



THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

BUILDING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES



Welcome to the May 2025 Issue of the UN NGO Committee on Ageing/NY Newsletter

What's in this Issue?

We begin with a message from our Chair, Bill Smith in which he expresses appreciation for the work of the work of our subcommittees whose reports will soon be posted on our website.

The High-Level Political Forum at the UN that monitors progress on the Sustainable Development Goals will hold its annual meeting in New York from July 14th -23rd. [High-Level Political Forum 2025/](#)

It will have a special focus this year on SDG's 3 (Health), 5, Gender (Equality) and 8 (productive employment and decent work.) In addition, 37 countries will report on the progress towards these goals in their countries. [2025 Voluntary National Reviews](#) (Readers who find their country on the list may want to see if their reports reference older persons, and query your governments if they do not)

For background, Maud Bruce-About explores how gender inequality from an early age leads to gender disparities in old age across the SDGs (See a *Deeper Dive*). Adriane Berg discusses how ageism and gender bias affects older women's right to work (*Words that Are Trending.*)

Warmly Yours,

Martha Bial, Editor and Chair of the NGOCOA Communications Committee,
Representative to the UN, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics



A Word from The Chair

Dear Readers,

At our recent Annual Meeting, we thanked the Executive Committee (EC) members who have completed their terms of service, and we appointed or

reappointed the Executive Committee that will serve for the next two years. There is so much work to be done.

We spent the majority of the meeting hearing reports from the EC Subcommittees, beginning with the subcommittee to protect the Human Rights of Older Persons. Chairs Frances Zainoeddin and Bethany Brown reported on a remarkable year in which NGO CoA efforts played a role in the UN's conclusion of the open-ended Working Group on Ageing after 14 years and the move to the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Our partners at the NGO CoA in Geneva will lead the continuing advocacy efforts there as the Council begins drafting a global Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

Much work in the past year has been the focus of the subcommittees on Older Women, Programs, Global Alliances, Fund Development, Communications, and the Task Force on Intergenerational Issues. The last-mentioned task force will become a standing subcommittee moving forward due to the importance of including all generations in our important work. Subcommittee reports will be on the NGO CoA website in the days ahead for all to read and enjoy.

This newsletter is, once again, filled with tremendous information on much of the work at the United Nations, with a continued focus on Older Women, Lifelong learning, fighting bias with facts, and so much more. Members of our committee continue to participate at the UN in discussions at the High Level Political Forum and other UN bodies.

As Chair, I am grateful for all the tireless work that so many Committee Members perform daily. Thank you.

William T. Smith, Ph.D. Chair, NGO CoA in NY

A Deeper Dive

Older Women: Still Left Behind

By Maud Bruce-About, UN Representative, International Federation of the Association of Older People (FIAPA), Chair NGO CoA Subcommittee on Older Women



The 2025 High-Level Political Forum aims to “Advancing sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The focus of the Forum is to “leave no one behind.” A significant segment of the population remains behind in work, wealth, health, and recognition. That segment is Older Women. As not to leave them behind, this article will focus on an increasing population segment – and the catch-ups that will make up for the lost time in gaining equality..

Older Women MATTER: By the Numbers

It might come as a surprise, but women over 50 represent 27% of the global female population today and will represent 35% by 2050.

This is due to population ageing in general and the fact that women tend to live longer than men. Today, [54% of persons aged 60 and 62% of those over 80 are female.](#)

Hence, this article will take gender and age perspectives - feminization of ageing - and encourage you to reflect on the key issues facing older women, as poverty is gendered ([NGO CoA Newsletter January 2024.](#))

In these challenging times - war, climate and technological change, cultural and economic polarization - their resilience and contributions towards sustainable development.

Given the interlinked nature of Strategic Development Goals (SDGs), our coverage will be broader than the SDGs to be reviewed by HLPF :

- 3: ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages [NGO CoA Newsletter May 2025](#))
- 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls;
- 8: promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all

We will take a lifespan perspective, as it is the inequalities, discriminations, and disadvantages that women compound throughout life that result in them being disproportionately affected by poverty and income insecurity at older ages. For instance, according to UN Women, in 28 of the 116 countries with data, [less than half of older women have a pension.](#)

We consider it key - as we pointed out in our [January 2024 Newsletter](#) - to avoid over-fixation on the cost-side of ageing and intergenerational equality, which both hide more important economic inequalities that need to be addressed to prevent increased multidimensional poverty throughout the lifespan, an increasing number of poor overall and widening disparities in both health and life expectancy among future cohorts of the older person. Longevity - female or male - should not be the privilege of the wealthy.

As already mentioned, gender inequalities create disparities early in life and create inequities in **education** - illiteracy and digital divide limit access to services, employment, social protection - **the labour market** - lower workforce participation, due to family care duties, and lower wages, often in low paid care work and at times in the informal sector limit life savings and pension and social security rights - **physical and mental health** - higher rates of chronic illness and disability , lack of access to health and long-term care services, higher rates of abuse, risk of accusation of witchcraft - **economic security and poverty** - non gendered and geographical mobility adapted pension plans and social security systems, higher labour participation in informal sector, widowhood and legal obstacles to build wealth put older women in economic insecurity and poverty - **social exclusion** - living alone increases economic insecurity, limits access to social services and leads to psychological distress.

As now widely recognized, these before-mentioned disparities intersect and compound with discriminations based on age, race, disability, economic status, marital status, and whether one lives in an urban or rural context.

The resilience and contributions of older women to society - as pointed out in our [April](#) and [September 2022 Newsletters](#) - are contingent on the

supportiveness of cultural and socio-economic environments. A bare minimum is required to have the capacity to “absorb, adapt, and transform in the face of shock and stressors,” as the World Food Program defines resilience.

Today, many older women live in environments that do not meet their needs (health, education, social protection), that were fragilized by COVID-19, and/or suffer from man-made war or natural catastrophes. Unfortunately, whilst COVID-19 confirmed the need for strong universal health systems and policies, many countries with the fastest aging population do not have solid systems in place.

As the Independent Expert points out, older women are often invisible in laws and policy, and the interplay between age and gender frequently goes unnoticed. Hence, national policies on ageing tend to merely refer to gender, and [gender equality laws/policies/strategies](#) often brush over older women.

This lack of attention to older women carries over to data collection and research.

For instance, research on emergencies concludes that older persons are disproportionately affected. The same [research](#) mostly neglects specific impacts on older women, like in the case of COVID-19, when gender data was missing. Further, most surveys on gender-based violence stop at 49 - menopause/end of reproductive age - rendering access to services for victims of gender-based and sexual violence impossible. Yet another issue concerns access to income-generating programs when it is too often assumed that older women are “[taken care of.](#)”

Lack of sex, gender, and age disaggregated data [and ageism leads to underrepresentation](#) of the challenges of older women in health research and, hence, low understanding of their health needs and ineffective treatment.

Likewise, we cannot neglect that older women are invisible in media covering the humanitarian crisis. A [Google News research](#) concluded that 97% of all Ukrainian headlines mentioned children, while merely 3% mentioned older persons, and only 33% of the latter mentioned older women. Furthermore, if not invisible, older women are frequently depicted as a burden, making them vulnerable to abuse and neglect.

For meaningful contrast, read “I just hope I will live until our victory,” part of [As Equals](#), a CNN ongoing series on gender inequality, and “The face of mass exodus: the older women caught up in war” by [Helpage](#).

Then again, even in the most privileged economic and natural environments, ageism or discrimination stymie both contributions and resilience. According to the [WHO Global Report](#) on Ageism, one in two people are ageist, and even ageism is gendered. Ageist attitudes disadvantage older women more than men - men are perceived as wise and experienced, whereas women face pressure to hide the physical signs of ageing.

Despite this reserve, we should not overlook that many older women hold leadership positions in local and national politics, business, culture, civil society, and academia and that many older women continue to be active in organizations fighting social injustice and working towards a more sustainable world. They all contribute to socio-economic and cultural development, break stereotypes, and constitute role models for women of all generations.

A case in point is Klimaseniorinnen Schweiz and Others v. Switzerland, a group of more than 2500 older Swiss women taking the Swiss government to the [European Court of Human Rights](#) for insufficient action to address global warming.

Older women are all heroes at our level, contributing as we can culturally, socially, and economically and being resilient.

As pointed out in our [April 2022](#) newsletter, older women perform unpaid work - like informal caregiving that is not currently accounted for in national statistics. In Sub-Saharan Africa, grandmothers tended to grandchildren following the HIV crisis in rural communities in Kenya after their children had fled for better opportunities due to draughts and famine.

Furthermore, older adults can share pensions and savings with family members for subsistence and to help the next generation.

In summary, as the Independent Expert on Ageing so accurately puts it: “The feminization of ageing has important implications for gender equality as well as for the rights of older persons.

[.....The vital contributions, experiences, and concerns of older women, however, remain largely invisible and disregarded.”](#) which is also why we fully support her 15-point recommendations, and especially “to close remaining gaps and shortcomings in the international human rights framework concerning the rights of older persons and pay particular attention to the intersection between gender and ageing”

Let’s age with rights!

Words that are Trending

Work for Older Women: The Right to Work, the Right to Thrive

By Adriane Berg, United Nations representative, International Federation on Ageing; Board Member of The Global NGO Executive Committee (GNEC), Member of NGO Committee on Ageing NY



In today’s global dialogue on inclusion and equity, one group continues to be routinely overlooked: older women in the workforce. While many talk about the “silver economy” and the “longevity dividend,” older women are still too often excluded from the job market—not for lack of talent or will, but because of deeply embedded systems of ageism and gender bias.

The Right to Work Does Not Expire

[The Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) and multiple [International Labour Organization](#) conventions affirm the right to work. But reality paints a different picture for women over sixty-five. Retirement policies, outdated hiring

practices, and societal expectations have created a perfect storm of invisibility. According to the [Global Report on Ageism by the World Health Organization](#), older people frequently face assumptions that they are less productive, less adaptable, or simply “done.” This is even more severe for older women, whose lifetime earnings and opportunities have already been constrained by unequal pay, child-rearing breaks, and limited access to leadership roles.

Education: The Lifelong Key

Education is the great equalizer—but only if access is equitable. [The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4](#) calls for “inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.” While there has been global progress in educating girls, disparities persist. According to [UNESCO, 129 million girls worldwide are out of school](#). This early educational gap later compounds into lower-paying jobs, less tech training, and fewer reskilling opportunities in midlife.

Lifelong education is essential, not optional. Older women need access to upskilling, especially in digital technologies, to remain viable in the workforce. The [Global Report on Ageing 2023 by HelpAge International](#) emphasizes the importance of governments supporting digital literacy and flexible training programs designed for women over sixty. These programs must not only be available. They must be welcoming, accessible, and age-affirming.

Fighting Bias with Facts

Let’s bust a myth: older adults, and older women especially, are excellent workers. A [2022 AARP study](#) found that multigenerational teams that included older employees had higher productivity, stronger decision-making, and lower turnover. Older women bring emotional intelligence, perspective, problem-solving, and mentorship. Yet, age bias persists in hiring and workplace cultures.

In a world where [1 in 6 people will be over the age of sixty-five by 2050 \(UN DESA, 2023\)](#), businesses and governments can no longer afford to ignore this powerhouse demographic. Employment programs must actively include women 65+, not as an afterthought but as a central pillar of workforce development.

UN SDGs: The Intersection of Gender, Age, and Labor Rights

The Sustainable Development Goals are our blueprint for a better world—and the rights of older women to work sit squarely at their intersection. [SDG 5 \(Gender Equality\)](#), [SDG 8 \(Decent Work and Economic Growth\)](#), and [SDG 10 \(Reduced Inequalities\)](#) all demand action on this front.

We must ensure that policy frameworks and economic initiatives explicitly include older women. From pension reform that removes forced retirement ages to support entrepreneurship at any stage of life to promoting flexible and remote work models—change is possible and overdue.

AI-An Unanticipated Boon to Older Women at Work

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative tool in the modern workforce, offering opportunities for individuals to engage in meaningful work regardless of age. For older women, AI presents unique advantages, particularly when tools are designed to be intuitive and narrative-driven.

Unlike traditional digital interfaces that may rely heavily on technical jargon or complex workflows, narrative-based AI tools leverage storytelling and

conversational prompts. This approach aligns with the strengths of older women, who often excel in communication, empathy, and critical thinking. Their ability to craft compelling narratives and ask insightful questions makes them well-suited to interact with AI systems that prioritize dialogue and context.

Furthermore, older individuals frequently possess a wealth of life experience, which enhances their capacity to discern nuances and ensure the accuracy of AI-generated content. This skill set is invaluable in roles that require content creation, customer engagement, or data interpretation, where understanding context and intent is crucial.

By embracing AI tools that are accessible and tailored to their strengths, older women can continue to contribute meaningfully to the workforce, breaking down barriers and redefining what it means to be an active participant in the digital economy.

What Needs to Happen Now

- **Tech Training:** Develop digital upskilling programs designed for older learners, especially women in rural and underserved communities.
- **Policy Reform:** Advocate for removing mandatory retirement ages and age-inclusive hiring policies.
- **Equal Pay Enforcement:** Commit to wage transparency and enforcement mechanisms covering workers of all ages.
- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch media campaigns to challenge stereotypes and showcase thriving older women in every industry.
- **Funding for Lifelong Learning:** Governments and NGOs must invest in education systems that support learners from childhood through old age.

This Is Not Charity, It's Smart Economics

Older women are not a burden; they are a powerful labor asset. Keeping them in the workforce improves GDP, strengthens communities, and upholds fundamental human rights. The International Monetary Fund estimates that closing gender gaps in labor force participation would significantly boost economic growth—imagine the compounded benefit when we close both gender and age gaps.

Let's be clear: Work for older women is not just trending—it's essential. The NGO Committee on Ageing calls on global partners to prioritize the rights, roles, and recognition of women over sixty-five in the workforce. Not in a future generation—now.

Discussion Points

In this new feature of our newsletter, we encourage you to discuss these issues in your meetings and writings:

- Should the concept of retirement be changed to “lifelong, appropriate work”
- How should advocates prove the dollar value of education for women in the GNP?
- To what extent does misogyny and ageism intersect to impoverish women and/or leave them undereducated?

- How do you answer the argument that older people must be forced to retire so that younger people can have jobs?

By all means, let us know what caught your attention about these issues. Contact us [here](#).

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

You can find back issues of our newsletter on our website. And while you are there...pay your 2025 dues and be credited with paid membership through December 2025! Pay online or get directions for mailing a check. ngocoa-ny.org

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