



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



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

**This month's issue is devoted to the U.N. International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP) and the search for intergenerational support for a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.**

***Message from the Immediate Past Chair, Cynthia Stuen, and Editor, Martha Bial***

**Welcome to all. As of 1 September, I became the Immediate Past Chair and now turn the gavel over to our new Chair, William (Bill) Smith. I wish to congratulate him and the newly elected Executive Board listed below. I want to thank everyone who has served with me during my four-year tenure as Chair. We met virtually through the pandemic, establishing this wonderful newsletter and more social media presence. Our education and advocacy at the U.N. have been outstanding, and older persons are being heard.**

**We look forward to seeing many of you at the 33<sup>rd</sup> U.N. Observance of the International Day of Older Persons on 2 October from 10 am-1 pm at the U.N. The theme is Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across Generations. It is the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration, so do [REGISTER NOW](#) to attend in person.**

**Or watch it live on [UN Web TV](#).**

**For history on steps the U.N. has taken until now to address the human rights of older persons who were not covered in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in 1948, see this issue's *Deeper Dive* by Maud Bruce-About. An official group of U.N. member states has been charged with identifying gaps in the Universal Declaration (and subsequent documents) and making recommendations for filling the gaps to the 14<sup>th</sup> Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in the spring of 2024.**

**Civil society has a great opportunity to provide input to this process, addressing the gaps by completing a questionnaire offered by the appointed co-facilitators of the Open-Ended Working Group on the Ageing Intersessional process. I hope you will take a few moments to provide your input. [PLEASE CLICK HERE NOW](#).**

**Newly Elected Offices and Members at Large of the NGO Committee on Ageing 2023-2025**

**William (Bill) Smith, Chair**

**Robin Fenley, Vice Chair**

**Martha Bial, Recording Secretary**

**Ariana Elezaj, Corresponding Secretary**

**Katharine Weiss, Treasurer**

**Cynthia Stuen, Past Chair**

**Members at Large:**

**Ramsey Alwin**

**Bethany Brown**

**Chris Hanway**

**Peter Kaldes**

**Magda Kaczmarska**

**What's in this issue?**

**As we approach the International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP), we form coalitions with a particular emphasis on intergenerational advocacy. This newsletter strives to explain the reasons and remedies for the lack of support for the rights of older adults among younger cohorts.**

**Our lead article by Maud Bruce-About, "Toward an Intergenerational Imperative for the Human Rights of Older Persons," covers the consequences of our failure to have a Convention On The Rights Of Older Persons and the psychological and neurological reasons that younger people do not see those rights as relevant to them. Words That Are Trending by Adriane Berg explores the concept of intersectionality, the recognition that inequities overlap and must be perceived as cumulative across the age continuum. We see the understanding of intersectionality as a path to intergenerational support and a step forward in strengthening the realization of a Convention.**

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

[ngocoa-ny.org](http://ngocoa-ny.org)

And while you are there...

You can pay your 2024 dues **NOW** and be credited with paid membership through December 2024! Pay online or get directions for mailing a check.

Thank you.



## **A DEEPER DIVE: Toward an Intergenerational Imperative for the Human Rights of Older Persons**

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

This year's commemoration of the U.N. International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP) focuses on the specificity and enjoyment of Human Rights by older persons. Specifically, UNIDOP explores how reciprocity between generations can offer sustainable solutions to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**Seventy-five years ago, the U.N. General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration on Human Rights - the first document articulating the fundamental rights to be protected universally.**

These rights have been detailed and refined by Covenants on Civil and Political Rights; Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; and by Conventions adapting and ensuring the rights of specific populations such as children, women, and persons with disabilities.

**What is increasingly being realized is the need to better protect the rights of older people in the context of a life-course perspective.**

It is now widely accepted that points of discrimination and exclusion intersect and accumulate throughout life. As the [World Social Report](#) points out, worsening income disparities are "widening disparities in health and life expectancy among future cohorts of older persons." As societies age (which most are doing), [these inequities become increasingly cumbersome for individuals and societies.](#)

The U.N. General Assembly 2010 commissioned an [Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing](#) (OEWGA) to consider existing international human rights of older persons frameworks and identify possible gaps and how best to address them, including considering further instruments and measures.

Through 13 sessions, the OEWGA has now performed situational analysis - topic by topic - and many other forums - like the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), committing governments to include ageing in all social and economic development policies. With the decade of healthy ageing, the WHO has produced reports on critical human rights issues.

### **Summary of Reports and Activities**

- [The Global Report on Ageism](#) released in 2022 by the World Health Organization found that one in two people is ageist.
- The [Fourth Review and Appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing](#) (MIPAA) pointed to age-based institutional discrimination, attitudes, and practices and highlighted issues with implementing national frameworks.
- [The 13th session of OEWGA](#) on social inclusion—the process to improve participation in society through enhanced opportunities, access

to resources, voice, and respect for rights—underscoring that it is a precondition to enjoying human rights and cohesive societies where all groups feel they belong, participate, and are included, recognized, and legitimated. It confirmed that 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 accumulate across the life course.

**Despite these efforts, the current Human Rights framework is inadequate to protect the rights of older persons. When it comes to enforcement, the language waffles. Here are just some examples:**

- SDG No. 1 aspires to end poverty in all forms everywhere. This is one of two focus areas proclaimed a cornerstone of well-being and one of the two priority areas of the 12th session of the OEWSGA. The Current Human Rights framework is insufficient, as the frameworks affirm the right to a safety network but also limit its realization of this very right to only what is [practically possible](#) given the resources in the individual State Party countries.
- While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in Article 25 convenes the right to "an adequate standard of living for the health and well-being of himself"—and specifically mentions "old age"—other articles place responsibility directly in the hands of the individual State Party countries.
- Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights—a consecutive elaboration and refinement of the UDHRs—recognizes the right of everyone to social security. However, it holds State Parties responsible for taking effective measures within their maximum available resources.
- Article 15 of the same Covenant makes retirement age appropriate to national circumstances, and non-contributory old-age benefits, social services, and other assistance at retirement (again) available only within the limited resources.

**Consequently, in parts of the world, economic security for older persons has never been achieved, and in other parts of the world—given the current circumstances—it has been eroded or is under menace.**

In 2020—before Covid-19—142 million older persons worldwide could not meet their basic needs, according to the [World Health Organization Baseline Report](#). 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.

The inability to meet one's basic needs—as one has not benefitted from development—makes individuals less able to contribute to sustainable development, the second focus area of the 12th OEWSGA. This makes societies not only less cohesive and inclusive, but also causes them to miss out on potentially valuable contributions towards important SDG goals.

Older persons do not only contribute to economies—both as accounted for in national statistics and not accounted for, like informal caregiving and volunteering— with a longevity perspective, but population ageing also creates

a market demand for new products and services, leading to business opportunities in age-friendly markets.

Furthermore, with the population ageing, older persons become an increasingly valuable work resource, as those 55+ are estimated to constitute [25 percent of the workforce in OECD countries by 2031](#).

Again, as pointed out above and in our NCOA March [2023 Newsletter](#) on social inclusion, the focus area of the 13th OEWSA shows that 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.

**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 or outright scary.**

The [WHO Global Report on Ageism](#) indicates that one in two persons is ageist. As a result, the global anti-ageing market—elixirs, skin and hair products, and surgical procedures—is [estimated to exceed \\$119.6 billion by 2030](#).

Today, [current research](#) indicates that "the tendency for young adults to draw upon stereotypes about ageing makes envisioning themselves as 'old' difficult," 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."

A recent episode of the podcast [Hidden Brain - You 2.0: Your Future Is Now](#) focused on concepts such as the end of history illusion, which is the belief that although one has changed in the past, they will change less now, and temporal discounting, which is prioritizing one's present as one perceives the future self as the future of somebody else in the far distance. Understanding this perception phenomenon helps us better understand the individual psychology at work, leading to societal ageism and discrimination. This understanding may assist advocates for the human rights of older persons in enlisting the support of the younger cohorts and faster-achieving change.

## **Conclusion**

With that said, it is now time to close the perceived gap between our current and future selves by communicating the positive aspects of ageing and building connections between perceived in-group and out-groups to enhance feelings of closeness between generations. In fact, proximity—working together—is crucial as WHO recommends to unravel ageism.

Hence, we hope you will join us for the U.N. New York IDOP—2 October—to learn how to work together intergenerationally towards a sustainable and better future for all.

---

## **Words that Are Trending**

**Intersectionality: Making  
Intergenerational Solidarity a  
Key to Rights of Older Persons**

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



Advocates for a Convention for The Human Rights of Older Persons are forming intergenerational coalitions to create a forceful wave of anti-ageism and human rights activists. These efforts are made in the face of new campaigns for a Convention to fill gaps in articulating and enforcing the rights of the world's elders.

**The time is ripe for action because of a new view of older persons' rights in the context of today's understanding of "intersectionality."**

The [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#) (UDHR) (General Assembly Resolution 217a) was the first United Nations document to articulate fundamental rights to be protected universally. Eleanor Roosevelt served as the United States delegate to the United Nations General Assembly and acted as the first chairperson of the United Nations Human Rights Commission in 1946. Some consider this document an international Magna Carta for everyone everywhere.

**In Mrs. Roosevelt's own words:**

*"Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home - so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the person, the neighborhood he lives in, the school or college he attends, the factory, farm, or office where he works.*

*...Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world."*

**Indeed, it is in these same small places that ageism resides.**

In the fabric of our cultures, shared in different ways by most societies today, the seeds of ageism grow as barriers to a [Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons](#). Despite hard work and many challenges, the current Universal Declaration of Human Rights has never been extended in theory or practice to older persons. Yet, the Declaration has spawned specific documents protecting women, children, and people with disabilities.

**Why the disparity?**

As stated in its Preamble, the 1948 Declaration was a reaction to the gross "barbarism" and cruelty demonstrated during World War II. With the death of millions, including the torture and death of over one and a half million children, there was an urgency to protect the future of humanity. The political climate surrounding the Declaration was not focused on discrimination in employment, lack of adequate caretaking facilities, or illiteracy that follows one into old age.

It takes additions and refinements to address such inequities in human rights documents. With some older adults, particularly in non-agricultural, strongly developed nations, displaying superior economic positions to younger generations, motivation to join the fight for the rights of older persons is sometimes lacking.

**Fortunately, a new word is trending, "intersectionality," that may change all this.**

The [Oxford Reference Of Human Geography](#) defines intersectionality as "The theory that various forms of discrimination centered on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to produce particularized forms of social oppression. As such, oppression is the result of intersecting forms of exclusionary practices. It is thus suggested that the study of identity-based discrimination needs to identify and take account of these intersectionalities."

**Further, aging advocates assert that discrimination because of race, gender, or religion overlaps or intersects to marginalize individuals throughout their life continuum.**

Age discrimination compounds already existing inequalities established earlier in life. This nexus between the status of any human being regarding their human rights and the potential for ageism to inflict even more significant inequities upon them is the essence of intersectionality. It applies to anyone living long enough to age.

**In this context, awareness of intersectionality becomes a pathway on which all generations recognize the need for a Convention that declares and ensures the rights of older persons.** Age discrimination has been viewed as an issue separate from the rights of younger cohorts. With intersectionality as a key concept, age discrimination is now viewed as a continuum of established inequities, making its remedy broader in appeal and urgency.

**Intersectionality and the accompanying wave of intergenerational support for a Convention give a new dimension to the scope, effect, and enforcement of the human rights of older persons. A Convention will impact all of us across the age continuum.**

For example, one of the significant indicators of the haves and have-nots of older people is education and literacy. Educational inequity follows one throughout life, accompanying a [lack of economic opportunities](#) and life satisfaction. Protecting the rights of older persons postulates the responsibility that older adults have equal educational opportunities. Such implementation cannot begin in old age. To eradicate age-related inequalities requires targeting earlier root causes.

**Indeed, intersectionality broadens the impact of even the most specifically age-associated rights.**

These include healthcare for chronic diseases, caregiving in general, non-ageist working opportunities, age-friendly environments, criminalizing elder abuse, and elder fraud. Awareness, recognition, and enforcement of the human rights of older persons require an overall framework of lifelong equity and an individual recognition that one's status in the future is inextricably connected to the rights and status of today.

**Intersectionality brings us to the realization that inequities follow the person.** Thus, to build consensus for a Convention, we must understand that age-related rights policies already affect us now, regardless of age.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights set a common standard for all peoples in all nations. However, it could not contemplate today's potential for a 100-year life. The document has stayed strong precisely because it inspires more specific protections. It has spawned 70 conventions and treaties on the human rights of groups like people with disabilities, women, and children. It contains definitions of rights made relevant and central to the changing times.

### **Intersectionality and the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing: Opening the Door to Expansion**

The [Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing](#) (OEWG) was established by resolution at the 2010 General Assembly. Even after a dozen sessions, aging individuals face myriad human rights violations and ageist policies. Recently, however, the work of the OEWG has been strengthened by the recognition of intersectionality and the pursuit of human rights through a life course perspective.

**At the 2023 session of the OEWG, a committee was assembled to study the gaps in the rights of older persons for a report to be delivered in 2024 at the next session.**

The working group will also articulate protocols for protecting rights in identifying those gaps. The examination will likely show that a practical and complete fulfillment of such protections will result in policies that strengthen all peoples of all generations, as is demanded by any solution to thwart age discrimination and the inequities resulting from ageism.

Achieving Member States agreement on a Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons has been a long and painstaking journey that is not yet at its end. While the process has been slow, recognizing intersectionality concerning inequities and the concomitant motivation for intergenerational support it engenders revitalizes hope for the future.

*[Listen to a podcast discussion of the 2023 OEWG with NGO Committee on Ageing, Immediate Past Chair, Cynthia Stuen](#)*

---

**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](https://ngocoa-ny.org/participate)

**Support the work of the NGO Committee on Ageing!**  
[Join us as a Member](#)





**THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING-NEW  
YORK**

PO Box 1854, New York  
New York 10163 - 1854 United States

You received this email because you signed up on our  
website or attended one of our events.

[Unsubscribe](#)

