THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING
BUILDING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES

Welcome to the June 2023 Issue of the UN NGO Committee on Ageing/NY Newsletter

This Month's Issue is Devoted to Sustainable Cities along the Age Continuum

Greetings from Cynthia Stuen, Committee Chair, and Martha Bial,

Editor, Communications Subcommittee Chair

Open Ended Working Group Update

We have a glimmer of hope with the 13th Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG) outcome in April. The chair of the OEWG has appointed the Co-facilitators, H.E. Ms. Ana Paula Zacarias, Permanent Representative of Portugal, and H.E. Mr. Ronaldo Costa Filho, Permanent Representative of Brazil.

The Co-facilitators are at work to set a timetable to facilitate the consideration of the existing international framework of the human rights of older persons, the identification of possible gaps in human rights, and how to best address them. In this regard, the Co-facilitators will conduct open, transparent, and inclusive informal intergovernmental meetings between the 13th and 14th OEWG sessions with all member states, members of the specialized agencies, and observers in the General Assembly.

All plan to collaborate with the national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the Independent Expert of the Human Rights Council on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons within their mandate.

Mark Your Calendar

June 15: World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEADD) takes place on Thursday, 15 June 2023. From 1:15pm – 2:30pm (EDT) in New York at the UNHQ, an expert panel will present overall trends of violence against older persons, and highlight gaps and challenges of implementing the objectives in Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Expert panelists will also present five priorities to combat violence against older persons in the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030).

July 10-19: The High-Level Political Forum (HLPF) meets 10-19 July 2023. As the Committee on Ageing delegate to the Stakeholder Group on Ageing, I chaired the writing group to prepare our Position Paper. This year we addressed SDG Goals 9- Innovation and Technology, Goal 11- Sustainable Cities and Age-

friendly Environments, and Goal 17- Partnerships and Data. It was submitted on May 26 and can be read on our website. The SGA will be sponsoring a side event during the HLPF.

October 2: Mark your calendars for the 2023 U.N. **International Day of Older Persons** in person at the U.N. and webcast on Monday, October 2.

Catch Up

I was so pleased that our **Independent Expert, Claudia Mahler, spoke with us at our May program meeting**, where she encouraged all of us to work within our countries to offer input to this process and to seek support for identifying the outcome as a convention (legally binding document) to protect the human rights of older persons next April.

The June 8 Online Program meeting from 1:30-3:00 pm (EDT) had two very important components. First, the election of new officers and members at large for the two years of 2023-2025. Thanks to our nominating committee for preparing a slate of offices. Visit our website, www.ngocoa-ny.org, to see the slate and their bios. Secondly, the program covered an essential topic on nursing home/long-term care as a human right from a global perspective and the state of the art of helping persons age in place.

What's in this issue:

With Sustainable Cities (SDG 11) in mind for this issue, our **DEEPER DIVE** focuses on the challenges and opportunities facing an ageing and urbanizing world. Author Maud Bruce-About warns that as technology grows to address some of the challenges of rapid urbanization, older persons' rights to participate in this growth must be protected.

In **Words That Are Trending,** author Adriane Berg tells us how Age Friendly Cities are an antidote to social isolation and can decrease the health risks for older people.

We conclude with a Backgrounder on the **June 15 World Elder Abuse Awareness Day: Closing the Circle: Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Older Age Policy, Law, and Evidence-Based Responses.**

Won't it be wonderful when we no longer need this awareness day because elder abuse has been eradicated!

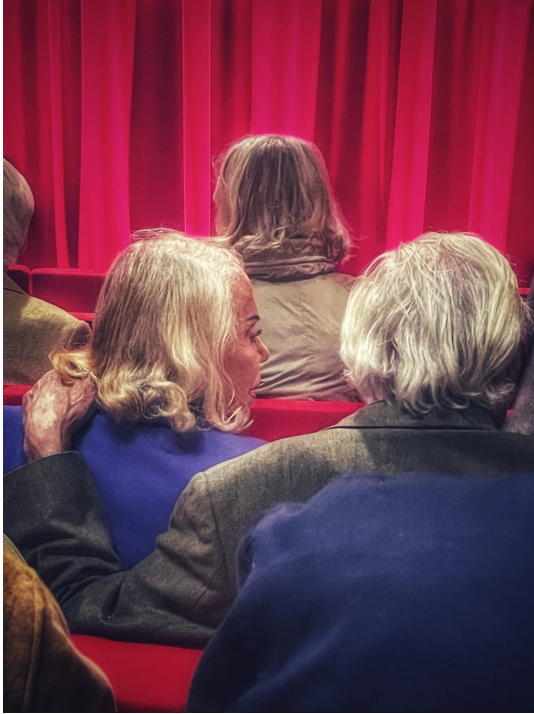> No time to read these great articles? Find them along with back issues on our website.
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A DEEPER DIVE:

Urbanization and the

Design of Smart Cities Age-Friendly Cities

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

This article focuses on older persons in the context of SDG 11 - making cities " inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable" - one of the focus areas of the upcoming HLPF, focusing on new technology.

With 83% of persons in North America, 81% in Latin America and the Caribbean, 75% in Europe, 67% in Oceania, 52% in Asia, and 44% in Africa in urban settings, sustainability and inclusion of older persons in urban - and other contexts - are crucial subjects.

Sustainability-Today, cities are responsible for 66% of global energy consumption and 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. Such use puts pressure on land and resources as they generate 80% of global GDP and attract more people. Seventy percent of the world population will live in cities by 2050, compared to 56% today.

Inclusion- Older persons must be enabled to continue to contribute to sustainable development and society at large - in line with the inclusivity goals of the 1995 Copenhagen Summit of Social Development - and to do what they value and maintain their purpose, identity, and independence in line with objectives of the 2021- 2030 Decade of Healthy Ageing.

Hence, SDG 11 needs to consider the rights and aspirations of the population either born and growing up in, or migrating to, and then ageing in cities or having to migrate to cities at old age. Inclusiveness needs to account for the diversity among older persons. This poses specific challenges.

According to the World Social Report, between 2021 and 2050, the share of the older population - conventionally defined as people aged 65 years or over - will increase from less than 10 % to around 17% globally, making the number of older people more than double from 761 million to 1.6 billion.

By 2050, one in six people you meet will be aged 65 or older, compared to one in 11 today.

Societies age at different paces, regarding the percentage of ageing populations and actual numbers. Currently, ageing is furthest advanced in Europe and Northern America, Australia and New Zealand, and most of Eastern

and South-Eastern Asia, with the proportion of older persons exceeding 10 to 20 % of the total population.

Most other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Oceania are still in an early stage of this transition, while most countries in Central and Southern Asia, Western Asia and Northern Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean are at an intermediate stage.

However, according to the World Social Report, the geography of the world's oldest countries will shift from Europe towards Eastern and South-Eastern Asia between now and 2050, when the latter is expected to include five of the 10 oldest populations. Among regions, Northern Africa, Western Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa are expected to experience the fastest growth in the number of older people over the next three decades.

Important to consider is the fact that the number of people aged 80 years or over is rising even faster than the number aged 65 or above; from 2021 to 2050, this age group is projected to increase by more than 200% in all regions except Europe and Northern America and Australia and New Zealand, where it is expected to grow by 10 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

As an analysis of selected countries in Asia, Western Europe, and Northern America indicates, this increase in population age has both positive and concerning aspects.

The increase in life expectancy and good functional health is positive, as it means that future elders will be healthier, better educated, and more productive, given sufficient investment in health, education, and anti-ageist measures.

The equal increase in the number of years lived in bad health or with disabilities reported in the analysis mentioned above is a concern - especially as the report concomitantly points to increased income disparity with possible "widening disparities in health and life expectancy among future cohorts of older persons," as it points to increased care needs.

Again, according to the World Social Report, demand for long-term care is increasing fast in many countries, as care models that rely primarily on families increasingly become inadequate as intergenerational co-residence is declining in both developed and developing countries due to urbanization and development in general.

Hence, societies are both ageing and urbanizing. Currently, it is challenging to find up-to-date statistics on the extent of urbanization of older persons across all regions and countries; OECD and WHO statistics on urban/rural dwellings of older persons date from 2015.

In the EU-27, we know that in 2019, 38 % of the 90.4 million older persons lived in predominately urban regions, and another 38% lived in intermediate regions, while 22 % lived in predominately rural regions.

Interestingly, their share of the total population, expressed as a percentage by region, tend to indicate a tendency to live in predominantly rural regions. This is valid for most E.U. states - especially Spain, the Netherlands, and France - with the only exceptions being Slovakia, Belgium, and Poland.

This is mirrored in the U.S., where 19% of the U.S. rural population is 65 years or older, compared with 15% in urban areas. Some rural counties grow older

because they attract retirees, as they are scenic or recreational destinations. After all, young adults leave.

In the U.S., we know from [the most recent census](#) that from 2012 to 2016, 77 % the of 46.2 million people 65 years and older lived in urban areas.

With this in mind, we will explore recent U.N. Urban agendas, how older persons are covered, and point to difficulties addressing their needs and rights within the current technological environment.

Since 2007, the [WHO Global Friendly Guide](#) has encouraged and sets criteria for age-friendliness in eight areas of urban life: outdoor spaces and buildings; transportation; housing; social participation; respect and social inclusion; civic participation and employment; communication and information; and community support and health services.

Its [Global network of age-friendly cities](#) encompasses 1445 accredited cities and communities with 300 million people - around 4% of the world population - in 51 countries.

More recently and more broadly, the [2016 U.N. New Urban Agenda](#), linked to SDG 11, provides roadmaps for cities to generate prosperity and cultural and social well-being while protecting the environment and addressing climate change.

As such, it is a commitment to

- provide essential services and access to equal opportunities and no discrimination to all citizens - one of the areas where older persons are mentioned in the SDGs **-**
- respect the rights of refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons regardless of their migration status;
- promote safe, accessible and green public spaces and cleaner cities;
- address climate change by reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and facilitating resilience to reduce the risk and the impact of disasters;
- and to improve connectivity and support innovative and green initiatives.

In fact, with the ascent of digitalization, Big Data, and A.I., innovative initiatives abound - under the heading of smart cities and smart cities initiatives. This ranges from extensive concepts such as A.I. digital twin cities in [urban planning](#); demand-responsive parking pricing in [San Francisco](#); solutions to estimate and predict air quality using A.I. and big data from the mobile network in [São Paulo](#); allowing local government preventive actions; to now terminated COVID-19 war room in [Cascais](#), Portugal, allowing city leaders a holistic, real-time view of the pandemic's impact on the local population.

Smart city technology can potentially improve and optimize urban governance, planning, and investment in services. However, it poses issues of how data is captured, who benefits, risks of excluding populations like older persons.

It is often upheld that smart cities' innovation can help better manage urbanization and economic development in the Global South. For instance, the Institute for Security Studies considers it essential to address current structural challenges in Africa, where the urban population grows the fastest globally. In about 20 years, one in two people- or 926 million people, compared to 488

million people today - will be urban. By 2030 six of the world's megacities - Cairo, Lagos, Kinshasa, Johannesburg, Luanda, and Dar es Salaam will be in Africa.

Notable is that natural urban population growth - the predominance of births over deaths in urban areas - is Africa's most important driver of urbanization, accounting for 60% of urban population growth, with rural-urban migration accounting for 30%. Drivers for rural-urban migration are better service provision, changing weather patterns, land pressures, natural disasters, and conflict.

To ensure that *"technology and innovation are used to ensure......human rights in cities,"* UN-Habitat launched "People-centered Smart Cities" - in alignment with SDG 11 - in 2020.

Best practices include New York City's Internet master plan, a Digital Villages project in Germany, and Decide in Madrid.

As concerns older persons, Smart City technology and initiatives need specific adjustments to escape "Digital Ageism."

According to research, datafication - the use of online quantified data for tracking and predictive analysis to ensure fair and accurate representation is complex as data on older persons is often discarded. It may be treated as an outlier - uncollected - due to set age limits, or not disaggregated - treated as a homogenous 65-plus group without taking into account the difference in the experience of multiple generations.

Researchers also point out that Big Data with standard data-driven decision systems has issues predicting groups that differ from the mainstream, resulting in older adults being neglected and deprioritized as their needs and concerns differ from the mainstream.

Nascent research on the algorithmic treatment of older adults indicates that ageism is embedded within big data and digital platforms and that ageism is present in data treatment due to the homophily of program teams and incoherent algorithms.

The fact that older adults are often seen as digitally unskilled impacts how systems design their data, with algorithms used to disguise that companies are not prepared to provide the expected user experience to digitally unskilled users.

Recommended solutions reside in involving older adults throughout projects, co-creation to receive insights into the need of older persons, designing with empathy for older persons - ensuring their inputs and interests are considered - and Participation Action Research Approaches - involving stakeholders throughout design and use of smart city technology.

CONCLUSION: Whether we like it or not - ageism permeates everything and seriously needs to be addressed to enable older persons to continue to contribute to sustainable development and society at large - in line with the inclusivity goals of the 1995 Copenhagen Summit of Social Development. Older persons must do what they value and maintain their purpose, identity, and independence in line with objectives of the 2021- 2030 Decade of Healthy Ageing.

Words that Are Trending

Sustainable and Age-Friendly Cities: A Practical Antidote to Isolation

By Adriane Berg, Member NGO Committee on Ageing-NY, UN Representative IFA, HOST: *On the Ground* Podcast of the U.N. Global NGO Executive Committee
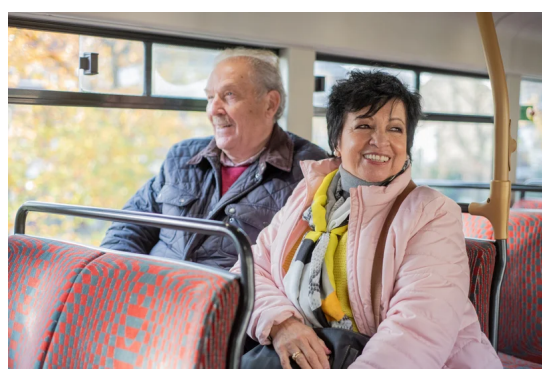
*Sustainable cities and age-friendly cities are **words that are trending**. In this article, we examine how these aspirations intersect with the current issue of isolation as we age. Geroscientists have called loneliness the new smoking to describe the health implications of isolation. Opportunities for social integration can be provided in the built urban environment through age-friendly public spaces, transportation, libraries, shopping, entertainment, work, and learning hubs.*

The U.N. Has Promoted Sustainable and Age-Friendly Cities as an Antidote to Isolation

In 2002, at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, The Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing resolved to foster "A Society For All Ages." This "encompasses the goal of providing older persons with the opportunity to continue contributing to society. To work towards this goal, removing whatever excludes or discriminates against them is necessary."

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) promotes the "participation of older adults in social, economic, cultural, sporting, recreational and volunteer activities (which) also contribute to the growth and maintenance of personal well-being." That concept opens the door to examining the built environment to promote such participation. Indeed, Objective 21 of the Plan lists the "Promot(ion of) civic and cultural participation as strategies to combat social isolation and support empowerment among its actions."

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11 calls for sustainable cities and communities to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. UNECE and ITU jointly developed a definition of smart, sustainable cities and **measures for the sustainability of SMART CITIES**:

A smart, sustainable city is an innovative city that uses Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and other means to improve quality of life, the efficiency of urban operation and services, and competitiveness while ensuring that it meets the needs of present and future generations concerning economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects.

This definition forms the framework for an initiative dubbed United for Smart Sustainable Cities (U4SSC). U4SSC is a global platform for smart city stakeholders to craft public policies by 2030. The 2030 target goals of smart cities include targets that specifically mention older persons:

- Safe and affordable housing
- Sustainable **transport systems** for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with particular attention to the needs of vulnerable people.
- Provide universal access to safe, inclusive, accessible, green, and public spaces for women, children**, older persons,** and persons with disabilities.

Age-Friendly Cities

As implementation of the broader concept of sustainable or smart cities, age-friendly cities honed down the characteristics of access and equity in the built environment as it promotes SDG 11 and the overall goals of MIPAA. For example, the World Health Organization [offers toolkits, reports, and guides to build and sustain a disability and mobility-friendly environment](.).

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In 2018 **[WHO and Kings College London issued a report on what makes a city age-friendly.](.)** The report gives as an example of the social inclusion of older people, **The Mayor of London's London Plan** (Greater London Authority 2006), and its accompanying strategy, **Valuing Older People**. The London Plan has become a model of the concepts behind age-friendly cities and the realization of the built environment for active ageing as an antidote to isolation.

During focus groups held to create the London Plan, stakeholders, including older adults, stated that "it is people's attitudes which can prevent older people from living in an environment that is genuinely age-friendly."

It was recognized that age-friendly environments are a weapon against ageist attitudes that foster isolation. Seeing older adults shop, learn, use technology, interact, and speak with people across many generations is not only an antidote to isolation but also goes far in erasing the ageism that causes it. The image of the older adult languishing on a park bench is thwarted as we see active elders playing sports in the park, conversing with friends in outdoor spaces, pushing prams, and exercising.

In combatting isolation, urban planners cannot ignore the need for the built urban center to be attractive across the age continuum.

Urban activity centers can foster intergenerational relationships and help older adults create new networks of relationships as they nurture existing relationships. Accessibility or even mobility is not enough to prevent isolation.

For example, many older adults have superior mobility but find cultural and activity hubs like parks, libraries, lifelong learning, free outdoor community theatre, and We Work style centers inaccessible or geared toward the pace and temperament of only younger generations.

These activity hubs must be accessible through planning basics like wayfinding, big print signage, better transportation, walkability, and streetlights that permit longer intervals in crossing thoroughfares without embarrassment or the calling out of older citizens.

The perpetuation of sustainable and age-friendly cities coalesces around the commerce that a vibrant older population can bring to

Center City.

Stores catering to older adults' fashion, pharmaceutical, travel, and entertainment needs create venues for social integration and bring revenue to sustainable cities. It behooves city planners to include the types of restaurants, markets, and ethnic goods, that bring older adults to Center City and give them new venues for active communication. We must ask older residents what they want in a smart city.

CONCLUSION: Aristotle said that "similar people cannot bring a city into existence." A sustainable and age-friendly city cannot be achieved if elders are seen as a monolith needing only help with disabilities. If we build according to our residents' psychographics and demographics, we will more realistically and practically create enjoyable spaces that thwart isolation.

BACKGROUNDER: World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) on June 15th

"Closing the Circle: Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Older Age Policy, Law and Evidence-based Responses"

WEADD is sponsored by the Permanent Mission of Argentina to the United Nations. It will be broadcasted live and on-demand on U.N. Web T.V.

World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD) will be observed on June 15. It was officially recognized by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution 66/127 in 2011, following a request by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA), which first established the commemoration in 2006. WEAAD represents the one day in the year when the world voices its opposition to elder abuse, a human rights violation, and enhances the recognition of the dignity of older persons and their right to live free of fear and violence.

Ahead of the 75th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) milestone, this year's commemoration of WEAAD is related to the year-long campaign to promote and recognize the 75th anniversary. During June 2023, it showcases the UDHR by raising awareness of its legacy, relevance, and activism related to women's rights. The theme of the 2023 WEAAD commemoration in the United Nations Headquarters in New York is entitled, "**Closing the Circle: Addressing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Older Age - Policy, Law and Evidence-based Response.**"

An expert panel will provide updates on closing the circle, taking into account "**policies**" through relevant outcomes of the fourth review and appraisal of the

Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), "**universal laws,**" and how a legally binding instrument can provide standards to prevent and combat elder abuse; as well as updates on the implementation of the five priorities of the Decade to tackle the abuse of older people through "**evidence-based**" gap maps, population-based surveys and cost-effective solutions.

Find more information here: World Elder Abuse Awareness Day

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

Support the work of the NGO Committee on Ageing!
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