
Written Statement Submitted by the International Federation on Ageing (IFA): Participation in public life and in decision-making processes

14th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

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The International Federation on Ageing (IFA) is an international non-governmental organization whose membership base comprises government, civil society, industry, academia, and individuals who are committed to driving the agenda on the world's ageing populations globally. The IFA appreciates the opportunity to provide a statement at the 14th Session of the United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing towards the focus area of participation in public life and in decision-making processes.

Regarding steps to ensure participation in public life and in decision-making processes, actions — such as the presence of older persons councils in many municipalities to inform public policy decisions — are enacted globally, but legally binding measures that protect older persons' rights as outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are not guaranteed. Social discourses on ageing remain outdated, inaccurate, and contribute to the persistent prevalence of ageist attitudes impacting older persons' ability to participate in public life on an equal basis to others. Research indicates that across various domains of living — including transportation, community support and health services, and civic participation and employment — that older people are routinely excluded. (1) Indicators to monitor individuals' participation in public life and decision-making processes exist, yet the vast majority of indicators are not disaggregated by age. For example, the majority of the World Bank indicators specific to women's access to decision making are limited to those of reproductive age, from 15 to 49 years old. (2) Similarly, only 18 of the 231 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) indicators have age-disaggregated data available from any of the 193 UN Member States for at least one year since 2015. (3)

We know that low social participation can lead to social isolation and loneliness which in turn are hugely detrimental to physical and mental health. (1) Challenges and barriers that older persons face regarding participation in public life and in decision-making processes include the provision of information that facilitates participation in public life being predominantly online in many communities, inaccessible physical environments (including transportation), and illness. (4,5) Additional barriers exist for those victim to other types of discrimination including racism, sexism, ableism, and discrimination on the basis of socioeconomic status. (1,6,7) In a comprehensive systematic review of determinants of ageism against older persons, the WHO found that there is evidence that having high quality contact with people in older age groups across one's life and knowledge about ageing are both protective factors which can support older persons' participation in social life. (1) Policies that protect individuals' right to engagement in public life ought to consider factors such as the above.

Without the consistent collection of data it is difficult to monitor how older persons are excluded from participation in public life and decision-making processes. This is to the detriment of our societies. Having a legally binding international convention is necessary to ensure that the world benefits from the participation of older people in public life and decision-making processes. It would also ensure that there are guaranteed mechanisms in place for older people to advocate for their rights should they be violated. Civil society organizations have a wealth of expertise gained from lived experience that they are eager to share with Member States in the process of creating a mechanism to protect the human rights of older people. As our global population ages at an unprecedented rate, the time is now to ensure that we can all age with dignity. The International Federation on Ageing urges UN Member States to commit to holding each other accountable to ensuring the participation of older people in public life and decision-making processes by supporting the creation of a convention on the rights of older persons.

References

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