

# THE NGO COMMITTEE ON AGEING

## BUILDING A SOCIETY FOR ALL AGES



### Welcome to the January 2026 Issue of the UN NGO Committee on Ageing/NY Newsletter

#### **What's in this issue?**

Bill Smith, our NGO CoA chair opens with an update on recent NGO CoA-NY activity and a plea to our readers to join our advocacy “where you are” on behalf of the human rights of older persons in all member states of the UN

As we look at the start of the 64<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on Social Development (CSocD that will run from February 2<sup>nd</sup> through the 12<sup>th</sup>, it is too late to register for in person attendance, but you can watch plenary sessions on UN WEB TV and some of the side events will be available online. For background and further thinking about the work of CSocD and the Human Rights Council (February 23<sup>rd</sup>—to April 2<sup>nd</sup>) with respect to Older Persons, we invite you to read our *Backgrounder* by Maud Bruce-About (*A Deeper Dive*) and *Words that are Trending* by Adriane Berg. The information they share in these two articles can be shared as part of your own advocacy at UN missions or in the chat/ comment opportunity at virtual events.

We also urge you to share this newsletter with others in your network who might be interested in its content.

Warmly Yours,

Martha Bial, Editor and Chair of the NGOCO-A-NY Communications Committee,  
Representative to the UN, International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics



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#### **A word from the Chair**

Happy New Year to all our readers. 2026 promises to be a very active year for the NGO Committee on Ageing. We encourage our readers to join the committee and get engaged in the work of our subcommittees. The

membership fee is only \$35. More information can be found on our website [www.ngocoa-ny.org](http://www.ngocoa-ny.org).

Much was accomplished in 2025 largely due to those working at the United Nations in collaboration with those associated with the NGO CoA NY. A major accomplishment in 2025 was the Doha Political Declaration. This declaration will help in promoting the life course perspective globally which impacts older persons as well as the youth involved with the United Nations. Our NGO CoA has developed an Intergenerational Subcommittee to help to inform people about the important work that is being planned.

We are supporting the work of the Sustainable Development Goals with the aim of accomplishing this ambitious agenda by 2030. Much work is yet to be done and Older Persons globally are dependent on this effort.

We will also be supporting our colleagues at the NGO CoA Geneva, which is leading much of the work on the Rights of Older Persons beginning with the drafting of language for a legal instrument, in UN language a Convention, that will mandate nations that sign onto it to strengthen the rights of older persons in their countries. In New York, we have been working on this issue for approximately fifteen years and now support the Geneva efforts in drafting language for a Convention that can sent on to the General Assembly for discussion and hopefully adoption.

We are gearing up for the February meetings of CSOCD, the Commission for Social Development. There is no shortage of items to be considered. There will be a review of the Doha Declaration as well as the Madrid Plan of Action. For more specific information please refer to the comprehensive article prepared by Adriane Berg.

Finally, many of our readers are connected to large networks of Civil Society globally. I would ask that you mobilize where you are in asking Member States to support all of this work. DESA, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs at the United Nations, under the leadership of Amal Abou Rafeh, the Chief of the Programme on Ageing at DESA is a great partner in this advocacy. Check their website out for additional information.

<https://social.desa.un.org/issues/ageing>

Remember Older Persons globally are dependent on our efforts.

Yours,

William T . Smith, PhD,

Chair, NGO CoA in New York

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## **A Deeper Dive**

### **Backgrounder for Advocacy at the Commission on Social Development and the Human Rights Council**



**Policymakers (Member States) have increasingly become aware of population ageing and its implications... but the context is challenging...**

Advocacy for the Rights of Older Persons and the necessity of adapting society to a more mature age structure continues at the upcoming Commission on Social Development (CSOCD) and at the Human Rights Council.

Not only did the 2025 Doha Political Declaration reaffirm the global commitment to social justice, inclusion, and sustainable development, but it also relied on three reinforcing pillars: 1. poverty eradication, 2. complete and productive employment, and 3. decent work for all and social inclusion.

**As the Deputy Secretary-General, Amina Mohammed, so judiciously stated: *"It's a commitment to place people at the centre of sustainable development."***

More importantly for those of us advocating with a life-course perspective for the Rights and realization of those rights for Older Persons, the Doha Declaration recognizes the implications of population ageing and calls for social policies adapted to all people at all ages, with particular attention to older persons and youth.

It furthermore commits to creating an enabling environment for the full, effective, and meaningful participation of older persons in political, social, economic, and cultural life, and to combat all forms of discrimination and inequality they face.

**Hence, commitment to Civil Society advocacy for the Rights of Older Persons and active participation at all United Nations instances - especially the upcoming Commission for Social Development - are more important than ever...**

Challenging but encouraging, is this allegiance by the UN Member States at Doah made at a time when progress to achieving most 2030 Strategic Development Goals (SDGs) is too slow - with some goals stalled or regressing - inequality having reached new heights, and multiple new challenges - geopolitical tension, armed conflict, economic crisis, climate change etc. etc. - are reversing social development gains.

In fact, the Commission for Social Development (The CSOCD) is the follow-up and review instance for both the Doah and the Madrid Plan of Action for Ageing (MIPAA)

Starting in 2031, the Commission for Social Development will follow up and review *the World Summit for Social Development (the 2025 Doha Political Declaration)* every five years, and assess the progress achieved, gaps, and opportunities for action by the five UN regional commissions:

- [ECA: Economic Commission for Africa](#)
- [ECE: Economic Commission for Europe](#)
- [ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean](#)

- [ESCAP: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific](#)
- [ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia](#)

Meanwhile, the upcoming 2026 CSOCD will review the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002, to prepare society to address issues of ageing in the 21st century. [It focuses on three priority areas](#): 1. older persons and development; 2. advancing health and 3. well-being into old age; and ensuring enabling and supportive environments.

A preliminary report on the MIPAA review (which has taken place every 5 years, with the 5th and final review scheduled for 2028) will be discussed at the 2026 CSOCD.

**We hope that you will follow the CSOCD deliberations on MIPAA and take an active part. The last review - 2023 - clearly shows that MIPAA and a Convention for the Human Rights of Older Persons are interrelated, mutually supportive, and vital, and that all possible support is necessary.**

[In 2023, conclusions of the fourth MIPAA review and appraisal carried out by Member States and coordinated by the regional commissions, were presented,](#) against the backdrop of COVID-19 that in/directly cost the lives of over 12 million older persons in 24 months, making it possible only for four out of seven Member States ( representing 84 per cent of the area where older persons reside worldwide ) to participated in the fourth review and appraisal.

#### **[The fourth review:](#)**

- stressed that the principles and objectives of the 2002 MIPAA plan to handle issues of ageing in the 21st century that were set in 2002 remain valid, even though older persons face both old and new challenges.
- shows that much remains to be done to fulfil the goal in MIPAA of building a society for all ages. In fact, according to the review, COVID revealed the multiple risks faced by many older persons and how these risks interact and are magnified and compounded by age-based discrimination.
- revealed existing disparities among and within regions in MIPAA implementation, in the focus of countries and regions around the issue of population ageing, and on what emerging issues or ongoing challenges are in each context.
- specified that many “old and known” issues - poverty, weak social protection systems, limited access to health care and health services, and increasing concerns around long-term care and care work remain key in many countries.
- showed that the importance of meaningful participation of older persons in crisis recovery efforts - pandemics, climate crisis, energy crisis, and conflicts - as well as emerging issues, like inclusion of older persons in the digital revolution.
- indicated that many of the challenges in implementation and progress, as identified in the three previous global review and appraisal cycles, persist and affect all regions to various degrees.
- specified that inadequate national institutions and mechanisms, lack of human and financial resources, absence of legal and policy frameworks,

or failure to implement existing ones, and insufficient coordination to place older persons on the political agenda and to focus on their needs and aspirations are issues in some countries.

- showed that in some regional contexts, knowledge and use of the MIPA by policymakers and other stakeholders remain limited, and that synergies and collaboration need to be created between MIPAA and other national and regional structures - including those devoted to economic development and human rights.
- laid bare that lack of a strong knowledge base and high-quality age-disaggregated data hampers policymaking.
- confirmed age-based discrimination, attitudes, and practices; with intersecting discriminations further affecting older women, older persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities, migrants, and LGBTQ+, etc. The absence of human rights laws/norms/standards and deficiencies in the implementation of international and national frameworks for older persons need to be redressed.
- concludes that whilst MIPAA is still solid - to bring needed social, economic, environmental and political changes - it needs to be complemented with explicit human rights language and set expectations for States to accelerate required modifications.

*An international legal instrument on the human rights of older persons, as noted by some Governments in the ECA, ECLAC, ESCWA, and ECE regions in their regional processes, would reinforce the Plan and protect the rights and dignity of older persons, including in any future policy frameworks on ageing.*

***In Summary, we urge you to support the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons at both the upcoming Commission on Social Development and the [Human Rights Council](#).***

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## Words that are Trending

### **Civil Society, Elder Advocacy, and the Realization of MIPAA**

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



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Civil society, as defined by the United Nations, comprises non-governmental, non-profit organizations and individuals who advance shared values and public interests outside of government and the private sector. This “third sector” includes diverse groups such as NGOs, grassroots movements, faith-based organizations, and advocacy groups, such as the NCO Committee on Aging.

Increasingly, organizations representing older persons have become central to UN initiatives in development, human rights, and sustainability. Witness the NGOCOA'S championship of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

***Today, older persons are stakeholders across the entire UN agenda, recognizing that the Sustainable Development Goals affect all aspects of our lives.***

Elders are not a special interest group; we are a structural component of civil society itself. To marginalize us is to weaken the legitimacy, representativeness, and effectiveness of civil society as a whole.

Nevertheless, while older persons are increasingly active and influential in civil society, we continue to face marginalization, barriers to engagement, and intersectional challenges.

Addressing these issues is essential for building a more legitimate, representative, and effective civil society. For this reason, older persons must be fully included in civil society engagement strategies at all levels. Their exclusion is no longer defensible on demographic, social, or policy grounds.

### **The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA),**

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), adopted in 2002, marked a significant shift in global aging policy. It recognized older persons as active contributors to development and rights holders, urging the integration of aging considerations into all policy domains.

MIPAA's adoption was transformative, positioning older persons as active rights holders and contributors across all areas of development. This shift moved elder advocacy beyond a narrow focus on social welfare, integrating it into wider human rights and development agendas. The recognition of aging as a lifelong journey spurred the creation and expansion of elder-centered organizations, which now play a vital role in civil society at the UN and globally.

***Since MIPAA's adoption, the global population aged 65 and over has grown from 420 million to over 770 million.***

Moreover, older adults today are healthier, better educated, and more engaged in civic life, with increased digital literacy and global connectivity. Our advocacy now extends beyond traditional welfare concerns to broader issues such as human rights, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.

Greater mobility and migration have contributed to a more global outlook. Ready access to information has enabled more scrutiny, accountability, and advocacy. Across regions, older adults are now more assertive, organized, and determined not to be excluded from public decision-making.

***Civil society, elder advocacy, and MIPAA are interconnected elements of a global transformation. As civil society ages, it is vital that institutions, policies, and participation mechanisms fully reflect this reality.***

Older persons have become essential drivers of progress within civil society, and their involvement has produced measurable benefits across multiple domains. On December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026, the NGOCOA-NY, in collaboration with the Global NGO Executive Committee affiliated with the United Nations, held the first intergenerational webinar on Building Awelness of xxxx. The full recording and report are available at xxx. The webinar revealed the following value

added to any mission when age-related matters and experienced advocates with decades of experience take up:

- **Enhanced Legitimacy and Representation:** The active participation of older adults strengthens the legitimacy and representativeness of civil society organizations. Their inclusion ensures that advocacy and policy efforts reflect the needs and perspectives of all age groups, making civil society more credible and effective.
- **Broader Policy Influence:** Older persons have expanded the scope of civil society advocacy beyond traditional welfare concerns. Their engagement now encompasses human rights, peacebuilding, sustainable development, climate adaptation, digital inclusion, and lifelong learning. This broadens the agenda and brings attention to issues that might otherwise be overlooked.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** By forming alliances with other advocacy groups—such as women’s movements, disability rights organizations, and labor unions—older adults help address complex, interconnected challenges. Their leadership fosters collaboration and innovation, strengthening the overall impact of civil society.
- **Institutional and Policy Reform:** The advocacy of older persons has prompted reforms in institutions, policies, and participation mechanisms. Their insistence on inclusion has led to more comprehensive strategies that recognize aging as a lifelong process and integrate older adults as stakeholders in all areas of development.
- **Global Agenda Setting:** Older persons are now recognized as stakeholders across the entire United Nations agenda, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Their contributions ensure that global strategies address the realities of an aging population, benefiting society as a whole.
- **Social Cohesion and Intergenerational Solidarity:** The involvement of older adults in civic life promotes intergenerational understanding and solidarity. Their experience and knowledge enrich public discourse and foster a sense of shared responsibility for community well-being.

### **Marginalization and Limited Visibility**

Historically, organizations representing older persons were peripheral to major civil society initiatives. Their advocacy was frequently siloed, focusing narrowly on pensions, healthcare, and social welfare, with limited visibility in broader debates on human rights, peacebuilding, or sustainable development. This marginalization persists in some contexts, where older adults are still viewed as a special-interest group rather than as integral stakeholders. This has changed and bred.

**Barriers to Engagement:** Older persons often encounter obstacles to civic participation, including ageism, lack of representation, and insufficient mechanisms for inclusion in decision-making processes. Limited access to digital technologies and global networks can further restrict their ability to engage in advocacy and policy dialogue, especially in resource-poor regions.

**Policy and Social Exclusion:** Excluding older adults from policy discussions means that critical issues affecting aging populations—such as employment, social protection, humanitarian response, and climate adaptation—may be overlooked or inadequately addressed.

**Intersectional Challenges:** Older persons often face compounded challenges due to intersecting factors such as gender, disability, migration status, and socioeconomic background. These intersections can amplify barriers to participation and advocacy, underscoring the need for civil society organizations to adopt inclusive approaches.

***To overcome these challenges, civil society must recognize older adults as a structural component rather than a peripheral group.***

Institutions, policies, and participation mechanisms must be reformed to ensure older persons are fully included at all levels. Their exclusion is no longer defensible on demographic, social, or policy grounds.

### **As Words Trend, They Signal Profound Shifts In Policy**

Civil society, elder advocacy, and MIPAA are not separate concepts, but interlocking elements of global transformation. Aging is an issue for civil society, and older people are a force within it. The challenge before us is to ensure that our institutions, policies, and participation mechanisms reflect this reality—entirely, visibly, and without hesitation.

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### **Discussion Points**

We encourage you to discuss these issues within your organizations:

- **What is your definition of Civil Society:** Civil society includes NGOs, grassroots movements, and advocacy groups advancing public interests outside government and private sectors, with older persons forming a structural component rather than a special interest group.
- **Growing influence of elder advocacy:** Organizations representing older persons have become central to UN initiatives, moving from narrow welfare concerns to encompassing human rights, peacebuilding, and sustainable development.
- **Impact of MIPAA:** Adopted in 2002, MIPAA marked a transformative shift by recognizing older persons as active rights holders and contributors across all development areas, fostering elder-centered organizations globally.
- **Demographic and societal changes:** The global population aged 65 and over has grown significantly, with older adults being healthier, better educated, digitally literate, and more civically engaged than before.
- **Benefits of elder participation:** Older adults enhance legitimacy, broaden policy influence, foster cross-sector collaboration, drive institutional reforms, contribute to global agenda setting, and promote intergenerational solidarity within civil society.
- **Persistent marginalization:** Despite gains, older persons often face ageism, limited representation, digital access barriers, and intersectional challenges related to gender, disability, migration, and socioeconomic status.
- **Need for inclusive reforms:** To overcome exclusion, civil society must recognize older adults as integral stakeholders and reform institutions, policies, and participation mechanisms to ensure full inclusion at all levels.
- **Interconnected global transformation:** Civil society, elder advocacy, and MIPAA are intertwined elements of global change, requiring visible

and comprehensive institutional reflection of aging realities.

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

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**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 2026 dues and be credited with paid membership through December 2026! Pay online or get directions for mailing a check. [ngocoa-ny.org](http://ngocoa-ny.org)

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