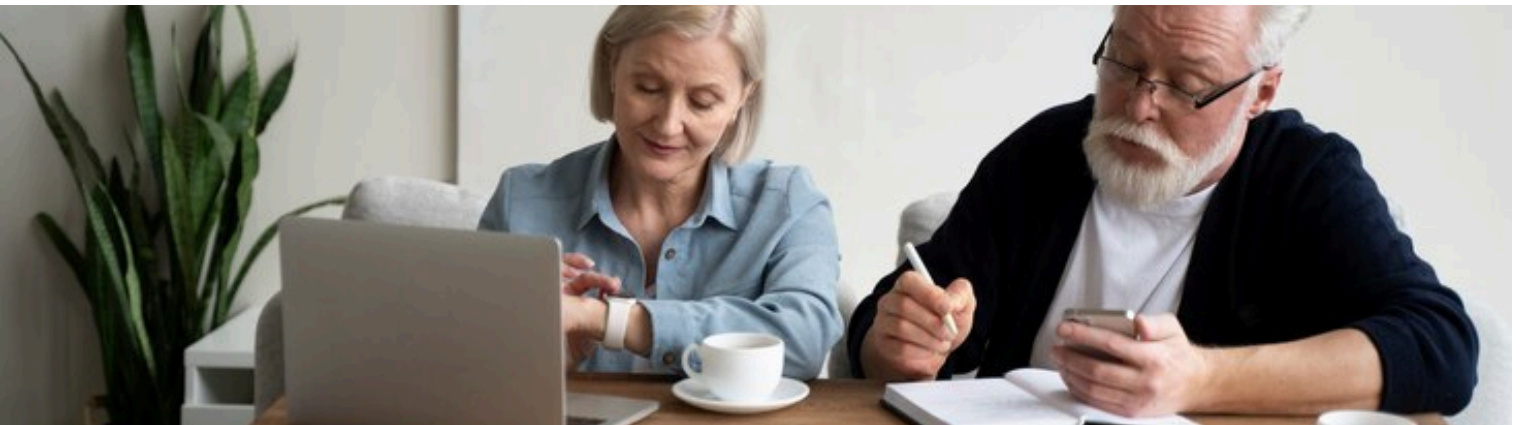
"Older persons play vital intergenerational and familial roles, serving as key contributors to maintaining a strong sense of community. They uphold and pass down traditional values, fostering unity and solidarity within their communities in the truest and most meaningful sense of these ideals."

- 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](#)



Decade of healthy ageing



Department of
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Social Affairs



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