



THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

BUILDING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES



Welcome to the April 2022 Issue of the UN NGO Committee on Ageing/NY Newsletter

Sustainability Development and Older Persons: Urgent and Logical

Greetings,

The forthcoming Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG) for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons is convening April 11-14 in person and virtually and your help is needed. With a very late decision to convene OEWG in person to include the NGO community, our subcommittee on Human Rights along with the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People have been scrambling to ensure voices of older persons are heard. While the NGOs will be restricted in numbers for in-person attendance, we can all view the live UN Web TV coverage. Details on virtual participation are still in progress. Visit our [website](#) frequently to see latest updates.

There is one thing each of us can do right now leading up to the OEWG on April 11-14th.

Prepare at least one if not several messages and send on Twitter. Here is an example:

- “In my lifetime, I’ve witnessed the planting of the flag on the moon. Now I just want to Age with Rights.”

You can make this based on your own personal experience and send as many tweets as you want starting today! If you need a refresher on how to tweet, visit the NGO Committee on Ageing/NY website and take the [tutorial](#). If COVID-19 has taught us anything, it is that the human rights of older persons have been/are being violated. We must make our voices heard that older persons’ rights are HUMAN RIGHTS.



This past month's 66th Commission on the Status of Women had more than 800 parallel/side events. The overall theme was "Women and Climate Justice." Our Subcommittee on Older Women organized a great session on "Older Women and Environmental Justice." If you missed it, you can watch it on our website. We worked hard to get "older women" included in the Agreed Conclusions at CSW66. Some progress was made and there were clearly more sessions inclusive of older women during the two weeks of events.

The Stakeholder Group on Ageing (SGA) works to ensure the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) remain on track as monitored by the High Level Political Forum. Unfortunately, the pandemic has taken a toll. The SGA, of which our NGO Committee on Ageing is a member, has contributed to the position paper focusing on SDG 4 (Lifelong Learning), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and always SDG 17 (Data Collection and Disaggregation). The High Level Political Forum will convene July 5-15 at the UN. The position paper will be posted on our website later in April.

Exciting news: On May 17, the ITU World Telecommunication & Information Society is hosting a "Digital Technologies for Older Persons and Healthy Ageing" event. You can visit

[Digital Technologies for Older Persons and Healthy Ageing](#) for more information.

As you prepare for the OEWG, please enjoy two very thoughtful pieces in this newsletter that discuss the promise and challenge of increased longevity. In separate articles Maud Bruce-About and Adriane Berg outline how older persons contribute to Sustainable Social and Economic Development for all generations. However, they note, inequality within and among nations, along with entrenched ageism, have erected a speed bump on the way to full realization of these contributions.

Yours,

Cynthia Stuen, Chair NGO Committee on Ageing/NY and **Martha Bial**, Chair, Sub-committee on Communications

Deeper Dive: The Urgency and Logic of Sustainable Development for All Generations

Maud Bruce-About, Executive Committee, NGO Committee on Ageing/NY

Our last issue covered Economic Security, one of the two priority areas of the 12th session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing



(OEWGA) and the cornerstone of well-being.

This issue covers the second priority area - older persons' contributions toward sustainable development.

I believe we can all agree that we go through life both as beneficiaries of and contributors to development at large, be it social, economic, or cultural. We can also agree - I think - that the extent to which we benefit or contribute is, in part, dependent on whether our socio-economic and cultural environments are supportive. **So, it is both urgent and logical, today, that development be sustainable - that is, meet the needs of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.**

Many older persons today can neither contribute to nor fulfill their full potential, either because their environments have not met their needs (health, education, social protection), or they have suffered from manmade (war) or natural catastrophes (earthquakes, tsunamis), some of which are linked to human-induced climate change. Even in the most privileged economic and natural environments, ageism or discrimination can thwart contribution.

The impact of societal ageing can be explored through many lenses. For example, one can focus on current economic models, which are themselves ageist, and mainly highlight the cost side of ageing. Although many lenses allow for better understanding of risks and may open up discussion around risk management, they tend to overlook important economic and less quantifiable contributions that older persons make to their families, communities, and society at large.

Hence, to better understand ongoing debates around the contribution of older persons, we will briefly elaborate on the common understandings of ageing.

We will first explore the cost focus, second the more positive Silver Economy and finally the Longevity Economy that tends to take a broader focus and involve adapting the very structure of society to ageing.

(Beware, however, that while exploring these lenses we must also ask ourselves to what extent human relations can and should be monetized. We should not forget values such as respect, dignity, compassion, and solidarity.)

Economists often point to the risk of unsustainable public finances due to increasing [old-age dependency ratios](#) (OADR), a somewhat flawed

measure, and the pressure on pensions, health and long-term care costs as the share of older persons increases. This OADR measure often overlooks measures available to ease the cost pressure on public finances long term, including expanded coverage of lifelong health systems to keep populations healthy and free from chronic disease; enhanced efficiency in health care; reform of pension benefits; and the growing geroscience breakthroughs for increased healthspan (healthy longevity).

For instance, the normal retirement age is set to increase by about two years in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on average by the mid-2060s. Hence, [future normal retirement age](#) will be 69 years or more in countries like Denmark, Estonia, Italy and the Netherlands, and 62 for men in Colombia, Luxembourg and Slovenia.

Furthermore, prior to Covid-19, there was a tendency for older persons to work longer. From 2009 to 2019 there was 16-30% employment growth in the UK, Germany, France and the US in persons 65+, and [in Japan](#) that demographic accounted for 75% of employment growth.

However, for persons to be able to reach new statutory retirement age they also must be in sufficient physical and mental health (which is not always the case); receive appropriate training; and not be discriminated against when seeking health services or employment, or in the workplace.

The [Global Report on Ageism](#) released by the World Health Organization earlier this year found that one in two people is ageist.

Today, for instance, for various reasons, [withdrawal from the work market](#) tends to start long before pension age. In the UK, participation falls from 85% for people aged 50-54 years, to 58% for 60- to 64-year-olds, and to 23% for 65- to 69-year-olds, with statutory retirement age at 66.

Those who promote the “Silver Economy” tend to focus on the positive contributions of older persons, whether these can be quantified or not.

In the work market, it is often pointed out that [older persons have comparative competitive advantage](#) and create economic value in jobs *“requiring less physical exertion...where skills continuously improve with age,”* and jobs in which *“long experience improves the quality of the work.”*

Transfer of knowledge between generations is often invoked, be it personal, cultural, or professional in the form of specific traditional trades or advanced business management, (the latter being the subject of the 2015 film ***The Intern***).

They also point to the fact that unpaid work by older persons - like informal caregiving - is currently not accounted for in national statistics.

For instance, adjusting the 2014 measured employment rate for people aged 55+ in Portugal with full-time informal care workers [would have increased the employment rate by nearly 13%](#), taking it from 16.6% to 29.2%. Studies in Spain also suggest that the informal care sector could account for as much as six percent of GDP. Obviously, to this contribution should be added the freeing effect on the formal employment rates, as working-aged individuals are freed up from elderly or childcare to obtain paid employment.

In the [US individuals 50+ contributed unpaid activities](#)—grandchildren care (\$344 billion); adult care (\$260 billion); and volunteering and charity work (\$140 billion)—totaling \$745 billion in 2018. Note that the 117 million Americans 50 and older now constitute 35% of the total population.

Older adults, at times, find themselves sharing pensions or accumulated with family members, both for subsistence and to help the next generation with housing etc.

Elders do not only consume or benefit from public funds; they also finance their lives from private sources. These private sources, like savings and investments, while being accumulated, also contribute to capital investment and economic growth. Older persons also contribute when retired through taxation such as pension income taxes; consumption taxes (VAT); and taxes on property and capital gains. To put this in perspective, taxes from non-income sources make up for 30% to 50% of tax revenues [in OECD countries](#).

An [EU 2018 report](#) shows that a large part of the EU economy is already made up of older consumers, with an estimated consumption value of 3.9 trillion Euros in 2015 and projections of reaching 5.7 trillion Euros in 2025 when 43% of the population will be 50+. [In the US](#), the 50+ population contributed \$8.3 trillion to the economy in 2018, a number set to triple to \$28 trillion by 2050.

Economists also point out that an ageing population creates market demand for new products and services, leading to business opportunities in age-friendly markets.

First, there is the belief is that [older persons will demand goods and services](#) that tend to be more labour intensive, such as health, social care, housing, and transport, which will create job opportunities in countries with high levels of unemployment. Second, it is also believed that a drive for cost efficiency will also incentivize technology development in health management care and independent living. Third, it is also believed that ageing will open new or expand markets, such as active ageing and silver tourism.

Those who speak about the Longevity Economy tend to take an even broader view of the potential positive effects of both societal ageing and individuals living healthier, longer, and more productive lives. This is known as healthy longevity or “healthspan.”

Some, like Gratton and Scott in their book *The 100 Year Life*, point to the fact that to reap the real benefits of longevity we need to move away from our current three stage life model - learn, earn, and retire - to a more flexible multi-stage career/ life path freed from age discrimination and ageism. Each and every one of us would lead professional and personal lives configured and managed according to our unique needs - be they financial or not - and interests in a quite different way than we have up to now.

Supported by [life course educational and health policies](#), this could improve the economic prospective of younger generations, today faced with insecure employment and weak income prospects. Hence, it would improve intergenerational equity both short and long term.

Longevity Economists tend to [focus on changes in consumer behavior](#). First, existing markets will expand to new demographics - those aged 50 are now consuming goods for those in their 40s, as ageing is slower. Second, markets will expand to manage the needs of an ageing society, particularly relating to care, medicine, and health. Third, markets will expand to support healthy

ageing- the value of a 2.2-year increase in life expectancy for Americans aged 50 or older is estimated to \$7.1 trillion. The health sector, education sector and other industries - like medical research, bioscience, pharmaceuticals, food and beverages, and leisure - [will benefit](#).

To reap the benefits of the Longevity Economy - as it is quite focused on being productive in the long haul - lifelong management of health, education and employment are needed. Targeted policies to tackle inequality will be key as there is presently great diversity in how people age and disadvantages do accumulate in health, education, and employment over life.

To conclude, older persons' present contribution to sustainable development can only partially be quantified - whatever perspective we take - and as for their future contribution much will be contingent on present and future policies and social change in attitudes.

Today, there are big disparities in how people age - between and within countries.

Only social protection, lifelong policies in education and health, and elimination of age discrimination will enable older persons - and the present young that are the future old - to reach the WHO objective of doing what they value and contribute to their full potential to their families, communities and societies.

Words that Are Trending: Sustainable Longevity

Adriane Berg, Sub-committee on Communications, NGO Committee on Ageing/NY



The trending word “sustainability” posits a circumstance that is expected to continue uninterrupted for a considerable period, if not in perpetuity. We relate sustainability to our environment, businesses, personal economic status, etc.

However, the word is also applicable to a trend, ongoing since the 1800s: that of increasing the longevity or lifespan of we humans. Continually increased longevity has been due to clean water, sanitation, and the prevention of infectious disease. More recently longevity of populations has been sustained by the prevention and decrease of chronic diseases of aging, and prolonging life for those with disorders. Most recently, geroscientists have posited that aging itself may be “preventable ”

In any case, estimates suggest that in the pre-modern world, life expectancy [was around 30 years](#) in all world regions. In the US it was age 47 in 1900, and nearly 79 years old today. [“No country in the world has a lower life expectancy than the countries with the highest life expectancy in 1800. Many countries that not long ago were suffering from bad health are catching up rapidly.”](#)

Thus, increasing longevity appears to be sustainable. And yet 3 major factors are at work to perhaps reverse the trend:

#1. Longevity and chronic care- In recent years, longevity as a measure has been supplanted with health adjusted life expectancy, HALE, defined as the number of healthy years likely to be lived. In this regard the news has not been good:

“Globally, life expectancy has increased by more than 6 years between 2000 and 2019 – from 66.8 years in 2000 to 73.4 years in 2019. While healthy life expectancy (HALE) has also increased by 8% from 58.3 in 2000 to 63.7, in 2019, this was due to declining mortality rather than reduced years lived with disability. [In other words, the increase in HALE \(5.4 years\) has not kept pace with the increase in life expectancy \(6.6 years\).](#)”

This means that sustainable longevity may also be accompanied by sustained chronic diseases of aging, requiring a massive input of family effort, government resources, and personal determination.

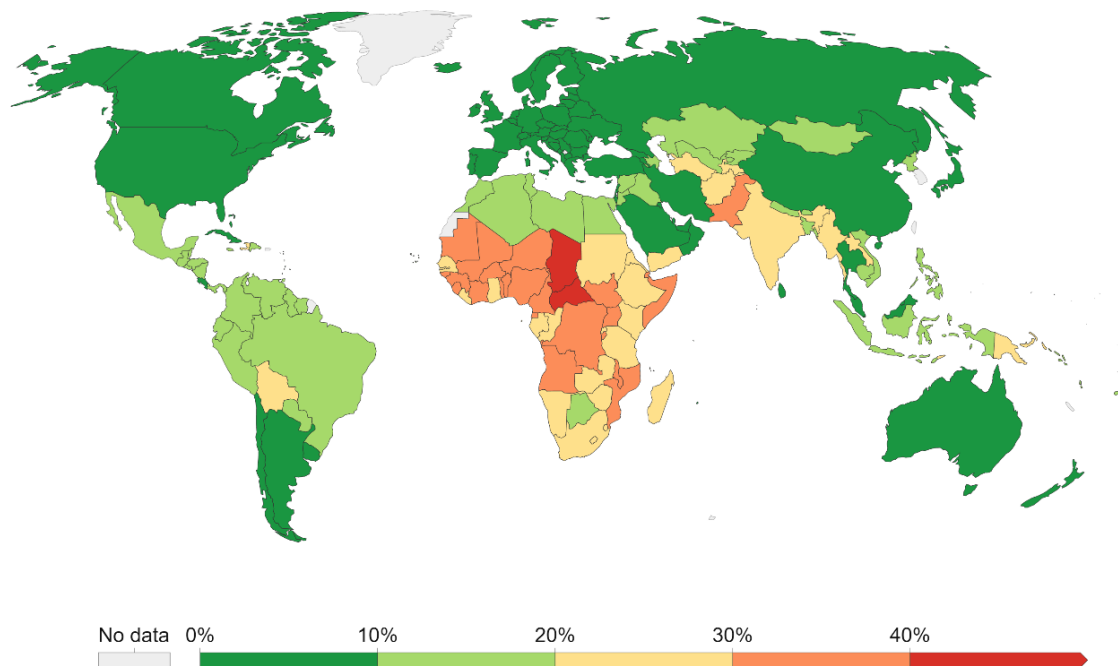
The unintended consequence of breakthroughs in sustaining lifespan for people in need of care has created an Ageist backlash regarding the value of elders in societies with limited healthcare resources. "Life expectancy for patients with Alzheimer's disease typically ranges from three to twelve years but can be longer in some cases. Families are anxious to know what to expect and how to best plan for the time ahead in terms of finances, family caregiving, and how they want to live out their lives," [said Dr. Cullum, a neuropsychologist Investigator with the Peter O'Donnell Jr. Brain Institute](#) who specializes in cognitive assessment. "

#2. Inequality in sustainable longevity-Increasing life expectancy always bore an element of inequality, “even since the age of enlightenment when such things began to be broadly measured...In the early 19th century, life expectancy started to grow in the early industrialized countries while it stayed low in the rest of the world. This led to very high inequality in how health was distributed worldwide—good health in the rich countries and persistently lesser health in those countries that remained poor...[Nation by nation, there are broad inequalities now being measured with sustainable methodologies targeted to bridge the gap.](#)”

The life expectancy disparity is still vast across and within countries. For example, in 2019 the country with the lowest life expectancy was the Central African Republic, with 53 years. In Japan, life expectancy is 30 years longer."

Inequality in life expectancy, 2015

Inequality in distribution of expected length of life were estimated using data from life tables and the Atkinson inequality index.



Source: UNDP (2019)

CC BY

Source: <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/inequality-in-life-expectancy-2015-2020>

#3. Ageism and the construct of total leisure in retirement (developed countries), has atrophied opportunities for long-lived adults to be contributory and fully realize the longevity dividend that would add to national GNP and sustain the care of those in need.

Given these circumstances, we may be at a crossroads of sustainable longevity.

Although, Geroscience breakthroughs and anti-ageism advocacy portend well for increasing longevity, inequality, both economic and biologic, sets up a conflict between societal desire for sustainable longevity and the cost of an increasingly older population out of the workforce, and in need of extended care. This could result in restricting resources, particularly in healthcare and caregiving. Thus, sustaining longevity which is now considered a significant national benefit in most nations (in England the All-Party Parliamentary Committee on Longevity strives to increase lifespan by 5 additional years by 2030 for all UK citizens) may face a reversal, as sustainable longevity may be seen as a drain on overall resources.

This is a new problem that may benefit from an ancient solution.

In the 1800s, many people did not know their age. In an agrarian society, physical ability, rather than age alone, was the measure of contribution and access to employment. Because many people of all ages could not read, elders often found themselves in newly built schools with children, teenagers, and young adults creating an intergenerational environment that prevented the age essentialism through which we categorize people today.

The cultures, worldwide, valued people for their ability to be productive.

Increasing intergenerational communication, eradicating ageism, changing our notion of leisure-driven retirement to contributory retirement, can all add to regarding mature years as ones of productivity; thus, realizing the so-called "longevity dividend." This may be the road to sustainable longevity, as we move from an industrial world to a technology world where physical strength is no longer the requirement of most productive employment. In a future world the very transition from industrial to techno society may be the catalyst for continuing increases in longevity, as productivity becomes age-irrelevant and increased healthspan is seen as a desirable societal goal.

Catch Up on What You Missed Since Our Last Newsletter



- Recording of the NGO COA event during the 66th session of Commission on the Status of Women (14-25 March 2022), on "Older Women and Environmental Justice" can be found here [Flyer showing details of the event can be found here](#)
- [Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, twelfth session](#) (11-14 April 2022) – focus areas for discussion are (a) economic security, (b) contribution of older persons to sustainable development and (c) possible normative content of a convention to protect the rights of older persons, for issues discussed at OEWGA 11 (right to work and access to the labour market; and access to justice).
- [United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing](#) – 2021-2030, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution aligned with the last ten years of the Sustainable Development Goals, that brings together governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media and the private sector to improve the lives of older people, their families and the communities in which they live. The Decade will address four areas for action: age-friendly environments; combatting ageism; integrated care; and long-term care. Access to information about the Decade here:
- The World Health Organization has also established an online [Platform for the Decade of Healthy Ageing](#) to connect and convene the stakeholders who promote the four action areas at country level and to support those seeking to find and share knowledge that can improve the lives of older people, their families and their communities.
- NGO COA members cited in PassBlue news article! Susan Somers and Frances Zainoeddin were interviewed about the slow pace of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing which has held 11 sessions without coming up with any proposals for an international legal instrument to protect and promote the rights and dignity of older persons. [Read the article here.](#)

- 223 NGOs from 62 countries signed an Open Letter calling for urgent action to be taken by the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing to protect the rights of older persons!
- CHECK OUT the recently released "[Advocacy Brief on Older Women: Inequality at the Intersection of Age and Gender](#)", a must read to promote the rights of older women !

Thank you for reading this issue of our newsletter. We welcome any feedback! Feel free to drop us a line [here](#).

To discover more about how you can be part of the dialogue and the solutions, visit ngocoa-ny.org/participate

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