



## THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING BUILDING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES



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

#### Greetings from Cynthia Stuen, Committee Chair and Martha Bial, Editor, Communications Subcommittee Chair

This year's observance of World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on June 15 coincides with the fourth review of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Rome, Italy. While there will be an in-person WEAAD observance, we are pleased to invite everyone to participate virtually on June 15. Details and registration here: [WEAAD registration](#). For background on WEAAD, read the informative piece in this newsletter by Gloria Gutman, Immediate Past President of the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA).

Further this month, as Chair, I have been invited to participate in the review and appraisal cycle of MIPAA in Rome. A new preamble paragraph has been added to recall the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, and the convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, among other treaties and covenants. The fact remains that older persons remain invisible and unprotected. The pandemic's excessive toll on older persons has documented that human rights of older persons are not being protected. We must continue to advocate for a legally binding document to protect the human rights of all older persons.

The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) meets in person July 5-15 at the United Nations. This year's agenda will take stock of the impact of the pandemic on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It will look closely at Goal 4: Education and Lifelong Learning; Goal 5: Gender Equality; Goal 14: Life Below Water; Goal 15: Life on Land; and Goal 17: Partnerships (and Data).

We are working closely as members of the Stakeholder Group on Ageing (SGA) and several of our committee members have contributed to the SGA Position Paper on Goals 4, 5 and 17, which was submitted to UN DESA and will be available on our website. We have also nominated members to be speakers for the various panels during HLPF.

In this issue, you will be interested in two articles in our current issue on Education and Lifelong Learning and how they intersect with the pursuit of Gender Equality. In ***A Deeper Dive***, Maud Bruce-About writes about educational progress achieved in recent years, and the gaps remaining, particularly the gender gap and the income gap. Across regions women and

girls in low-income countries are more likely to drop out of school prematurely and older women in poverty are particularly disadvantaged by the lack of earlier schooling and barriers to making up the gap in later life.

In ***Words That Are Trending***, Adriane Berg tells us about the physical and mental health value of education to older learners and lifelong learning's contribution to the economic productivity of their countries. Both Maud and Adriane cite ageism as one barrier discouraging older persons from enrolling in educational programs.

The UN International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP) will be held once again in person at the UN (and live webcast). The exact observance date is pending due to space availability at the UN. We are collaborating on the theme with our counterparts in Geneva and Vienna on addressing older women and issues of climate change, pandemic and other issues, but from the perspective of the resilience and contributions of older women. Robin Fenley is chairing this year's observance and welcomes ideas from anyone.

Note: The new chair of the Vienna Committee on Ageing is Shantu Watt and in Geneva, the new chair is Kelly Fitzgerald.

The UN has now opened up for all NGO representatives with ECOSOC or DGC status to be able to get annual entry passes so get your passes!



## **Can COVID-19 Help Put the Spotlight on Elder Abuse and Neglect?**

**Gloria M. Gutman, PhD** - Immediate Past President INPEA.

A little history: In 2005, when my colleagues and I in the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) first considered establishing a world elder abuse awareness day (WEAAD), maltreatment of older adults was very much a hidden problem. The idea in establishing the day, the first one held on June 15, 2006, was to draw public attention to what at the time was considered to be a social problem. Subsequently, it became recognized as a health problem and more recently, especially after WEAAD became an official UN day, it has become recognized as a human rights issue as well.

Much time and effort are currently being expended by INPEA and partner organizations, including the NGO Committee on Ageing/NY, in advocating for a convention on the rights of older people that if adopted by UN member states would raise the profile of older adults on government human rights agendas world-wide.

**What the COVID-19 pandemic has done is something different.**

In my country, Canada, and elsewhere, it has drawn attention to deficits in long-term care, particularly long-term care provided in long-term care facilities (LTCFs). In March 2020, statistics compiled by the Ryerson University National Institute on Aging in Toronto showed that 80 percent of deaths from COVID in Canada occurred in LTCFs. As the pandemic surged, the situation was so dire in LTCFs in Ontario and Quebec that the army was called in. Seasoned medical personnel were appalled at what they found: older people mired in excrement and bed sores and experiencing malnutrition.

Elder abuse is recognized internationally as comprised of five basic types of maltreatment of older adults: physical, psychological, sexual, financial, and neglect. What we saw in LTCFs was clearly neglect brought about by short staffing, a problem in many LTCFs before the pandemic.

Opportunities for abuse were compounded by public health measures that precluded the lifeline of assistance provided by unpaid caregivers—family and friends who came in daily to help feed, groom, and attend to the needs of their loved ones. Additionally, many paid companions hired by family could not be on the premises on a daily basis because of living in another city or province, or work/home commitments. It is only now that lock-down and social distancing requirements in LTCFs have been lifted that we realize the full extent of disruption they caused—to relationships, day-to-day assistance as well as to the monitoring and surveillance of abusive and neglectful behaviours on the part of staff, visitors, or other residents.

The latter, known as Resident-Resident Aggression (RRA) is an under-recognized and in some cases lethal issue. Many LTCFs and jurisdictions don't record it, some because they have come to normalize the idea that people with dementia who constitute many in LTCFs will act out when frustrated, in pain, or frightened or confused. Or perhaps it reflects the idea that "if we don't count it, it doesn't exist."

While it is important to address ageism, recognizing that it underlies much of the reason these intolerable behaviours are swept under the rug, let's not let the difficulty of combatting individual, community-level and society level ageism (sometimes called systemic abuse) deflect us from addressing the basics. This includes ensuring that LTCFs have a reasonable ratio of well-trained staff to residents; ensuring that LTCFs have a sufficient supply of personal protection equipment; and generally, infection control and disaster planning measures in place so that when the next disaster hits, we won't see older adults die alone and separated from their loved ones.

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## **A Deeper Dive: Learning: A Lifelong Process, A Protected Right**

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

*In this issue of the NGO Committee on  
Ageing/NY newsletter, we survey the*



*status of lifelong learning for older populations through a gender lens, following the focus of the upcoming 2022 High-level Political Forum (HLPF), the main UN platform on sustainable development. The HLPF review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in part focuses on SDG 4, the quality of education, and SDG 5, gender equality. The UN Secretary-General is convening a summit on Transforming Education in September 2022.*

In this brief review of the importance, development, and inadequacies of lifelong learning for older adults, we recognize that access to education, formal and informal, is prey to the inequalities imposed by poverty, female gender, disability, and ageism. In calling for age equality and a Convention establishing the rights of older persons, we would be remiss if we did not recognize what too many others fail to acknowledge: An older person is only an aged version of their younger self, and what impacts them in youth affects them in older age.

If more were aware of the life continuum, ageism would be eliminated. In that spirit, we look at those most vulnerable to education inequality. Regardless of the learner's age, solving core inequality issues will largely eliminate barriers to continued learning as we age. In short, a young, educated person tends to become an older, educated person, curious and open to continued learning.

Learning and education help us acquire new skills, adapt to new challenges, and explore and understand our communities and the larger world around us. The educated, whether formally or informally, can better collaborate with others, contribute to their societies, work, spend and increase a nation's GNP. Learning is never a one-off injection, but a lifelong process.

Given the importance of lifelong learning and early childhood education (those deprived of one tend to be deprived of the other) to personal, social and economic development, and to the promotion of democracy, life-long learning and education are granted by international human rights law and other international treaties.

For example:

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) grants the right to the full development of the human person.
- The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) in Article 13 confirms that fundamental education is for ANYONE not yet having satisfied basic learning needs, including older persons.
- This includes technical and vocational education, retraining for adults whose current knowledge and skills have become obsolete owing to

technological, economic, employment, social or other changes.

- The UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education asserts the right to continuous education without discrimination. (UNESCO 2015 Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education)

***Yet, [there were more than 141 million illiterate older persons worldwide in 2019](#). [Sixty-seven percent of older women globally are illiterate](#). And there is a significant [technology gap in the learning and education of older persons](#).***

Older persons have been excluded from the UN educational agenda despite the proclaimed right to lifelong learning. In 2018, the Independent Expert highlighted that none of the 10 targets or 11 indicators linked to SDG 4 - to “[e]nsure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”, specifically mentions older persons while mentioning several other groups. Furthermore, the 2016 - 2019 SDG [progress report by the Secretary-General](#) makes no explicit mention of older persons’ educational status.

Recognizing the discrepancy between the stated importance of lifelong learning and the actual educational and literacy status of older persons, in 2019, the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) focused on “Education, training, life-long learning and capacity-building.” It chronicled the challenges older persons face in receiving access to quality education, training, lifelong learning, and capacity-building services. The following is a brief synopsis of data and findings.

- Physical barriers include location, transportation, accessibility, untreated common visual impairments, and hearing loss. These barriers are often most substantial in developing countries.
- Aging intersects with other forms of vulnerability and social exclusion, such as poverty, illness, and disability, and these intersections compound throughout life.
- Financial barriers include balancing work and care for other family members.
- Older women, older persons with disabilities, older persons living in remote and rural areas, older persons speaking Indigenous languages, and older persons in correctional institutions are especially overlooked.
- Ageist stereotypes also impact older persons’ access to education as they are discouraged from enrolling due to the misconception that education is only for children and youth.
- [International Labour Organization \(ILO\) figures from 2014](#) show that about 14 percent of total public expenditure was dedicated to education globally, and 42 percent of countries spend less than one percent of their public education expenditure on adult training.

***As inequalities compound over a lifespan, it is necessary to amend the situation of older persons, and address education from an early age, as the young of today represent the future old.***

We must take a larger view on education globally and approach it with a gender lens, as women statistically are more illiterate and undereducated than their male counterparts. [Sixty-six percent of uneducated youth are young women](#). For example, a [2021 OECD](#) report called out a global collective failure to ensure the universal right to education for children, youth, and adults. It

highlighted that this is especially true for girls and women, and youths with disabilities, those from poorer or rural households, indigenous peoples, minority groups, and those who suffer the consequences of violent conflict and political instability.

### **Poverty, Gender Discrimination, and Education Equality**

It is axiomatic that uneducated and illiterate children make for undereducated adults. Any quest for lifelong learning for older persons must address the ongoing crisis in general education for girls and women.

- In [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), the poorest girls spend two years less in school than boys. This is likely due to girls' social and economic challenges, like early marriage, early and unplanned pregnancy, domestic work, and menstrual health and stigma. There has been no progress in education for girls since 2011 at the lower secondary level and since 2014 in upper secondary levels.
- During COVID, some parents in Bangladesh, Jordan, and Pakistan were [reluctant to give girls access to smartphone learning](#).
- Phone surveys of 19-year-olds during the pandemic showed that 70 percent of young women in Ethiopia compared to 35 percent of young men spent more time than before the pandemic doing household chores, while 42 percent of young women in Peru compared to 26 percent of young men spent more time looking after children.

As gender and age inequalities compound, we can agree with Secretary-General António Guterres when he states, "As the world faces unsustainable levels of inequality, we need education – the great equalizer – more than ever."

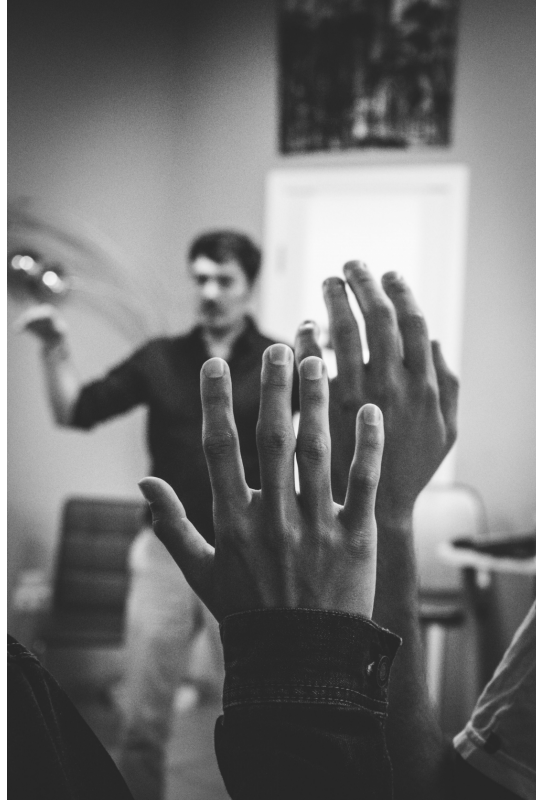
Hence, the right to education must be ensured throughout life and for work to build human capabilities agnostic to gender or age. Education is intricately connected to the right to information, culture, and science. It's also connected to the right to access and contribute to humanity through shared and expanding resources of information, knowledge, and wisdom.

We urge all initiatives to include all age groups through a much-needed Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, our Common Agenda, or the summit on Transforming Education in September 2022. Nobody should be left behind!

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## **Words That Are Trending: Lifelong Learning, What We Learn and What We Teach Throughout the Age Continuum**

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



## A Brief History of Modern Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning (and teaching) is a natural human endeavor, as we see from cave pictographs depicting hunting, cooking, and even scientific knowledge. Skip to the 1800s and the developed agrarian societies where elders and youngsters attended reading classes together in one-room schoolhouses.

With our modern notion of retirement, *Lifelong Learning* has become a trend and a conscious goal of fulfillment as we age. [The UNESCO definition](#): *Lifelong Learning is a form of **self-initiated education focused on personal development**. While there is no standardized definition of lifelong learning, it has been taken to refer to the learning outside a formal educational institute, such as a school, university, or corporate training.*

[Scholars often point to its origin as recently as the 1970s](#) when The Council of Europe resolved to promote education throughout the life span. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) proposed *recurrent education*, and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) published the *Learning to Be* or the Faure Report (1972), declaring that *lifelong education* must be available to all and not only in formal schooling. Currently, The European Agenda for Adult Learning serves to guide policy. The European Commission hosts the ePlatform for Adult Learning in Europe, EPALE.

Worldwide, *Lifelong Learning* is a multi-layered effort that encompasses leisure-time intellectual pursuits after retirement, retraining for late-life careers, and the fight for universal literacy among elders, particularly women, who lacked educational opportunities in their earlier years. The fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) of the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all" and "leave no one behind."

An example of an effort toward this goal is a 35-hour, free online certification course offered until December 31, 2022, by UNESCO, Institute for Lifelong Learning, in collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning [Family Learning](#)

[and Indigenous Knowledges](#), to academics, researchers, and course curriculum developers in adult learning and community education, based on research on how to teach for community transformation. Research on teaching methods is derived from UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation teams in Ethiopia, Malawi, Nepal, and the Philippines. [Register here](#).

## **The Impact of Ageism on Lifelong Learning**

In one sense, *Lifelong Learning* as a movement reflects the recognition that the older brain can learn and learn anything, whether the technology of the metaverse, the workplace, or the leisure world of gaming. According to Washington State University, one essential criterion of lifelong learning is [a belief in lifetime human potential](#). This is often absent from expressions of public policy. Even the well-meaning computer training sessions offered at most senior centers can smack of an attitude of incompetency of senior students and be handout-style entitlement, making the learner feel small and stressed.

This could change if the value to a nation's GNP and the healthcare savings generated by *Lifelong Learning* were recognized. Recently, learning programs are being reimagined as a healthcare benefit, which can also pull from larger national and local budgets or result in insurance funding.

## **The ROI of Older Adult Learning**

[Psychological Science](#), in 2013, linked reduced healthcare costs to lifelong learning for older adults. Skill learning, preferably more than two kinds, improved memory in subjects ages 60 to 90. Learning a new skill may reduce a senior's risk of dementia by strengthening connections between different brain parts. This initiated the idea that learning a language, playing an instrument, and other skills not before tried by the elder are "built for the brain." Learning skills increase brain activity in both old and young, with elders experiencing more significant memory improvement than younger subjects.

Dr. Burkhard Pleger from the RUB Neurology Clinic in Bergmannsheil Hospital and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning chronicle these benefits:

- Greater resilience to the stresses of change
- Less frustration in daily activities reducing inflammation related to illness
- A healthy self-perception of being an active contributor to society
- Increased personal relationships that prolong longevity by signing up for classes or joining forums on specialist topics of interest

The Fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4) in the [UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) is to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, and leave no one behind".

## **Lifelong Learning and Teaching**

Given these benefits and the desire and need for older adults to learn continuing career skills, attention is turning to teaching techniques. [The World Bank Report](#) asserts that lifelong learning is essential for "readjusting skills to fit in the future of work, but it would benefit from a serious design rethink." This highly researched report reviews lifelong learning needs worldwide, citing that 2.1 billion working-age adults (ages 15–64) have low reading proficiency.



In Sub-Saharan Africa, 61 percent of workers are not proficient in reading; in Latin America and the Caribbean, this share is 44 percent. The report calls for "more systematic diagnoses of the specific constraints that adults face; pedagogies customized to the adult brain; and flexible delivery models that fit in well with adult lifestyles." Adult brains learn differently, which is not always factored into program design.

The next iteration of *Lifelong Learning* will focus on how older adults learn skills through real-life experience, adaptive technology, and programs designed for the more aged brain. The most significant breakthrough is marrying *Lifelong Learning* with *Lifelong Teaching*. The best way to learn is to teach. Innovative programs allow elders to preserve what they already know by passing on that knowledge, finding greater contribution levels as neurons and enthusiasm grow exponentially.

Imagine a world where *Lifelong Learning* and *Lifelong Teaching* go hand in hand as we age. Mentorship, reverse mentorship, and peer-to-peer training create new communities of empowered people pulling together for a better life.

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## Catch Up on What You Missed Since Our Last Newsletter



**2-6 May: Dr. Cynthia Stuen, Chair of NGO Committee on Ageing/NY was a panelist on the event held on 2 May 2022 that discussed "[Opening of the ICTs and older persons special track](#)".**

**5 May: NGO COA program event on Mental Health: the New Frontier in Global Ageing with Holly Shaw, Chair of NGO Committee on Mental Health and Kiran Rabheru MD, University of Ottawa. [A video of the recording for the May 5th event is available here](#). We also call your attention to this presentation from the meeting: [NGOCOA-NY May 5th Powerpoint presentation](#) (NOTE: Large File Download - pptx 24 MB)**

**6 May: IFA Global Cafe Series. Dr. Alexandre Sidorenko - Older people of Ukraine in the time of the Russian invasion. [Video here](#).**

**17 May: World Telecommunication and Information Society Day, 2022 Celebration (Decade of Healthy Ageing theme)**

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

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To discover more about how you can be part of the dialogue and the solutions, visit [ngocoa-ny.org/participate](https://ngocoa-ny.org/participate)

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