ENNHRI Statement in regard of the organizational meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Rights of Older Persons (IGWG) in February 2026

The organizational meeting of the IGWG represents a critical opportunity to establish working methods that will determine the inclusiveness, legitimacy and effectiveness of the drafting process. ENNHRI calls on UN Member States to advocate for meaningful, full, equal and effective participation of older persons and their representative organisations, national human rights institutions, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisation throughout all stages of the drafting process.

Key recommendations

1. Older persons and their representative organisations, NHRIs and civil society organisations must be guaranteed access to the sessions of IGWG as well as meaningful opportunities to submit written contributions and deliver oral statements.
2. The IGWG must operate in accordance with transparent, inclusive and predictable working methods.
3. Older persons and their representative organisations must be ensured the possibility of effective remote participation in IGWG sessions.
4. All information and documentation produced or disseminated by the IGWG should be made available in accessible formats.
5. A dedicated online platform should be established providing comprehensive access to all documents produced by or submitted to the IGWG, as well as to all documents of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG-A). This platform should be maintained well beyond the IGWGs mandate.
6. The instrument to be drafted by the IGWG should adopt an intersectional approach and explicitly address the rights and lived experiences of older persons in vulnerable situations.
7. The instrument must reflect the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and encompass the full spectrum of human rights as they relate to older persons all human rights.

Background: ENNHRI and NHRIs

ENNHRI, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, consists of 51 National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) from across Europe. NHRIs are independent national bodies established by constitution or law, with mandates to promote and protect human rights in accordance with the United Nations Paris Principles and the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers Recommendation 2021/1. They play a unique bridging role between international human rights standards and their implementation at the national level. ENNHRI has a long commitment to the rights of older persons and has established a working group on this topic. Among others initiatives, ENNHRI, in partnership with AGE Platform Europe and Equinet, organized a webinar in February 2025 on strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons and addressing age-based discrimination in Europe, and subsequently published a report presenting the outcomes of the webinar.

The Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on the Rights of Older Persons

In April 2025, the UN Human Rights Council adopted Resolution A/HRC/RES/58/13 which established an open-ended intergovernmental working group (IGWG) with the mandate to draft a legally binding instrument on the promotion and protection of the human rights of older persons. The resolution was introduced by more than 40 UN Member States, including the European Member States Albania, Armenia, Austria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Italy, Luxembourg, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Ukraine (Resolution A/HRC/58/L.24/Rev.1) and was cosponsored by more than 80 UN Member States. Several NHRIs, including European NHRIs, advocated actively for this resolution.

The establishment of the IGWG followed a process undertaken in New York. In 2010, the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG-A), composed of UN Member States, was established as a platform to assess the existing international framework for the protection of the human rights of older persons, identify possible gaps and consider how best to address them. At its fourteenth and final session in 2024, OEWG-A adopted Decision 14/1 (A/AC.278/2024/2, para. 28) which set out a series of recommendations on how to close gaps in the international human rights framework, including the development of an international legally binding instrument. In Resolution 78/324 of August 2024, the UN General Assembly acknowledged that the OEWG-A had completed its work and urged United Nations bodies to consider its recommendations. With Resolution 79/147 of December 2024, the General Assembly concluded the mandate of OEWG-A.

European NHRIs and CSOs have participated actively in the work of the OEWG-A and have played a crucial role throughout the process.

Value of a new convention

Today, older persons receive limited and insufficient attention within the existing human rights protection system. As a result, they face multiple vulnerabilities that are not adequately addressed by current frameworks. While instruments such as the Revised European Social Charter and Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)2 recognize certain rights of older persons, significant protection gaps remain. Older persons continue to be exposed to risks including age discrimination, inadequate social protection, violence and neglect, barriers to healthcare, and threats to autonomy and dignity, to name but a few.

According to the European Economic and Social Committee, approximately 42 per cent of older persons in Europe report that age discrimination is prevalent in their country, particularly in the workplace. Ageism and age discrimination contribute to further disadvantages and may ultimately result in serious human rights violations. Furthermore, the AGE Barometer (AGE Platform Europe's annual assessment) consistently documents persistent inequalities, exclusion, and barriers faced by older persons across EU Member States.

A dedicated convention would explicitly affirm the rights of older persons, acknowledge them as independent rights holders, and clarify States' obligations to respect, protect and fulfil their human rights in older age. By aligning with existing human rights treaties and standards, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, such an instrument would address and close protection gaps within the current human rights framework and more effectively recognize and respond to the diverse lived realities of older persons.

Recommendations

1. Meaningful Participation

Older persons, their representative organisations, civil society organisations and national human rights institutions must be able to participate meaningfully, equally, fully and effectively during the IGWG, including being provided with opportunities to submit written statements, deliver oral interventions, and be part of panel discussions. NHRIs, in accordance with their mandates to protect and promote the human rights of older persons, welcome the opportunity to contribute to the IGWG process.

The representation of older persons within the IGWG is essential and should reflect the full diversity of this heterogeneous group. Meaningful participation is not only a human right in itself, but also a prerequisite for ensuring the legitimacy, relevance and effectiveness of the instrument to be developed. In the drafting of the instrument, it is essential that existing human rights principles are fully reflected while reaffirming that older persons are independent rights holders, entitled to full protection and enjoyment of these rights.

2. Transparent and predictable working methods

Clear, predictable and transparent working methods are essential to enable the effective engagement of all relevant stakeholders. This includes the timely circulation of agendas and documentation, clear information regarding opportunities for written and oral inputs, and transparent reporting on how contributions from NHRIs, CSOs and older persons are taken into account in the work of the IGWG.

3. Hybrid format

For some older persons, travel to Geneva may be difficult. If participation in the IGWG is limited to in-person attendance, older persons and their representative organisations must be provided with the possibility to participate remotely to ensure that the right to meaningful participation is fully guaranteed. Hybrid participation strategies should take into account the diverse living situations of older persons, and the intersecting forms of discrimination they may face, which often further restrict their opportunities to participate.

4. Accessible information

All older persons must have access to information produced or disseminated by the IGWG. This requires that all information be provided in accessible formats, including, for example, screen-reader compatible documents, easy-to-read formats, and sign language interpretation. Guidance for accessibility may draw on European standards for clear and comprehensible information, as well as measures established under the European Accessibility Act.

5. Online platform

As was the practice during the OEWG-A, an online platform should be established to provide access to all documents produced by and submitted to the IGWG. In addition, all documents produced by and submitted to the OEWG-A should be made accessible on this platform, as they constitute an essential basis for the work of the IGWG. Unlike the OEWG-A, this platform should

be maintained even after IGWG has completed its mandate. The platform should be user-friendly, well-structured and searchable and older persons should be actively involved in its design and implementation.

6. Intersectional approach

The instrument to be drafted by the IGWG should adopt an intersectional approach and take into account the lived realities of older persons in vulnerable situations. It should recognise that discrimination in older age is often intersectional for e.g. older women, older persons with disabilities, older migrants and refugees, older Indigenous persons, older members of ethnic minorities, older LGBTQ+ individuals, and older internally displaced persons. The instrument should therefore obligate States to identify and address these multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination. Furthermore, it should require the meaningful participation of these groups in the implementation and monitoring of the instrument, to ensure that responses are informed by their lived realities.

7. Coverage of the instrument

The instrument to be drafted by the IGWG must reflect the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights and encompass the full spectrum of human rights as they relate to reflecting the lived realities of older persons. This includes issues such as access to justice, accessibility, an adequate standard of living, ageism, age discrimination, autonomy and independence, digitalisation, economic security, education and empowerment, life-long learning, health, housing, long-term and palliative care, participation, social inclusion, social protection and social security, violence against older persons, and working life.

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