



Input by BAGSO, the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations

Twelfth session of the General Assembly Open-ended Working Group for the purpose of strengthening the protection of the human rights of older persons (11-14 April 2022)

Focus area 1: Contribution of older persons to sustainable development

National Legal and Policy Framework

1. What are the legal provisions, policy frameworks in your country that recognize older persons' right to participate in and contribute to sustainable development?

- All the above-mentioned rights are regulated through general legal provisions and policy frameworks. However, there are no specific provisions for older people, despite their diverse contributions (e.g. in the labour market, through voluntary and unpaid care activities or at the political level).
- Only for the right to participate in public affairs there are specific regulations for older people: the so-called senior citizens' participation laws (*Seniorenmitwirkungsgesetze*) in several federal states¹, which ensure the participation of senior citizens' councils or representations as advisory bodies.² They provide support for draft laws and resolutions and other political initiatives, or contribute their expertise to committees relevant to federal, state and municipal policy.³ Nationwide, there are 1,300 municipal senior citizens' councils, but no uniform binding regulations for their functioning. BAGSO is therefore calling for senior citizens' participation laws or municipal ordinances in the *Länder*, also to give them the right to be heard. In Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, there are parliaments for senior citizens taking place every one to two years.
- With regard to political participation, for people of any age, there are citizens' councils (*Bürgerräte*). In these, participants are first drawn by lot, before groups are formed in a

¹ Berlin, Hamburg, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and Thuringia

² <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/806880/a5130c89b9d64655cafdc9ac985930dc/WD-9-064-20-pdf-data.pdf>

³ https://www.bagso.de/fileadmin/user_upload/bagso/06_Veroeffentlichungen/2021/BAGSO-Positionspapier_Mitentscheiden_und_Mitgestalten.pdf

way to represent general characteristic of the population. Participants are reimbursed for the costs that incur, including for the care of children or relatives in need of care.⁴

- There are maximum age limits for holding public office and mandates.⁵ According to BAGSO they are arbitrary and unreasonable, regardless of whether they are professional or voluntary. Voters should decide who can hold office and for how long.⁶
- The overall well-developed engagement-supporting infrastructure contributes to ensuring the participation of older people. Multi-generation houses, senior citizens' offices and volunteer agencies provide information about opportunities for voluntary engagement. However, these institutions depend heavily on the personal commitment of those involved, are often not financially secure and do not exist nationwide.
- In many areas, contributions of older people are indispensable and activities would not function without volunteers. However, there are no specific regulations on the framework conditions of volunteering for older people. Moreover, many districts, cities and municipalities have neither the structural nor the financial prerequisites to meet the growing challenges of a contemporary municipal policy for older people. Framework conditions are needed for the development of such structures and binding regulations on responsibility and funding.
- Specifically in relation to the review of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, BAGSO was invited to participate in federal/state sustainability forums as an interest group of older people. In addition, BAGSO participates in the Agenda 2030 Network, an alliance of civil society organisations that pursues the national SDG implementation.
- Political education programmes play a particularly important role in the area of political participation. The Centres for Political Education (both at Federal level and at the level of the *Länder*) and the further education institutions in the area should be encouraged - also financially - to develop and provide political education programmes for older people. Cross-generational approaches and formats are desirable. Furthermore, existing educational offers for sustainable development should be adapted and offered to the target group of older people. At present, they are mainly aimed at younger age groups.

2. What are the challenges faced by older persons for the realization of their right to contribute to sustainable development at national and international levels?

General challenges in exercising the right to contribute to sustainable development:

⁴ <https://www.buergerrat.de/>

⁵ <https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/412584/e289e9406daf18acd60ca473df164727/WD-3-127-15-pdf-data.pdf>

⁶ Siehe auch https://www.bagso.de/fileadmin/user_upload/bagso/06_Veroeffentlichungen/2021/BAGSO-Positionspapier_Mitentscheiden_und_Mitgestalten.pdf

- Lack of knowledge about the possibilities, especially among population groups that are not or only with difficulty reached with the usual forms of addressing. → Demand: Improvements in the field of political education and education for sustainable development.
- Special challenges exist for people with a migration background, low income, low educational opportunities, with physical or mental disabilities (keyword: intersectional discrimination and accessibility). → Demand: Creation of low-threshold offers.
- The contributions of older people are not sufficiently valued. Negative images of old age still exist, which were reinforced during the pandemic. → Demand: Measures to correct existing images of age.
- Given increasing digitalisation, analogue access is falling away in many areas. This also affects political participation. → Demand: Securing the right to analogue participation.

Specifically in relation to the 2030 Agenda at national level, the following challenges arise for older people in exercising their right to contribute to sustainable development:

- Lack of knowledge about the 2030 Agenda, its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and the relevance of these to their own concerns
- Insufficient educational offers in the field of sustainable development, adapted to the target group of older people
- Lack of resources of older people's organisations to engage with the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (e.g. in consultation processes at federal or state level)
- Limited analogue participation opportunities (exacerbated by the pandemic)
- Barrier-free accessibility

For exercising this right at the international level, there are additional challenges:

- Limited language skills in the official UN languages
- Lack of knowledge about international opportunities to contribute
- Impression that little can be achieved internationally compared to influencing at federal, state or local level

3. What data, statistics and research are available regarding older persons' contribution to sustainable development?

- German Volunteer Survey⁷ (by age groups and gender), data is collected every five years: 34% of people 65 and older are involved in volunteering according to the current German Volunteer Survey; among 65-74 year olds, the share is 41%.

⁷ <https://www.dza.de/forschung/fws>

- Time use statistics⁸ (also by age group and gender) are collected every ten years. Data collection is currently underway.
- Data on the share of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work is collected by age group (incl. 65+) as part of the SDG indicators.⁹
- Data on the contribution of older people to the implementation of the SDGs is hardly collected. For some of the relevant indicators, e.g. the participation rate of young people and adults in formal and non-formal education and training, only the population up to 65 years of age is considered. For other indicators, such as the share of informal employment in total employment, no differentiation is made by age group¹⁰, or in the case of the unemployment rate, only very rough differentiation is made (15-25 years and 25-75 years).¹¹

Equality and non-discrimination

4. What measures are being taken to eliminate ageism, ageist stereotypes, prejudices and behaviors that devalue older persons' contribution to sustainable development?
 - Photo/cartoon competitions as part of the Federal Ministry's *Programm Altersbilder*¹² (Programme Images of Old Age), which aims to convey a new and realistic image of old age also on social media.¹³
 - Research projects, e.g. Image-19 on media images of old age during the Covid-19 pandemic.¹⁴
 - Campaigns, such as a private initiative on new images of old age.¹⁵

Remedies and Redress

5. **What mechanisms are necessary, or already in place, for older persons to lodge complaints and seek redress for denial of their right to participate in and contribute to sustainable development?**
 - The Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (ADS) is a contact point for lodging complaints in various areas of participation (e.g. working life, health and care or in education). However, the independence of the agency as a national equality body is questioned. There are calls for a reform of the ADS to extend the time limit for filing complaints in

⁸ https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Einkommen-Konsum-Lebensbedingungen/Zeitverwendung/zve2022/_inhalt.html

⁹ <https://sdg-indikatoren.de/5-4-1/>

¹⁰ <https://sdg-indikatoren.de/8/>

¹¹ <https://sdg-indikatoren.de/8-5-2/>

¹² <https://www.programm-altersbilder.de/>

¹³ <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/themen/aeltere-menschen/aktiv-im-alter/neue-bilder-vom-alter/initiative-neue-bilder-vom-alter--77164>

¹⁴ <https://www.image-19.de/>

¹⁵ <https://www.neue-altersbilder.de/>

the General Equal Treatment Act (AGG) from two to six months, to introduce the right of associations to file complaints and to re-elect the management every five years.^{16, 17}

- Independent complaints and advice centres exist for the field of care or for the participation of people with disabilities, but not specifically for the concerns of older people.
- Independent anti-discrimination offices and counselling centres (for any kind of discrimination) are organised in an umbrella organisation that does not offer counselling itself, but mediates it.¹⁸

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¹⁶ <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2021/kw15-pa-familie-antidiskriminierungsstelle-831750>

¹⁷ <https://rsw.beck.de/aktuell/daily/meldung/detail/antidiskriminierungsstelle-mahnt-reformen-des-agg-an>

¹⁸ <https://www.antidiskriminierung.org/>