POSITION PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE 2023 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL FORUM BY THE STAKEHOLDER GROUP ON AGEING (SGA)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The world's population is ageing. There are 727 million persons aged 65 and over in 2020, with projected growth to 1.5 billion in 2050 (UNDESA, 2020). In 2021 older persons accounted for more than one billion people, with 70% living in low- and middle-income countries (AARP, 2021), the majority of which live in urban areas (HelpAge International).

To ensure that neither today's nor future generations of older persons are left behind, the full implementation of Agenda 2030 must include the means for older persons to enjoy their independence, preserve their dignity, participate fully in society and attain their rights. Society's perception of older persons and older age/ageing needs to be transformed to accept older persons as valuable contributors to their families, communities and the national economy, not merely as recipients of medical rehabilitation and social welfare.

A human rights and life-course approach is necessary to ensure the intersection of the global megatrends of urbanization and population ageing (UNDESA, 2020). Policies and programmes that promote healthy ageing also benefit younger people as they age.

Technological advances present opportunities to achieve Agenda 2030. However, older persons are at risk of being left behind in the digital world due to increasing digitalization of everyday life. In the European Union, almost 40% of those aged 65 to 74 do not use the internet (EU, 2021). Efforts to ensure access to and knowledge of digital technology for those over 65 are essential. The International Telecommunications Union's report on Ageing in a Digital World provides an age inclusive roadmap to follow.

Member States have committed to protection of the human rights of older persons in a number of areas: through the establishment of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021-2030; adoption by the Human Rights Council of its resolution 48/3 which encourages States to take measures to combat ageism and eliminate age discrimination; the establishment by the World Health Organization (WHO) of a Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

Recommendations

The SGA recommends that Member States and sub-national and local governments put in place policies, programmes and budgets that:

    a. Include older persons in the development of information and communication technology (ICT);

b. Adopt age inclusive ICT accessibility and quality standards and provide appropriate training to guarantee the use of digital technology by older persons, recognizing the need to overcome sensory and cognitive conditions for some older persons;

c. Ensure participation of older persons in all their diversity in the development of master urban and territorial plans;

d. Contribute to the global effort of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, 2021-2030;

e. Engage in WHO's Age-friendly Cities and Communities initiatives;

f. Adopt mainstreaming ageing policy implementation tools and carry out age-sensitive analysis;

g. Implement the New Urban Agenda as a roadmap to improving the lives of older people in cities;

h. Collect and use age inclusive disaggregated data reaching all older persons;

i. Support the efforts of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group to create a convention to protect the rights of older persons.

Sources

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Overview

1. The Stakeholder Group on Ageing represents the concerns of older persons and organisations working with and for older persons across the world. Addressing these concerns now will enable older people to contribute to the building of a thriving, peaceful and biologically diverse world for future generations; we are conscious of our shared responsibility for the future of our planet, and call for accelerated efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

2. The Covid-19 pandemic laid bare and exacerbated societal inequities, including ageism and the marginalization of older people. Accelerating recovery from COVID-19 and the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels, requires Member States to ensure that:

    a. The development of information and communication technology (ICT) that is inclusive of older persons' needs, with accessibility and quality standards that pay special attention to "off liners" and those with sensory and cognitive impairments; (SDG9)

    b. Cities and human settlements are inclusive of people of all ages and abilities through the adoption of a life-course approach, with the ultimate goal of creating age-friendly environments that foster the ability for all to contribute and to thrive and deliver a society for all ages. (SDG11)

    c. Disaggregated data collection and analysis that include all segments of older persons, including the oldest old, in sufficient detail to show clearly multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, inequality and inequity.

    d. Human rights in older age are strengthened through the adoption of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons as an international legally binding instrument to hold Member States accountable on issues relevant to the growing population of older persons.

Rationale

3. The world's population is ageing. There are 727 million persons aged 65 and over in 2020, with projected growth to 1.5 billion in 2050 (UNDESA, 2020). In 2021 older persons accounted for more than one billion people, with 70% living in low- and middle-income countries (AARP, 2021), the majority of whom live in urban areas (HelpAge International).

4. Ageism and age discrimination pervade many institutions, policies and areas of life. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021) one in two people worldwide are ageist and hold negative views about older persons. Recent crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, have put a spotlight on the vulnerabilities, neglect and the mistreatment of older persons. In particular, they have shown up very significant failures of policies and laws that should protect the human rights of older persons.

5. Member States have committed to protect the human rights of older persons in a number of areas, including: the establishment of the United Nations' Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030; the adoption by the Human Rights Council of Resolution 48/3, which encourages States to take measures to combat ageism and eliminate age discrimination; and the creation by the World Health Organization (WHO) of the Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities.

6. Technological advances present opportunities to achieve the 2030 Agenda. However, older persons are at risk of being left behind in the digital world due to increasing digitalization of everyday life. In the European Union, almost 40% of those aged 65 to 74 do not use the internet (EU, 2021). Efforts to ensure access to and knowledge of digital technology for those over 65 are essential. The International Telecommunications Union's report on Ageing in a Digital World (2021) provides an age-inclusive roadmap to follow.

7. Despite the 27 references to ageing and older persons in the New Urban Agenda and many in SDG11, the specific concerns and needs of older persons and their families and communities are often overlooked in programmes intended to make cities and communities inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. The UN's Decade of Healthy Ageing and the World Health Organization's Age-friendly Cities & Communities initiative offer excellent opportunities to learn good practices from programmes in cities around the world, which have elements that are informative and replicable. More concerted effort is needed to multiply and embed these good practices in the many cities where they have yet to be implemented.

8. Given increasing longevity, it is crucial to disaggregate population data beyond 50 and 65. With people living longer than ever before, the years beyond the traditional retirement age become longer and more diverse. This has to be considered in data collection and analysis in order to evaluate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and best prepare our societies for a healthy and participatory long life.

SDG9 - Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation

9. SDG 9 offers the opportunity to overcome the lifelong inequalities faced by current cohorts of older persons and the means for them not to be left behind. This can be done by providing age inclusive digital infrastructure and ensuring affordable access and education/lifelong learning to enable older persons to be included.

10. Sustainable Development Goal 9 is about "industry, innovation and infrastructure" and digital technology is vastly changing industry structure. Older people should not be "left behind" in enjoying the benefits of this digital progress.

11. Given good access and appropriate training and education, the digital world offers the opportunity for older persons to remain proactive participants in society. Communication

Technologies (ICTs) therefore can help dispel prevailing stereotypes and myths of older persons as vulnerable or a burden on society, and enhance acceptance of older persons as valuable participants in society.

12. Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies may have the potential to improve older people's health and well-being (WHO, 2022), but only if ageist bias is eliminated from design and implementation, and use. Care also must be taken to ensure that the algorithms used by AI are 'clean' in respect of older persons, and do not reflect ageist stereotypes, prejudice or discrimination.

Recommendations

13. Ensuring that older people are not left behind in enjoying the benefits of digital progress requires a collaborative effort from governments and civil society to promote digital literacy, accessibility, inclusion, innovation, and intergenerational connections.

14. To accomplish this goal, public and private sectors can take several steps:

   a. Foster digital inclusion: governments and industry should work together to ensure that older persons have access to digital technologies, including broadband internet access. This can be achieved through policies that promote digital inclusion and that provide subsidies for low-income households.

   b. Provide digital literacy training to older people, who may not be familiar with new technologies and may require training to use them effectively. Governments and industries can provide digital literacy training programs to help older people learn how to use digital devices and software.

   c. Ensure accessibility: digital technologies should be designed with accessibility in mind, such as providing larger fonts, adjustable colour contrasts, and text-to-speech features. This will help older people with sensory and/or cognitive impairments to access and use digital technologies.

   d. Encourage innovation: governments and industries can encourage innovation to include older people in the digital technology sector. Innovation can drive progress and provide new opportunities, products and services that cater to the needs of older people.

   e. Eliminate ageism in the application of digital technologies: AI and other digital technologies should avoid ageist stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination in their design, data bases, and usage and must not perpetuate age-biased practices.

   f. Foster intergenerational connections: encouraging intergenerational connections can help older people learn from younger generations about new technologies and how to use them. Governments and industries can promote intergenerational programmes that bring older and younger people together to learn from each other.

g. Nothing about us without us: involve older persons in all aspects of innovation, from its creation, design, user-friendliness, beta testing, teaching, and marketing.

SDG11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

15. Governments, international and civil society organisations should adopt a human rights and life-course approach, acknowledging and preparing for the intersection of the global megatrends of urbanization and population ageing (UNDESA, 2020), recognising the benefits of each.

16. Homelessness and inadequate housing are a special concern for older persons. The UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing regards the right to live in safety and dignity in a decent home as a fundamental human right, yet in many cities worldwide there has been a steep rise in the number of people experiencing homelessness and an even greater number who live in conditions that do not satisfy the minimum requirements of human decency. A rapidly increasing percentage of these people are older adults. Many older people live in homes that can no longer meet their needs as they age and are consequently unsafe or inappropriate.

17. Healthy ageing is life long and does not begin just when we are older. Environments that benefit older people also benefit younger people. For example, age-friendly environments that promote independent mobility of older persons, directly benefit everyone with permanent or temporary mobility restrictions and indirectly the carers and others who assist them.

18. Environments and communities that facilitate healthier lifestyles in turn enable citizens of all ages to lead healthier, more productive and independent lives, thus saving society costs that would otherwise be incurred in care and health services.

Recommendations

19. To achieve this goal, Member States should put in place polices, programmes and budgets that:
    a. Encourage Member States and subnational levels of government to create master plans or other national strategies, plans and policies for healthy ageing.

    b. Include older persons in all their diversity at the centre of developing master urban and territorial plans.

    c. Carry out age-sensitive analyses to assess the impact of policies and programmes on persons of different ages and abilities, specifically older persons.

    d. Expand affordable and accessible housing options, by modifying existing homes, developing new and age appropriate housing, and by creating a variety of accessible and cost appropriate housing typologies to enable people to age at home and remain integrated in their communities.

e. Facilitate effective multigenerational living and address isolation, by encouraging housing options and neighborhoods that accommodate multiple generations with facilities that encourage living together in harmony.

f. Respond to and address older persons' vulnerability to climate change by developing specific measures to reduce and mitigate risks faced by older people and their dependents in climate change-induced disasters.

g. Encourage and support countries and subnational levels of government to create and share good practice on age-friendly cities and community programmes, utilizing the online guidance and good practices from the World Health Organization's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities & Communities and its members, and the newly published guide to national programmes for age-friendly cities and communities.

h. Invest in and support the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021-2030 and its action area on developing age-friendly environments as well as the New Urban Agenda as a catalyst and roadmap for the implementation of SDG11.

SDG17 Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development

20. The availability of quality age-disaggregated data that incorporate the intersectionality of age with other types of discrimination is critical to track, monitor and evaluate progress in meeting all the SDGs. The implementation and monitoring of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals requires improved and age-inclusive data for their benchmarking.

21. The Titchfield Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age Discrimination was created in March 2018 (Dec. 49/118) to identify gaps in international guidance and suggest methods for producing disaggregated data by age and ageing-related data across the life course. The group has recognized that older people experienced the worst impacts of COVID-19, and has called for better evidence with regard to those impacted.

22. The just completed Fourth Review and Appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing noted that the lack of strong knowledge base and high-quality age-disaggregated data impairs policymaking on ageing issues and urged action on this.

23. Further disaggregation by age is necessary to reflect the diversity of older persons and address multiple and intersecting discrimination. Longer lifespans mean that it is crucial to disaggregate national and global older population data beyond traditional 'retirement' ages, as people may live another 40 more years. Living a decent, healthy and participatory life post retirement is essential in a sustainable world. Official statistics need to reflect this together with when health declines.

<u>Recommendations</u>

24. Member States and UN agencies must:

   a. Promote age disaggregated data collection and analysis that includes all age cohorts from birth to death for all countries and regions, inclusive of ethnicity, gender, class and disability.

   b. Ensure all SDG monitoring and reporting processes, which include local and national strategies and voluntary national and voluntary local reviews, specifically address older persons at risk of being left behind.

Summary

25. We, as older persons and representatives of older persons, join others in calling for urgent action to accelerate the implementation of the 2030 Agenda to deliver a society for all ages.

26. Creating a sustainable world for all ages is perhaps the greatest challenge we have. It is an intergenerational task for today's and future generations.

27. This position paper explains why Goals 9, 11 and 17 are especially relevant to older persons and what must be done to accelerate and improve their implementation to ensure no one older person is left behind.

28. Achieving a society of all ages requires a human rights and life-course perspective.

29. We are all impatient for Member States to agree and adopt a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons as a legally binding instrument and to address older persons' human rights in the implementation of the SDGs.

Sources

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