



**POSITION PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE 2022 HIGH LEVEL POLITICAL
FORUM
BY THE STAKEHOLDER GROUP ON AGEING (SGA)
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<https://www.stakeholdergrouponageing.org/>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the global population of older persons grows dramatically, so does ageism and age discrimination; the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated this. While some older persons require specialized care, most are active and are vital contributors -to their families, communities and society. The socio-economic and political contributions of women and men over the age of 60 have not yet been, but must be, fully recognized and included in 'building back better' from the global pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Essential for this is a fully age inclusive path for recovery and SDGs; universally applied age-inclusive legislation and policies; an international human rights legal instrument to protect the rights of older persons; and policies that support a just society for all people of all ages, everywhere.

Key messages:

- Access to education and lifelong learning with a life course perspective and that includes those beyond the age of 60 to ensure national economic growth, inclusion, healthy ageing and independence;
- Priority to the intersection of gender and age discrimination, to ensure gender equality;
- Urgent action and legal remedies to end and prevent gender-based violence/abuse for all across the life course;
- Comprehensive collection and use of age-related data and age disaggregated analysis on older age, lack of which impedes SDG achievement;
- Policy actions and public/ private partnerships for an age-inclusive society, leaving no one behind.

Recommendations for Member States:

- A. **Put in place** education policies and programmes that:
 - a. Guarantee affordable access and opportunities for lifelong learning for all beyond retirement age who depend on employment to survive, and for those who lack basic literacy.
 - b. Provide digital, financial and vocational training and re-training for older persons to assure both opportunities for **socio-economic development** and autonomy and **independence** in older age.
 - c. Expand affordable internet coverage for all to increase access to lifelong learning for older persons through partnerships with industry and civil society.
 - d. Put in place non-digital education for older people to manage their health, upgrade work skills, and engage in meaningful participation in civic and cultural life.

- B. **Invest** in gender equality by:
 - a. Recognizing the life-long impacts of structural gendered and age discrimination, which deprives older women of employment, a secure income, ownership of property, access to appropriate health services, and the right to social protection and to independence.
 - b. Ensuring policies and awareness campaigns on elder abuse integrate a gender perspective.
 - c. Using and collecting life course data on abuse, neglect, financial exploitation and femicides and report on risk factors involving older women in all settings, including in care homes.
 - d. Acknowledging and acting on how COVID -19 has exposed disregard for the rights of older persons and particularly its impact on older women who represent the majority of the world's old and oldest-old persons.

- C. **Address** systemic issues to:
 - a. Ensure timely and reliable age data disaggregated beyond the age of 49, through age 100+ as the bedrock of SDG policy.
 - b. Encourage multi-stakeholder and age-inclusive engagement everywhere to implement the SDGs.

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OVERVIEW

1. The Stakeholder Group on Ageing currently comprises nineteen regional and global members with networks that represent older peoples' organisations and the concerns of older people across the world.
2. We believe that essential urgent action for **'Building back better from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'** requires Member States to ensure:
 - A fully age inclusive path for recovery and SDGs with age and gender disaggregated data to underpin SDG implementation policies, their monitoring and accountability measures;
 - Universally applied age-inclusive legislation and policies for lifelong education, health and social care, social protection, employment and housing;
 - An international human rights legal instrument to protect the rights of older persons;
 - Age inclusive policies that support a just society for all people of all ages, everywhere;
 - Multi-stakeholder and age-inclusive engagement everywhere to implement the SDGs.

Rationale:

3. The global population of older persons is growing at a fast pace, both in absolute numbers and as a proportion of the total population; those over 60 are growing faster than children under five.
4. By 2030, 1 in 6 persons will be over age 60, 16.5% (1.4 billion) of the global total population, with low- and middle-income countries experiencing the greatest change, where by 2050 two-thirds of the world's population over 60 years will be living¹.
5. Nevertheless, ageism and age discrimination are rife and on the rise; the attitudes towards, and impact on, older persons throughout the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated this. The conflicts around the world, most clearly demonstrated in Ukraine, spotlight the vulnerabilities of and violence perpetrated against older people.
6. Yet the rights of older women and men are still not protected with a specific rights instrument. Discrimination and human rights violations due to age related exclusion and social vulnerabilities routinely occur.
7. While some older persons require specialized care, most are active and are vital contributors to their families, communities and society. The socio-economic and political contributions of women and men over the age of 60 have not yet been, but must be, fully recognized and included in 'building back

¹ <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

better' from the global pandemic while advancing the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

8. Opportunities for learning, together with older women's freedom from neglect, violence and abuse, are vitally important aspects of wellbeing in older age. The Stakeholder Group on Ageing is therefore concentrating its messages and recommendations in 2022 on Goals 4 and 5.



Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

9. Access to, and investment in, education and lifelong learning with a life course perspective, and that includes those beyond the age of 60, must underpin goal 4 implementation to ensure national economic growth, inclusion, healthy ageing and independence.

10. Therefore, we call on Member States to put in place education policies and programmes that

- Guarantee affordable access and opportunities for lifelong learning for all beyond retirement age who depend on employment to survive, and for those who lack basic literacy;
- Provide digital, financial and vocational training and re-training for older persons to assure both opportunities for socio-economic development and autonomy and independence in older age;
- Expand affordable internet coverage for all to increase access to lifelong learning for older persons through partnerships with industry, and civil society; and
- Put in place non-digital education for older people to manage their health, upgrade work skills, and engage in meaningful participation in civic and cultural life.

Narrative:

11. Digital, financial, and vocational training and retraining are essential for older persons to assure economic development and their continued independence to advanced ages, particularly since many older persons need to work in order to survive. But despite the importance of education and lifelong learning for older people, policies to ensure accessibility and the participation of older persons to education and training is low.

12. Building back better will require shared commitment by governments, industry, and civil society to expand internet coverage, make it affordable for everybody, and to increase educational programs

that will help older persons make use of it. Non-digital education remains essential to help people manage their health, upgrade work skills, and participate fully in civic and cultural life.

13. Access to lifelong learning, especially for people beyond retirement age, is insufficient throughout the world. Despite the importance of education and lifelong learning for older people and for getting older, access to lifelong learning, especially for people beyond retirement age, is lacking throughout the world – both in policy and practice. COVID-19 reduced the availability of formal programs and its uptake by older persons. While digitalization has compensated for this to some extent, many older persons do not participate because of cost, unreliable internet, lack of digital skills or even basic literacy, and lack of programs addressing their needs and interests. Caregiving or work responsibilities may also deter participation.

14. According to the Global Report on Ageism, published by the World Health Organization in 2021, in the United States only 21.5% of people aged 70 or older are actively participating in lifelong learning opportunities.² Statistics for the European Union show a similar situation: 31.6% of persons 55-64 years have participated in education and training in 2016, this being less than half the EU average.³ Of these, 31.6% participated in non-formal forms of education.⁴ This means large proportions of older people do not participate in formal education – because of a lack of access, limited digital skills and infrastructure, affordability, age limits to enrol, or responsibilities for caring or work. Inequalities based on disability, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, ethnicity etc. also have to be taken into account. The lack of mechanisms to lodge complaints and seek redress in case of discrimination often further aggravate discrimination and ageism, and are also a direct violation of the rights of older persons to education and lifelong learning.

15. COVID-19 has exacerbated already poor provision of educational opportunities for older persons due to public health measures which further reduced what was available and their access to them. Many formal educational offers were first stopped and then transferred to the digital world, leading to further barriers for those older people with few digital literacy skills or limited their access to the digital infrastructure.

16. Education and lifelong learning are prerequisites for the enjoyment of human rights. Denial of education opportunities in later life violates the right to education for all. Lifelong learning significantly contributes to older persons' health and wellbeing, social participation, and wider involvement in the community. The transfer of knowledge and experience to younger generations also plays an important role in the delivery of the goal of education for all and lifelong learning. When older people have educational opportunities they are more active members of society for longer and have greater possibilities to age in dignity – an important consideration when considering the demographic changes our world is undergoing. Life course access to essential health, social and long-term care provision, and

² <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism>

³ https://www.age-platform.eu/sites/default/files/AGE_Barometer-2021-FINAL.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

social protection in old age supports wellbeing of all people as they age, which in turn releases younger generations capacities to invest in the wider family and community.

17. Global, regional and national indicators to measure Goal 4 still exclude older age groups, and major policy frameworks on education do not include older ages. The data for SDG 4 is not inclusive of older persons and is not fully disaggregated for all ages. The result is inability to measure the implementation of the goal, and compounds lack of knowledge about the extent of provision, and the benefits of this for older age groups. All SDGs must be fully disaggregated by age amongst other factors.

18. In order for SDG4 to be properly implemented and to reap the benefits of education and lifelong learning for people as they get older, all stakeholders must work together in order to reflect older persons' interests and needs. Age inclusive education and lifelong learning approaches must be included in international, regional and national policy and legal frameworks and their monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

19. Adequate, affordable and accessible learning environments and opportunities for older people should be prioritised to ensure access on an equal basis and without discrimination. This will entail investing in accessible spaces, support to mobility, access to digital forms of communication, and intergenerational learning opportunities. Human-rights education and education for sustainable development for all across the life course should be included as key for our wellbeing. As representatives of older persons, we call on the international community to strengthen the right to education and lifelong learning for older people. The right to education in older age was explicitly expressed during the tenth Session of the United Nations' General Assembly's Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing in 2019.

20. We reiterate the need for a United Nations convention on the rights of older persons to promote and protect the rights of older people, including the right to education, and to hold States accountable in issues relevant to older persons.

Recommendations for Member States

1. Member States are urged to implement strategies for lifelong learning and education, including digital literacy, health literacy, human-rights education and education for sustainable development and therein recognize the special needs and interests of older people as learners. Special attention has to be given to non-digital education as an essential tool to help people manage their health, upgrade work skills, and participate fully in civic and cultural life.
2. All stakeholders, including Member States, industry and civil society, have to collaborate to ensure older people have access to digital technologies. An important cornerstone is expanding the internet coverage and developing hardware and software with older people's interests and needs in mind.
3. The United Nations' Decade for Healthy Ageing should be promoted and its goals be implemented by all stakeholders. Education and lifelong learning are important determinants of healthy ageing.

4. The United Nations are urged to improve data collection to ensure an effective monitoring and evaluation of policies and practices geared towards education and lifelong learning among older people. This is crucial to develop policies and programs that take older people's interests and needs into account and to ensure redress can be sought when the right to education is denied.
5. Member States should accelerate their current deliberations in the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing for an international instrument to protect the rights of older persons. This would be an important contribution to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.



Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

21. Older women are still left behind in gender policies, especially in policies and programmes designed to end gender-based violence and abuse, and in poverty reduction and humanitarian response policies and programmes. We therefore call on Member states to give priority to and invest in gender equality across the life course within policies and data analysis that highlight the intersection of gender and age discrimination by:

- Recognizing the life-long impacts of structural gendered and age discrimination, which deprives older women of employment, a secure income, ownership of property, access to appropriate health services, the right to social protection, and to independence.
- Ensuring policies and awareness campaigns on elder abuse integrate a gender perspective.
- Using and collecting life course data on abuse, neglect, financial exploitation and femicides and report on risk factors involving older women in all settings, including in care homes.
- Acknowledging and acting on how COVID -19 has exposed disregard for the rights of older persons and particularly its impact on older women, who represent the majority of the world's old and oldest-old persons.

Narrative

22. Inequality is visible throughout the world, with a glaring intersection with gender. Older women are the unsung heroes of communities struggling to survive, even when entrapped in violent situations, coping to support dependents when families migrate, working the land, taking on domestic responsibilities to enable their children and younger generations to earn income. Women, all women,

bear witness to longstanding and historic inequality, discrimination and disrespect as stereotypes, for no reason other than being female.

23. Structural gendered norms and discriminations are exacerbated in older age which, over a lifetime, can ultimately deprive older women of a secure income, ownership of property, access to appropriate health, the right to social protection, vulnerability to financial and physical exploitation and abuse in older age; factors which drive and exacerbate intergenerational poverty.

24. The impacts of Covid-19 on older women has exposed disregard for their rights and failure to acknowledge specific vulnerabilities due to ageing. Older women represent the majority of the world's old and oldest-old persons but policies and awareness-raising campaigns on elder abuse generally fail to integrate a gender perspective. This is despite the fact that one in every six older women experience some or all of psychological, physical, financial and sexual violence and neglect. More must be done to enable and encourage older women, including widows, to speak out and obtain access to justice, and to have access to legal remedies to end and prevent gender-based violence/abuse across their life course.

25. The two-year global pandemic has visibly brought the disregard of the rights of older persons to light. Presuming a gendered frailty and dependency is a disservice to older women and those around them, preempting efforts to live a life that reflects community engagement as well as the right to full health. A range of studies have shown that older women, who represent the majority of the world's old and oldest-old persons, have particularly borne the brunt of this virus whether directly or indirectly. For those who may have episodic or chronic care needs, access to equitable and appropriate care is vital, and is to be provided with respect and dignity.

26. Women experience unique biases and accumulated disadvantage over the life course. Socialization and entrenched patriarchal behaviours and customs teaches women household and agrarian activities – valuable to family and community well-being – yet educational opportunities to expand capabilities and skills to make choices and earn a meaningful income are not equally available. In many parts of the world, the expectation is to prepare meals, keep house, and care for babies, ill family members, and dying spouses. Necessary activities, but denial of the freedom to self-affirm and follow through on the desire and necessity to contribute to each one's community is to effectively choke and restrict growth. Further, it is cutting women off from the very economic supports that will be needed throughout their life, far into their own old age. According to the World Economic Forum gender gap reports across Europe, a third more women are in poverty in retirement than men- 12% vs 6% , due to the pension gap - with widows along with Black and minority groups typically experiencing higher rates of poverty. Across the world, income of women in retirement is 30-40% less than men.

27. This structural discrimination, experienced throughout a lifetime, brings threats to the stability of the world order and consigns older women and children to be the most vulnerable, despite our collective need for women's resourcefulness. Faced with the loss of dwellings, abandoned and isolated, it is not unusual for older women to risk their safety to obtain food and water and support their grandchildren. Infrastructure disruptions impede access to medications and supplies, with sporadic or no electricity to keep food and medicine cooled.

28. Yet, the resiliency of older women is a critical resource, helping and leading from experience, in the endurance, recovery, and development phases of community reconstruction. The inclusion of older

women in rebuilding is therefore critical as is hearing their voices and views to ensure their rights are reconciled and upheld.

29. With regard to neglect, discrimination and violence, the silent enemies in old age, there are a range of factors which create significant challenges for older women obtaining access to justice in cases of violence, abuse and neglect.

30. The WHO Study (2019) found that combined prevalence for violence against older women globally aged 60 years and older living in the community in 2015 was 14.1. This included psychological, physical, financial, sexual, and neglect. This means it is estimated that one in every six women is a victim of violence in older age but the number is expected to be higher as abuse is often not reported.

31. However, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons stated in her 2021 report that laws, policies and awareness-raising campaigns on elder abuse often still do not integrate a gender perspective, and violence against older women (VAOW) laws, policies and awareness-raising campaigns do not consider an age perspective.

32. Community surveys on VAOW often do not include women aged 50 and older in survey samples, and, when included, do not include questions about neglect, financial exploitation and perpetrators like adult children and grandchildren. Data on prevalence of abuse, neglect and violence in care homes where residents are primarily women are largely unavailable.

33. Deaths and killing of older women – ie femicides – at the hand of males on account of gender - are not routinely reported, so risk factors that women face in older age are unknown.

34. At the same time dependence on others and beliefs about responsibilities of women for protecting family members keep older women from speaking out and reporting family abuse.

Recommendations for Member States

1. Recognize and support older women to be included and meaningfully engaged in the development of policy and all aspects of community life and as a critical resource for the endurance, recovery, and development of community and global reconstruction.
2. Data collection efforts to be inclusive of women beyond the age of 49 through age 100+, and disaggregated. Abilities, interests, capabilities, and contributions of older women vary throughout these later decades and are not homogeneous. As society ages, it will be important for communities to understand how best to respond to its older members.
3. All legislative activity, policies and plans incorporate a gender perspective, with goals, measures and indicators that acknowledge capabilities, challenges, and needs of older persons, particularly older women.
4. Property, inheritance laws and customs recognize and adhere to the rights of older women, recognizing the role of property in providing older women their rights including social protection.
5. Act on the recommendations of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (2021) to ensure violence against older women (VAOW) laws, policies and

awareness-raising campaigns are not age blind and that data on femicides is collected across the life course in domestic settings and in care homes.

Sources

A/76/157: Report of the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, on human rights of older women: the intersection between ageing and gender (<https://undocs.org/A/76/157>)

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