



THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

BUILDING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES



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

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

We approach the 13th Open Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) on 3-6 April with optimism and hope for an outcome that will result in the call to assess the existing legal protections and gaps in the protection of human rights of older persons in an intersessional meeting. Your Committee on Ageing will host the out-of-town civil society representatives for an orientation meeting on Sunday, 2 April from 1-4 p.m. at AARP offices (750 Third Ave, 31st Fl., New York, NY). I hope you can join/help us.

The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) convened a productive preparatory workshop on 10 March for the OEWGA. As Chair, I was privileged to moderate it, and I quoted the Ambassador from Argentina in Geneva who has called for 2023 to be a GAME CHANGER! Please join us in person or on UN Web TV to follow the 2023 OEWGA. There are four side events during OEWGA in person in Conference Room 8, and there are three virtual side events as of 10 March. Monitor the UN 13 on the OEWGA website for the latest information.

Our March newsletter theme is focused on ***social inclusion***, which is a crucial area for the forthcoming OEWGA. We must continue to raise our voices and be heard at all levels of society. For some background on the various dimensions of social inclusion or exclusion affecting older persons, see this issue's articles, "Strengthening the Civic Participation Rates of Older Persons and their Right to Social Inclusion," by Maud Bruce-About, and "Words that are Trending" by Adriane Berg.

The winter events at the UN were most productive with the review of MIPAA at the Commission on Social Development (CSocD) and the establishment of an exciting working relationship with the UN Regional Commissions. The regional commissions and member states have heard from older persons on the need for better protection of human rights.

The Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) completed a dizzying round of meetings, and side and parallel events. Your NGO CoA was a sponsor or cosponsor of side or parallel events at CSocD and CSW.

No time to read these great articles? Find them along with back issues on our website.

And while you are there...

Do not forget to pay your 2023 dues! You can pay online or get directions for mailing a check.

Thank you.



A DEEPER DIVE: Strengthening the Civic Participation Rates of Older Persons and Their Right to Social Inclusion

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

This [article](#) focuses on "social inclusion," a key area for the upcoming Open Ended Working Group on Ageing, aiming to strengthen the human rights of older persons.

Social inclusion - the process to improve participation in society through enhanced opportunities, access to resources, voice, and respect for rights - is a precondition to enjoying human rights and to cohesive societies where all groups feel they belong, participate, and [are included, recognized, and legitimated](#).

Achieving social inclusion requires understanding and changing discriminatory social, economic, and cultural structures, practices, and policies that lead to exclusion, deprivation of resources, and lack of opportunities, with an intersectional and a life course perspective as [disadvantages that accumulate across the life course](#).

As the High Commissioner of Human Rights pointed out in a recent [UNHCR workshop](#) to strengthen economic, social, and cultural rights, all Human Rights - political, economic, social, or cultural - are indivisible and interdependent. Hence, although the upcoming OEWGA social inclusion component aims to narrowly focus on the participation of older persons in public life and decision-making processes, this article will first present snippets of a broader view before narrowing it down to participation.

As pointed out in prior NGO Committee on Ageing Newsletters, social inclusion is woven into the fabric of human rights in general:

- [February 2022 Newsletter](#): Economic security is a significant concern for the old today and the future old.
- [June 2022 Newsletter](#): More than 141 million older persons were illiterate worldwide in 2019, and a significant technology gap prevails in learning and education.
- [September 2022 Newsletter](#): Twenty-three percent of women 75+ in the EU live in poverty or social exclusion.
- [January 2023 Newsletter](#): In emerging countries - with less developed social security safety nets - the pandemic drove around 100 million

people into extreme poverty, raising the global total to 711 million in 2021 from 655 million in 2019.

Again, these - and many more - policy areas are vital to achieving "a society for all" in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play" (United Nations, 1995, para 66) and that "over-rides differences of race, gender, class, generation, and geography, and ensures equal opportunities for all to achieve full potential in life, regardless of origin."

As the [1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen](#) defined, an inclusive society must be based on embracing diversity and using participatory processes involving all stakeholders in the decision-making that affects their lives.

Participation in decision-making that affects one's life span ranges from holding an elected position - at the local or national level - to advocating for or voting for a party or party representative, participating in a member-based group or association, campaigning or protesting for a cause. It may also involve giving one's view in consultations with member organizations, or consultative and coordinating bodies.

As the share of older persons in society increases, the senior electorate should gain influence, and the issues important to them should occupy political agendas.

In practice, this depends on how "senior" is defined. When it concerns older persons, precise and disaggregated data is often unavailable. In addition, whether a senior electorate focuses narrowly on issues concerning their present and future is questionable.

In the U.S., it is interesting that Joe Biden, 79, is the country's 39th [oldest leader](#). Those above 78 - called the silent generation - [constitute 5% of both chambers](#). By the end of 2022, the average age in the Senate was 64, and 58 in the House. It is interesting that 64% of persons over 65 voted in 2018, compared [to 55% of those aged 45-55 and 37% of those 25-34](#).

This is unsurprising as, [according to AARP](#), older people view voting as a responsibility and care about a broad array of issues, not just those associated with ageing, and do not vote as a bloc. For instance, although 90% across party lines consider Social Security an important program, [a poll](#) concerning Covid-related policies showed that 60% of those 65 and over preferred political candidates that favor keeping families healthy and reducing the spread of the virus as opposed to candidates favoring reopening businesses and returning to work. Those aged 50 to 64 were equally split on this issue.

In European elections, the theoretical influence of older voters is also stronger than that of younger. But data does not support this for the oldest voters.

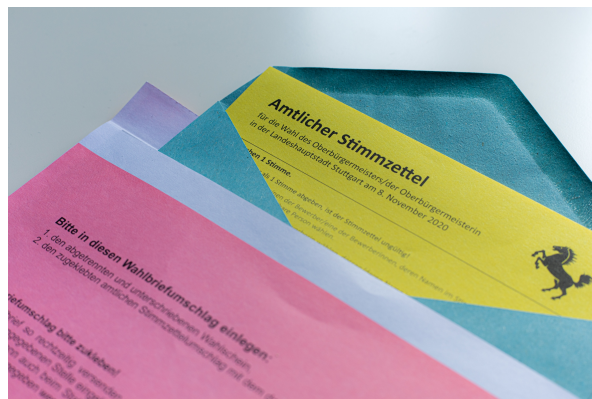
In the 2019 EU Parliamentary elections, 54% of those 55 and older voted, compared to 52% of those 40-54, 47% of those 24-39, and 42% of those 16/18-24. Seventy percent of those voting were over 40. [In national elections in Europe](#), voter turnout of those over 55 is higher than turnout for those aged 18-24, although this is often analyzed as a voting disenchantment among the young feeling that the traditional parties fail to represent their issues - like climate change.

[In local elections in France](#), two-thirds of voters did not turn up, and 50% of voters were over 65. However, as stated above, better age data and research is needed to understand fully the effect of ageing on political participation as societies age. Some recent research from Sweden allows us to nuance the silver tsunami perception above.

Political participation eventually declines with old age - according to research - both over time and in different countries. In fact, with definitions of "senior" starting earlier in chronological age and age brackets broadening - such as age 65+ or age 80+ - research methods do not reach the oldest individuals. This makes data less exact. Furthermore, ageist ideas that participation decline derives from deteriorating health contributes to dismissing studies on why other reasons why political participation declines with old age.

[In the Swedish 2018 national election](#), the highest turnout level, 90.3%, was among voters aged 65-74, while voters aged 80 years and older had the lowest turnout level of all age groups, 75.1%. Over the last 30 years, voters over 75 years have consistently shown the lowest turnout levels of all age groups.

Interesting to note is that this fall in political participation is not mirrored in any fall in political interest. Hence, persons over 75 remain interested in politics but vote less frequently. As for reasons why, current research is inclusive, as ["the reasons as to why older people abstain from voting seem numerous, from no longer viewing voting as important, to not having the internal and/or combined capabilities to execute this functioning."](#)



What will strengthen the civic participation rates of older persons and their right to social inclusion?

- With a better sense of the political participation of the older and the oldest, we turn to the efforts of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe ([UNECE](#)) to strengthen the voice and agency of older persons to ensure that the design and implementation of policies include an ageing lens. The UN 1991 principles for older persons say: ["Older persons should remain integrated into society, participate actively in formulating and implementing policies that directly affect their well-being, and share their knowledge and skills with younger generations."](#)
- The 1995 Madrid Action Plan on Ageing recommended accounting for the needs and concerns of older persons in decision-making, encouraging the establishment of organizations of older persons at all levels to represent them, and measures to enable the full and equal participation of older persons, particularly older women.

- The 2006 United Nations Guidelines for the periodic review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing recommend a “bottom-up participatory approach” to ensure that older persons can express their views on policies affecting their lives.
- [The UNECE Guidelines for Mainstreaming Ageing](#) recommend involving older persons and civil society when mainstreaming ageing across policies from the local to the global level and provides both advice on meaningful participation and examples of different forms of participation. Participation should be a long-term process and cover the whole policy cycle - research, data collection, priority setting, policy formulation, budgeting, implementation, review, and evaluation.
- Meaningful participation requires considering who is invited and enabled to participate; the tools or processes that facilitate participation; the power dynamics that facilitate/hinder participation; how information is shared; and what channels are used for engagement and information sharing. It also requires overcoming barriers to participation: social isolation, digital exclusion, and gender roles, ageism, culture, beliefs and habits.
- [In France, a 2018-2019 national consultation on 'older persons and autonomy'](#) involved 10 national workshops, bringing together representatives of the State and local authorities, experts, older persons, and representatives of associations and federations. Topics covered governance and steering seniors' pathway, the future service offered for older persons in loss of autonomy, professions, etc. Regional forums mobilized institutional bodies, operators, and associations of beneficiaries and carers. A citizens' consultation - discussion groups and individual interviews - gave voice to older persons cared for in institutions and at home, caregivers, and professionals.
- [In Italy](#), a national stakeholder network, the project, "National multilevel co-managed coordination of active aging policies in Italy", brings together representatives from national and local government and civil society to meet periodically to plan and agree on activities, and works closely with the implementation team.
- Ninety percent of [Flemish and Brussels](#) municipalities have a local older people's council offering older persons the opportunity to collaborate on specific issues and contribute to policy. In addition, 23 regional political participation platforms for older persons throughout Flanders convene the local seniors' councils in their region three times per year to exchange information and experiences and offer training in close cooperation with the Flemish Older People's Council. At the level of Flanders, the Vlaamse ouderenraad formulates opinions on all matters concerning older persons - at the request of the Flemish Government, the Flemish Parliament, or a strategic advisory council.
- In Canada, mechanisms at various levels of government involve older persons in policymaking. Several provinces, territories, and municipalities have committees of seniors, senior organizations, and/or experts to advise the government. Stakeholder engagements target seniors, academics, the private sector, and civil society, charitable and advocacy organizations through online consultations, surveys, and roundtables. The Territorial Ministers Responsible for Seniors develop

reports to raise awareness of issues related to ageing, some targeting specific groups, like recent immigrant [and refugee seniors](#), [LGBTQ2 seniors](#), and [indigenous seniors](#).

Age Exclusion is Self-Exclusion

Nobody is better placed than older persons to share the lived experience of their conditions and their view on how they wish to live and be cared for. Still, as the young of today are the older persons of tomorrow, it is also vital that the young of today integrate "old age" when planning and politicizing the society that will be their future.

[Unfortunately, young adults often view ageing as irrelevant to their lives. As *Global Report on Ageism* released by the World Health Organization indicates, one in two persons is ageist.](#)

Research indicates that "the tendency for young adults to draw upon stereotypes about ageing makes envisioning themselves as 'old' difficult to do," but that "the act of being able to imagine their future self in a way that is informed could reduce ageism and lead to better choices that facilitate the aging experience [and "have implications for how younger adults prepare to become an older adult."](#)

[It is time to close the perceived gap](#) between our current and future selves by communicating the positive aspects of aging and building connections between perceived in-group and out-groups to enhance feelings of closeness between generations.

Words that Are Trending

Achieving Social Inclusion in an Exclusionary World

By Adriane Berg, IFA Representative to the UN, GNEC Podcast host, *On The Ground*, member NGO Committee on Ageing Communications Subcommittee



Social Inclusion and UN Goals: Social inclusion is Foundational for All Human Rights

In this article, we examine the meaning of the term social inclusion from the point of view of an older person. However, the components of achieving the social inclusion goal are similar for everyone excluded from significant societal arenas.

Social inclusion is not technically one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, it is 'Target 10:1' under Goal 10, *Reduce Inequality within and among nations*. "By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of **age**, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status."

As the overarching goal of the SDGs is "Leave no one Behind," the implication is that nations must use the maximum available

resources to fully realize economic, social, and cultural rights FOR ALL.

The United Nations has identified social inclusion "as a universal goal aim(ing) to achieve an inclusive society that entails respect for human rights, cultural diversity, and democratic governance, and upholds principles of equality and equity." As a process, social inclusion enables all citizens' "participation in decision-making activities that affect their lives."

Indeed, recently, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, **DESA**, **challenged nations** to measure or rate the extent to which government policy creates an environment for inclusion for older adults by asking seminal questions such as:

- What legal age limits exist in your country that prevent the full and equal participation of older persons in employment, education, healthcare, financial goods, and services?
- What measures are in place to ensure that older persons in institutions segregated from their communities -such as institutional care systems or prisons- can continue participating in their society?
- What is the share of the national public expenditure budget targeted to older persons as a distinct group?

In April 2023, the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA) will hold its 13 sessions. Goal 2 of the **gathering focuses on social inclusion, asserting that it "is a precondition for the ability of older persons to exercise multiple human rights."**

The OEWGA identifies four requirements for fueling the process of social inclusion:

- (1) enhanced opportunities
- (2) access to resources
- (3) impactful voice and
- (4) respect

Elements of Social Exclusion of Older Persons

While the PROCESS leading to social inclusion is straightforward, the reasons behind the exclusion of older persons remain more elusive, significantly because each human will age, and the exclusion is against the self.

Notably, the OEWGA rubric for achieving social inclusion starts with recognizing widespread exclusion that must be addressed by changing specific practices and attitudes that serve as barriers to inclusion. For example, the OEWGA asserts, "From a human rights perspective, achieving social inclusion requires addressing the discriminatory structures that have led to exclusion, deprivation of resources and lack of opportunities identified in multiple international human rights instruments. On the one hand, the full social inclusion of older persons lies upon removing existing barriers and, on the other hand, on adopting measures that actively promote their inclusion."

OEWGA cites a laundry list of areas of exclusion that require attention:

- Lack of equality and non-discrimination

- Neglect, violence, and abuse
- Absence of autonomy and independence
- Lack of long-term care and palliative care
- Inadequate social protection and social security
- Minimal education, training, lifelong learning, and capacity building
- Failure of access to justice
- Absence of the right to work and access to the labor market
- Poor economic security
- Lack of recognition of the contribution of older persons to sustainable development
- Barriers to participation in public life and decision-making processes
- Absence of accessibility, infrastructure, and habitat (transportation, housing, and physical access to public spaces)



Practical Aspects of Social Inclusion as Reasons for Exclusion

Often social inclusion requires changes in the built environment, lifelong learning programs, and improvement in access to technology and communication outlets. For example, SDGs call for inclusive urbanization for all; this should enable older persons to access safe and affordable public transport and enjoy secure, inclusive, and accessible public spaces.

SDG Goal 4 calls for equitable quality education and the promotion of life-long learning opportunities for all. [United Nations Development Program, Leave No One Behind: Ageing, Gender, and the 2030 Agenda](#)

This recognizes the natural changes in physical capacity, mobility, and sensory capacity we experience as we age.

However, these natural occurrences of biological aging do not explain the growing separation of the generations and the insidious segregation in living arrangements, sometimes called **Age Apartheid**.

Self-Segregation and The Perpetuation of Social Exclusion

A recent barrier to social inclusion is the willing separation of older adults, especially in developed nations, to live in age-segregated communities and view age-based living as a rewarding retirement lifestyle.

Author David Ray Papke explores "age-segregated housing and accommodations in nursing homes, public housing for the elderly, and private retirement communities, with special attention to the law and government policy in each area."

Papke asserts, "the housing and accommodations routinely reflect the spatial segregation of the young and the old, which is widespread in modern societies. Unfortunately, living with only people who are one's age contributes to loneliness and feelings of worthlessness among older Americans." He calls for a change in private real estate development and retirement planning from "debilitating age-segregation" to "so-called *aging in place*". And he also states, "With legislation and programs that enable older Americans to age in their current homes, seniors would be more likely to continue growing intellectually and personally and to contribute to the society around them."

1. Segregation of this sort—living only with people of one's age—harms older Americans and society. Age-segregated housing and accommodations contribute to feelings of loneliness and isolation among seniors, leading many to internalize that they are weak or unworthy of residing in the larger community.
2. Age segregation of seniors makes them less visible and obscures the important role they might play in the development of younger generations.
3. Younger Americans, meanwhile, lose a sense of the lives and experiences of their elders and are less prepared for the days when they, too, will become elderly.

In Britain, which has been named one of the most [age-segregated countries in the world](#), "People's interactions outside of the home are almost exclusively with members of their age group, and this could lead to detrimental impacts on our society."

A television broadcast, [Old People's Home for 4 Year Olds](#), produced in association with Age UK, focused on the detriments of Age Apartheid and the benefits to older adults in being around young children.

According to Pam Hoyle, Chair of the Vital Aging Network, the challenge for age-segregated communities is to figure out: "How do we educate society to not only the joy of growing older but also the tremendous value of older adults in our community and in our nation?"

Robert Ramsey, author of [Creating Vital Aging Communities](#), states, "Community leaders need to create natural opportunities for regular contact and interaction among age groups. Life is better when all ages can talk to each other, work together, play together, help, and team up to help others. That makes a true community, not just a bunch of people of different ages living segregated lives in the same town."

Social Inclusion Requires Social Interaction

Despite the growing healthy longevity of older cohorts worldwide, age essentialism is increasing, and personal relationships are more separated by age.

No wonder we see elders as the other, even while growing older ourselves. Futurist author George Orwell observed, "The child thinks growing old is an almost obscene calamity. . .all who have passed the age of thirty are joyless

grotesques, endlessly fussing with things of no importance without having anything to live for. "

The process of social inclusion in governmental policy must also be accompanied by social inclusion in everyday life. Without age integration, we exclude our future selves from a seat at the societal reach and impact table.

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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