



**United
Nations**

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



JOINT UNDESA/UNESCAP
EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON
OLDER PERSONS AND INTERGENERATIONAL
SOLIDARITY

Bangkok, 10-11 October 2023

UN DESA/DISD/SIPB/PAS/2023/EGM/INF.1
28 September 2023

Intergenerational Solidarity and Equity for Future Generations of Older Persons Through a Human Rights Lens

A pre-meeting discussion paper

Draft
28 September 2023

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

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Notes

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Key Messages

1. Our world is changing in fundamental ways. One key trend is the gradual and largely irreversible shift towards an older population, already underway in most countries.
2. Older Persons face pervasive and often-unrecognized discrimination, threatening their human rights.
3. Exclusion in planning today will create magnified harms for older persons' human rights in the future.
4. We need a life course approach to future generations for intergenerational equity and solidarity. This means:
 - a. Older persons' participation in policymaking for future generations
 - b. Explicit recognition of older persons' human rights in the context of specific risks they face including climate change, the adequacy of social protection, the adequacy of health systems, and more.

I. Introduction

1. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) notes that “Solidarity between generations at all levels — in families, communities and nations — is fundamental for the achievement of a society for all ages.”¹ A life course approach to intergenerational solidarity recognizes and anticipates the dynamic nature of relationships between generations. As every person, from birth to death, moves through a process of ageing, their position in relation to other generations changes too. The aim of this pre-meeting discussion paper is to provide an overview of intergenerational solidarity and equity for future generations of older persons through a human rights lens, for the consideration of experts at the [UNDESA/UNESCAP Joint Expert Group Meeting](#) on “**Older Persons and Intergenerational Solidarity**”, to be held on 10 and 11 October 2023 in Bangkok.
2. Intergenerational solidarity has long been embedded in sustainable development, and in addressing the needs of future generations.² These generations have social relationships to one another, and solidarity animates the imperative of equity and justice.
3. Intergenerational equity seeks fairness; an equitable and just distribution of benefits, risks, and costs in all sectors, including socio-economic, between present and future generations. It is the instrumental side of the distributional effects of development and policy. Present generations alive today show solidarity with future generations (those not yet born,³) through actions for equity between the generations. This includes the foreseeable human rights of future generations.
4. The ability to foresee the effects of policy decisions becomes further attenuated the further into the future policymakers look.⁴
5. One thing that is already foreseen and has serious implications for human rights in the future, is that future generations of older persons will make up an increasing proportion of the population. In just a few decades, by 2050, the number of persons aged 65 years or older is expected to double to more than 1.6 billion.⁵ Globally, the number of persons aged 65 or over is projected to more than double, accounting to 24 per cent of the world population by 2100.⁶
6. The number of older persons as a percentage of the population will be higher in more developed regions than in less developed regions in 2100. Yet, in absolute numbers, most older persons

¹ Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

² [A/68/322](#)

³ Maastricht IV Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations, 2023, [Maastricht-Principles-on-The-Human-Rights-of-Future-Generations.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

⁴ Posner, Eric A. “Agencies Should Ignore Distant-Future Generations.” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2007, pp. 139–43. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4495600>. Accessed 7 July 2023; Sunstein, Cass R., and Arden Rowell. “On Discounting Regulatory Benefits: Risk, Money, and Intergenerational Equity.” *The University of Chicago Law Review*, vol. 74, no. 1, 2007, pp. 171–208. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4495602> (Accessed 7 July 2023)

⁵ UNDESA, World Social Report 2023, [ST/ESA/379](#)

⁶ Probabilistic Population Projections based on the World Population Prospects 2022, [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)

worldwide will live in less developed regions.⁷ In fact, in 2022, more than twice as many people aged 60 and over lived in less developed regions than more developed regions.⁸

7. Future older persons are entitled to the same human rights as other people alive concurrently. But whether future generations of older persons will actually enjoy their rights is not yet certain. The enjoyment of human rights by future generations of all ages will depend on the actions current generations take with future generations in mind.

A. A Life Course Approach

8. A life course approach to intergenerational solidarity for future generations responds to the fact that all older persons will have lived through childhood, youth, middle age and into older age. Children and youth lack the experience of growing old. Current children and youth may be most likely to outlive current older generations, but they will be living this possible future life as older persons themselves. This may be obvious, but in the context of operationalizing intergenerational solidarity for future generations, this point is too-often lost.
9. Solidarity between existing and future generations requires intergenerational equity. Current designs that exclude older persons from planning and implementing policies for the future further prejudice all actions against future older persons, rendering them invisible and therefore further magnifying harms against them. The dynamic nature of ageing across the life course, as well as current generations of older persons, should be well incorporated into future planning to ensure intergenerational solidarity.
10. Older persons should be included, along with other generations, in future policymaking. Generally, the term “older person” is used to describe someone in later life. There is no agreed definition of “older age” which reflects different disciplinary perspectives.⁹ Also, the concepts of “old age” and “elder” status have varied over time, within and among cultures.¹⁰ A social definition of who is “older” is one in which older age, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.¹¹ Therefore, using chronological age as a threshold criterion, could create an arbitrary line that prioritizes some age groups over others in policy making. For example, children and youth should not alone advocate for future generations, particularly that they cannot represent the interest of all ages they are yet to attain.
11. A life course approach instead recognizes that the lives of children and youth will extend further into the future in the age groups of adults and older persons as future generations, with corresponding rights, needs and interests, therefore highlighting the value of the right of

⁷ UNDESA, Probabilistic Population Projections based on the World Population Prospects 2022, [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#), noting that 38.2 per cent of more developed regions will be persons aged 60 years or over, and 28.7 per cent of less developed regions will be persons aged 60 years or over.

⁸ UNDESA, Total population (both sexes combined) by select age group, region, subregion and country, annually for 1950-2100 (thousands), 2022. Access data [here](#)

⁹ UN DESA paper “Defining and Measuring Older Age” (2021) prepared by Alex Mihniovits, and submitted to the steering group of the Titchfield Group as an input to the conceptual framework output.

¹⁰ [A/HRC/49/70](#)

¹¹ [A/78/134](#)

representative participation for people of all ages. Representative participation is an aspect of human rights. It necessitates the inclusion of all generations, including older persons, to determine the necessary policy steps for future generations of older persons, who will make up more than a quarter of the world in less than a century.

B. Ageism

12. Ageism is a type of discrimination against older persons based on their actual or perceived older age. Ageism occurs “directly, with age cutoffs for state support for devices such as hearing aids and personal assistance; it occurs indirectly, such as with inflexible employer requirements for physical fitness tests; and it occurs systemically, such as with segregated systems of institutionalization.”¹² Such harmful societal ageism can live alongside positive views of older persons. As one sociologist notes, “Positive opinions towards elderly [older persons] individuals, which may be structured by norms of either reciprocity or beneficence, can coincide with a considerable degree of generational hostility and conflict over scarce resources.”¹³
13. Fundamentally, ageism represents a major barrier to older persons’ equal enjoyment of their human rights on an equal basis with others.¹⁴ Older persons face deeply detrimental ageism.¹⁵ These beliefs can be so ingrained as to be unconscious.¹⁶ Importantly, this is true across cultures.¹⁷
14. Discrimination can be defined as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction that has the purpose or effect of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal basis with others, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in any field.”¹⁸ Human rights law prohibits discrimination, generally, and defines some statuses as explicitly protected.¹⁹ But it does not explicitly protect older age. Without explicit recognition of old age as a prohibited ground for discrimination in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or subsequent human rights treaties, the law in this area has been lacking.
15. Without this explicit recognition in existing human rights treaties, the treaties appear to set a higher threshold for demonstrating that different treatment based on age is inconsistent with non-discrimination.²⁰ Jurists therefore may use a higher standard of review by setting a higher bar for

¹² International Disability Alliance, Submission to OHCHR on Normative Standards and Obligations Under International Law in Relation to the Promotion and Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons. Accessed [here](#)

¹³ Turner, Bryan S. “Ageing and Generational Conflicts: A Reply to Sarah Irwin.” *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 49, no. 2, 1998, pp. 299–304. *JSTOR*, <https://doi.org/10.2307/591314>. Accessed 7 July 2023.

¹⁴ [A/HRC/48/53](#)

¹⁵ United Nations [Global report on ageism](#). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO; Slevin, Kathleen F. “‘If I Had Lots of Money... I’d Have a Body Makeover’: Managing the Aging Body.” *Social Forces*, vol. 88, no. 3, 2010, pp. 1003–20. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645880> Accessed 7 July 2023.

¹⁶ United Nations [Global report on ageism](#). Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO, p. 5 “Often people fail to recognize the existence of such institutional ageism because the rules, norms and practices of the institution are of long-standing, have become ritualized and are seen as normal.”

¹⁷ Mikton, C. et al, [Ageism: a social determinant of health that has come of age](#), The Lancet, VOL 397, ISSUE 10282, P1333-1334, APRIL 10, 2021 “Globally, ageism affects billions of people: at least one in two people hold ageist attitudes against older adults, with rates much higher in lower-income countries.”

¹⁸ [A/HRC/48/53](#)

¹⁹ See, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 Article 2, [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#)

²⁰ [A/HRC/48/53](#)

demonstrating different treatment based on age. Older persons seeking to claim their rights must first overcome the hurdle of determination that a human right should apply to them before they ever get to the heart of a complaint. This is an unequal standing from which older persons must currently seek to realize their rights. It does not guarantee equality and non-discrimination, and may further entrench existing patterns of ageism.

16. International “soft” law, which is important for guidance, but not binding in the same way as treaties with states parties, has been elaborated to apply to older persons on a few specific topics. These include: the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women issued a General Recommendation on the intersectional discrimination older women face;²¹ the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has a General Comment on older persons’ rights,²² and has decried old age discrimination in some contexts within its purview.²³ But these are not comprehensive or sufficient to articulate how the broad universe of human rights apply to the specific situations of older persons.
17. Stereotypes around frailty among other things, are often closely identified with being “elderly,” are common. The United Nations General Assembly called for the elimination of the word “elderly” from official documents, and usage of the phrase “older person” instead.²⁴ This change is person-centered and uses neutral terminology in an effort to address ageism.
18. One recent example of ageism was the rise of the social media hashtag #BoomerRemover²⁵ to describe the death impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on a generation of older persons. At the same time intense structural ageism in discriminatory policies of health-care rationing was being publicly supported by many bioethicists and published in prominent medical journals²⁶ (only later facing criticism²⁷), this idea still took root in online society. Future older persons who are not yet born, who are children now, and others who are not yet old, should not have to face such unchecked hate in the face of mortal threats as older persons in this current environment of ageism have endured. The harm done to society from ageism today pales in comparison to the magnitude of suffering it will cause future generations of older persons if left unchecked.

²¹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No. 27 (2010)

²² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 6 (1995) Economic, Social and Cultural Rights of Older persons. Accessed [here](#)

²³ [E/C.12/GC/20](#), UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), *General comment No. 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2, of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)*, 2 July 2009, E/C.12/GC/20, Para. 29. Accessed 6 July 2023

²⁴ [A/RES/50/141](#), “Decides that henceforth the term “older persons” should be substituted for the term “the elderly”, in conformity with the United Nations Principles for Older Persons,” para 14

²⁵ [What Is 'Boomer Remover' and Why Is It Making People So Angry? \(newsweek.com\)](#); All Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, are aged 59 and older in 2023 [What years are Gen X, baby boomers, millennials, Gen Z? \(usatoday.com\)](#)

²⁶ See, Emanuel E. J. et al., “Fair Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources in the Time of Covid-19,” *New England Journal of Medicine* 382 (2020): 2049–55, claiming “Saving more lives **and more years of life** is a consensus value across expert reports.” (Emphasis added); D. B. White and B. Lo, “A Framework for Rationing Ventilators and Critical Care Beds during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Journal of the American Medical Association* 323 (2020): 1773-74.

²⁷ Gaurke M, Prusak B, Jeong KY, Scire E, Sulmasy DP. Life-Years & Rationing in the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Critical Analysis. *Hastings Cent Rep.* 2021 Sep;51(5):18-29. doi: 10.1002/hast.1283. PMID: 34529846; PMCID: PMC8653336 [Life-Years & Rationing in the Covid-19 Pandemic: A Critical Analysis - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#)

C. Development and Intergenerational Solidarity

19. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) calls for the “strengthening of solidarity through equity and reciprocity between generations.”²⁸ This requires addressing ageism and ensuring older persons enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with others. Intergenerational solidarity is a cross-cutting issue that affects all aspects of societal organization, human rights and development. It provides the framework for determining the duty owed to future generations of all ages. It is a basis for population-level policy design, not just for intra-familial or localized activities.²⁹ The [Fourth Review and Appraisal](#) of the implementation of MIPAA notes that it was not clear whether many such activities and exchanges utilized a rights-based approach to ensure people’s dignity, voice and well-being.³⁰
20. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for reducing inequality in Goal 10.³¹ The Goal’s targets include empowering and promoting inclusion of all, regardless of age, and ensuring equal opportunities and reduction of inequalities by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices. In the Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs) submitted to the high-level political forum on sustainable development, many Member States identify older persons as one of the groups within their countries most at risk of experiencing vulnerability to social exclusion and discrimination.³² This is likely to continue until an international human rights framework clarifies the minimum legal standards necessary to ensure equal protection of the human rights of older persons. As MIPAA notes, “older persons are not one homogenous group;” and the “promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms is important in order to achieve a society for all ages” in which “older persons participate fully and without discrimination and on the basis of equality.”³³

²⁸ Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

²⁹For resources on localized activities, see: HelpAge International, Restless Development, Bringing Generations Together for Change, 2022, [intergenerational-guide.pdf \(helpage.org\)](#); for more on this interpersonal type of intergenerational solidarity, see Bengtson, V., et al. “Solidarity, Conflict, and Ambivalence: Complementary or Competing Perspectives on Intergenerational Relationships?” *Journal of Marriage and Family*, vol. 64, no. 3, 2002, pp. 568–76. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3599924> Accessed 20 June 2023, which defines solidarity as “a classification scheme that systematically identifies the building blocks of inter-generational relations as the core elements of sentiment, structure, and behavior.”

³⁰ [E/CN.5/2023/6](#) and [E/CN.5/2023/6/Corr.1](#)

³¹ [Global indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#), 2023

³² [A/78/134](#)

³³ Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8–12 April 2002 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

II. Some Human Rights Principles of Intergenerational Solidarity

21. “Just like present generations, future generations will include people of all ages, from children and youth to older persons, and hence it is important to consider people’s needs and rights across the life course.”³⁴ This also requires incorporating the life course into to future-looking policy and decision making to protect human rights of future generations. Many potential human rights violations against older persons are foreseeable in every region if Governments do not change policies to address extended longevity and growing numbers and shares of older persons in the population in the future.
22. A group of experts recently drafted the Maastricht IV Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations, detailing human rights for future generations founded in existing international law, and emphasizing that human rights have no temporal limitation.³⁵ While international human rights law theoretically should protect older persons, there is no dedicated international legal instrument for the protection of the human rights of older persons in existing international law. The [Fourth Review and Appraisal](#) of the implementation of MIPAA notes, “In the absence of human rights norms and standards particular to the situation of older persons at the international level, the ability to unpack the complexities and changing nature of discrimination and intersecting forms of inequality across the life course is limited.”³⁶
23. Intergenerational solidarity requires analysis of how current and future actions will impact the human rights of future generations. Drawing from existing international human rights law, this section highlights human rights principles foreseeably at risk for future generations of older persons. Namely, some of these rights are the right to participation, the right to life in the context of climate change, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to health, and the necessity of an intersectional approach.

A. The Right to Participation

24. Policymakers have a human rights obligation to include older persons as full, effective and meaningful participants in policy making for future generations. This is rooted in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, further elaborated in General Comment No. 25 of 1996.³⁷ Participation is a critical component of the realization of human rights, and a right unto itself. So far, the conceptualization of duties to present and future generations has not fully included older persons.

³⁴ [CEB/2023/1/Add.1](#) United Nations System Common Principles on Future Generations (preamble, para 2)

³⁵ Maastricht IV Principles on the Human Rights of Future Generations, 2023, [Maastricht-Principles-on-The-Human-Rights-of-Future-Generations.pdf \(ohchr.org\)](#)

³⁶ [E/CN.5/2023/6](#) and [E/CN.5/2023/6/Corr.1](#)

³⁷ General Comment No. 25: The right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the right of equal access to public service (1996). Accessed [here](#)

25. One of the most detailed explanations of the right to participation is in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities expressly included older persons as a group that should be closely consulted and actively involved in the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the CRPD.³⁸
26. Many older persons have disabilities, and many more are perceived as having disabilities, and their rights should be directly protected by the CRPD. It elaborates the right to participation as one requiring that States Parties undertake “To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs.”³⁹ It further states as a general obligation that in the creation of policies to implement the CRPD, as well as “in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities... through their representative organizations.”⁴⁰
27. This participation must come from older persons themselves and their representative organizations. A risk exists that such consultations could be dominated by aged care, pharmaceutical, and medical industries, which can have oppositional motives to older persons rights. To ensure the right of participation for older persons now and in the future, policymakers should ensure the meaningful participation of older persons in all decisions affecting their human rights now.

B. The Right to Life in the Context of Climate Change

28. Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights recognizes and protects the right to life of all human beings. The Human Rights Committee notes that “Environmental degradation, climate change and unsustainable development constitute some of the most pressing and serious threats to the ability of present and future generations to enjoy the right to life.”⁴¹ Older persons are more likely to die from climate-related disasters, such as heatwaves, typhoons, hurricanes and floods. They face disproportionate negative impacts on their health, housing, livelihoods, well-being and access to food, land, water and sanitation⁴², as well as lack of evacuation in emergencies,⁴³ and even the impacts of displacement if they are evacuated. Older persons’ right to life can foreseeably be put at even higher risk in the context of climate change if policy making does not change its methods. The heat-related mortality rate steeply increases with age.⁴⁴ Children who are now 3 years old will be 80 or more years old in the year 2100, ages at which heat can be especially deadly, and even more so for older women.⁴⁵
29. Life-threatening risks of global warming are particularly profound for older persons living in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). More than 30 per cent of the populations of SIDS are projected

³⁸ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 7 (2018), para 50, [CRPD/C/GC/7](#)

³⁹ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 29.

⁴⁰ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 4.3.

⁴¹ Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 36 on the Right to Life (2019). Accessed [here](#)

⁴² [A/78/226](#)

⁴³ [New Rules to Protect US Nursing Home Residents are in Congressional Crosshairs | Human Rights Watch \(hrw.org\)](#)

⁴⁴ Ballester, J., Quijal-Zamorano, M., Méndez Turrubiates, R.F. *et al.* Heat-related mortality in Europe during the summer of 2022. *Nat Med* (2023). Access [here](#)

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

to be over the age of 60 by 2100.⁴⁶ These countries are likely to face extreme adverse effects of climate change, including heat waves, and could in some cases even become uninhabitable.⁴⁷ Where it is foreseeable that older persons in the future would face heightened risks to their life, Governments have an obligation to mitigate those risks.

30. To ensure the right to life for older persons now and in the future in the context of climate change, policymakers should ensure adequate disaster risk reduction incorporating the inclusion older persons' specific risks and increasing proportions and numbers in all populations around the world.

C. The Right to an Adequate Standard of Living

31. Older persons have the right to an adequate standard of living in older age. According to the World Bank, only one in three workers contributes to a pension scheme globally,⁴⁸ which can further be foreseen as an increased risk to an adequate standard of living for future older persons. In low-income countries, as few as one in ten workers contributes to a pension.⁴⁹ Current iterations of social pensions are often not viable for future generations.⁵⁰
32. Older persons also face barriers to accessing income and employment.⁵¹ Some of these barriers are imposed by permissible discrimination against older persons for their older age, some barriers are imposed by insufficient social protection, some are imposed by exclusion based on gender, indigeneity, or disability contributing to poverty in older age. With this feature of older age, many, and in some countries most, older persons live in poverty.⁵² Also, accurate information about old-age poverty is hampered by the absence of an international harmonized database of poverty rates disaggregated by age.⁵³ Many have been made worse off during current food, fuel and finance crises.⁵⁴
33. The right to an adequate standard of living for older persons is further impacted by the cumulative effects of multiple discriminations over their life course. This means, for example, that inadequate access to schooling and inadequate access to employment, would limit lifetime earnings, the ability to save for retirement, and to qualify for non-contributory pensions. These effects are particularly profound for older women. To ensure the right to an adequate standard of living for older persons, policymakers should also ensure that older persons are targeted for social protection and employment protections.

⁴⁶ Probabilistic Population Projections based on the World Population Prospects 2022, [World Population Prospects - Population Division - United Nations](#)

⁴⁷ UNFCCC (2005) [Climate Change, Small Island Developing States](#). Issued by the Climate Change Secretariat (UNFCCC), Bonn, Germany.

⁴⁸ [Pensions Overview \(worldbank.org\)](#)

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Generations, Meeting the Mid-Career Moment, 2021, <https://www.generation.org/midcareer>; Harvard Business Review, [The Case for Hiring Older Workers \(hbr.org\)](#)

⁵² UNDESA, Income Poverty in Old Age: An Emerging Development Priority. Accessed [here](#)

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ HelpAge, "Things have just gotten worse," 2023. Accessed [here](#)

D. The Right to Health

34. Older persons have the right to the highest attainable standard of health. In an era where rapid population growth is slowly coming to an end, accompanied by a gradual but permanent shift towards older ages, it is foreseeable that many health systems should be reorganized to support older persons in this right.
35. Scaling up person-centred, non-discriminatory, accessible and integrated care that responds to older persons' needs is key and should be provided as part of Universal Health Coverage (UHC). This will require investment in and transformation of health systems, including for example, by building capacity for integrated action across sectors to ensure meaningful and measurable improvements in the lives of older persons.⁵⁵
36. And it is also foreseeable that there will be more pandemics. While ageing in itself does not necessarily make individuals more vulnerable, a number of physical, mental, political, economic and social factors that accompany older age contribute to the challenges that older persons face in the enjoyment of the right to health.⁵⁶ This has been evidenced during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, where people aged 60 years or over accounted for more than 80 per cent of the overall mortality across all income groups, with upper and lower middle income countries accounting for 80 per cent of the overall estimated excess mortality.⁵⁷
37. The gravity and urgency of the situation were highlighted in a [joint statement](#) by 146 Member States and permanent observers of the United Nations supporting the Secretary-General's [policy brief](#) on older persons, which emphasized the neglect and abuse experienced by older persons in institutions and care facilities. This was compounded by situations where the rationing of emergency care was made based on older age or disability. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights' Article 7 on non-discrimination and the Siracusa Principles on the Limitation and Derogation Provisions in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights do not allow for discrimination, even in emergencies. Governments have a duty to be preparing now for the next pandemic to prevent this from happening again.
38. To ensure the right to health, policymakers should be redesigning health care systems to ensure the highest standard of health for older persons and ensuring that plans for future pandemic preparedness do not discriminate against older persons.

E. The Necessity of an Intersectional Approach

39. Intersectionality is a particularly crucial component of the experience of older persons because they have a lived experience of decades with cumulative and intersecting forms of discrimination, of which older age is, by definition, a later addition.

⁵⁵ [United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing: Baseline Report](#), World Health Organization 2021

⁵⁶ Based on [A/HRC/49/70](#)

⁵⁷ <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/365809/WER9805-eng-fre.pdf>

40. One of the signature ways that discrimination changes for older persons is that old age discrimination intersects with what may be deeply accumulated effects of discrimination based on gender, disability, indigeneity, and inadequate standards of living. In this way, an older woman today may not have gone to school because of discrimination against her gender as a child; then she may then have faced power imbalances in her personal relationships based on that discrimination; she may have had financial strain due to unpaid care she provided; and she may have unequal access to formal employment, and thus have unequal access to a private pension in older age.⁵⁸ She will have lived with these ever-deepening effects of gender discrimination for decades longer than younger women, resulting in unique challenges by virtue of her older age as they accumulate, in addition to a newly-added layer of old age discrimination.
41. Intersectionality also affects older persons who may acquire an intersectional form of discrimination, such as acquired disabilities. Older persons are too-often seen to be experiencing these discriminations on the basis of older age, rather than additionally on the basis of these other protected categories. This old age discrimination prevents older persons from accessing their rights under existing international law, because it is “inadequately covered by existing international norms.”⁵⁹ Plans for future generations and intergenerational solidarity should be responsive to these common experiences of intersectionality that are unique to older age.

III. Intergenerational Solidarity in the Future of the United Nations

42. All efforts to work for future generations should be human rights-based. The United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights made explicit promises to future as well as current generations, notes the Secretary-General in the Call to Action for Human Rights.⁶⁰
43. The Secretary-General’s vision for the future of global cooperation, outlined in [Our Common Agenda report](#), offers a variety of entry points for the United Nations to support the human rights of current and future generations of older persons. It proposes the Summit of the Future, which is intended to “forge a new global consensus on what our future should look like, and what we can do today to secure it.”
44. On 1 September 2023, the United Nations General Assembly adopted [resolution 77/568](#) on “Scope of the Summit of the Future.” As Member States continue to deliberate on the remainder of the intergovernmental preparatory process of the Summit, intergenerational equity could be taken into account in the Pact for the Future, to strike a balance between the needs and interests of both younger and older generations.

⁵⁸ See, HelpAge International, Older women’s lived experiences of gendered ageism, 2023. Accessed [here](#)

⁵⁹ OHCHR, Update to the 2012 Analytical Outcome Study on the normative standards in international human rights law in relation to older persons. Accessed [here](#)

⁶⁰ United Nations Secretary-General, The Highest Aspiration: A Call to Action on Human Rights, 2020. Accessed [here](#)

45. The right to participation is also a priority. The pursuit of intergenerational equity and solidarity requires meaningful engagement and dialogue. The outcome document should include references to a life course approach, and areas of specific concern for future generations of older persons, including the effects of climate change, displacement, pandemics, and more.
46. Looking ahead, as Member States consider the proposed world social summit in 2025, subject to discussion and agreement by the General Assembly on its modalities, and emphasizing that the possible summit outcome should have a social development approach and give momentum towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, it is also crucial to support the solicitation of the participation of both younger and older persons. This will ensure the strengthening of intergenerational partnerships, keeping in mind the particular needs and preferences of both the older and the younger, in discussions around the proposed world social summit.