



United Nations

Department of
Economic and
Social Affairs



NGO Committee on Ageing

GENEVA



Combatting Elder Abuse: What's next? Five priorities for the Decade

INPEA Side event, UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing
Rome, 16 June 2022

held in commemoration of the

WORLD ELDER ABUSE AWARENESS DAY
#WEAAD2022

A contribution to the



Background

The World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (WEAAD), designated as 15 June, was initiated by the International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA) in 2006, and recognized as a United Nations Day by the General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/66/127 adopted in 2011.

According to WHO estimates, 1 in 6 people over 60 years of age suffers from abuse. That means nearly 141 million people globally. This number may be much higher as neglect, abuse and violence of older people are among the most hidden and underrepresented violations of human rights.

This year, WEAAD coincides with two important events. The first is the start of the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030)¹. This marks the beginning of ten years of concerted, catalytic and sustained collaboration with diverse stakeholders on improving the lives of older people, their families and their communities. The second is the 20th milestone of the Second World Assembly on Ageing and the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA). These provide an opportunity to generate renewed momentum for international action to advance the ageing agenda.

MIPAA represents the first time Governments agreed to link questions of ageing to other frameworks for social and economic development and human rights. The 159 Member States who signed onto the MIPAA reaffirmed the commitment to spare no effort to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

This complementarity between MIPAA and a human rights framework can be easily shown in the area of elder abuse. MIPAA includes various references to elder abuse, including “Issue3: Neglect, Abuse and Violence,” which provides two objectives relating to the elimination of all forms of neglect, abuse and violence of older persons²; as well as the creation of support services to address elder abuse³. Both objectives include actions to review policies, enact laws and create awareness, information, training, and research initiatives. However, in the absence of an international standard on the rights of older persons, gaps between policy and practice, and the mobilization of necessary human and financial resources, as well as the uneven progress in the implementation of MIPAA continues. An international legal instrument for older persons would advance the implementation and accountability of MIPAA.

Older Persons Deserve International Human Rights Protection

Often, national laws and policies fail to provide the protection of human rights needed by older persons. While MIPAA is a forward-looking agenda with many needs and rights laid out for older persons, it was enacted two decades ago, and important unmet needs and gaps have come to the fore since it was promulgated.

¹ General Assembly resolution (A/RES/75/131)

² Paragraph 110

³ Paragraph 111

In addition, because it is a non-binding policy document, the process of monitoring and evaluation is voluntary and different regions adopt individualized and tailored approaches to this process. While each Member State is encouraged (though not obliged) to report on progress in implementing MIPAA, it is not apparent whether there has been any significant improvement in the utilization of the bottom-up participatory approach by Governments. In particular it is not clear whether stronger partnerships have been forged and national-level mechanisms established by which civil society, NGOs, as well as older persons themselves, can hold States accountable for meeting the objectives set out in MIPAA that are intended to ensure older persons' rights. Furthermore, while there has been a steady upward trend in the participation of Member States in the review and appraisal cycle of the implementation of MIPAA, in some parts of the world, awareness of MIPAA, by Governments and older persons alike, remains limited or non-existent, which limits the scope of implementation efforts. A survey of African nations undertaken by Stakeholders Group on Ageing, Africa (SGA Africa)⁴, revealed that few members of civil society were aware of MIPAA and that their Governments had signed onto promote it.

Looking back, twenty years of MIPAA implementation; four review and appraisal cycles; eleven sessions of the General Assembly Open Ended Working Group (OEWG)⁵ to strengthen the protection of the human rights of older persons; the appointment of an Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons⁶; and continuous effort by the international community, the United Nations and NGOs to anchor the issue of ageing in the global development agenda – these have not resulted in significant new protections for older persons globally.

Against this backdrop, the world has witnessed significant harm to older persons during the COVID-19 pandemic, the promulgation of ageist policies and lack of protections. The United Nations Chief stated that “the pandemic is a clear test of international cooperation – a test we have essentially failed.” For the first time, the Secretary-General leaned into the conversation and in his policy brief on “The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons⁷” he called upon Member States to accelerate efforts to develop proposals for an international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons. The Policy Brief created an immediate political impact with 146 Member States endorsing a joint statement of support and expressing commitment to “fully promoting and respecting the dignity and rights of older people and to mitigate the negative impacts during and after the COVID-19 pandemic on their health, lives, rights and wellbeing.” An international legal instrument would also involve a compulsory international monitoring procedure under which States would be obliged to report regularly to an international committee of experts on their progress. This would be an open and transparent process to which NGOs and NHRIs could contribute their expertise and experience: it would involve real scrutiny through a constructive dialogue between the State and the committee.

⁴ <https://sgafrica.org/>

⁵ <https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/>

⁶ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/ie-older-persons>

⁷ <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-05/Policy-Brief-The-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Older-Persons.pdf>

MIPAA Fourth Review and Appraisal Cycle and Human Rights

In its resolution 2018/6, the Economic and Social Council requested the Secretary-General to address the relationship between development, social policy and the human rights of older persons. Development and human rights inform each other and are mutually beneficial. Such interlinkages have been recognized by Member States and the international community time and again. There is also a heightened connection to the human rights framework in the modalities resolution⁸ of the fourth review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA. A new preambular paragraph was added to recall “the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.”

Older persons remain invisible and unprotected, and structural barriers are overlooked. Existing international human rights frameworks lack a comprehensive legal instrument that defines normative standards for protection of older persons against neglect, abuse and violence. In addition, these frameworks do not provide guidance for adequate support, remedy mechanisms and accountability for such violations as evidenced by the following recent documents:

- [OHCHR, *Update to the 2012 Analytical Outcome Study on the normative standards in international human rights law in relation to older persons*](#) (eleventh session, UNGA Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, March-April 2021)
- [OHCHR, *Normative standards and obligations under international law in relation to the promotion and protection of the human rights of older persons, Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*](#), A/HRC/49/70 (2022)

The Event

An expert panel will present overall trends of violence against older persons, and highlight continuing gaps in, and challenges to, the implementation of relevant objectives in MIPAA. The panel will explore the need for a new international legal instrument to address these gaps and challenges, to ensure that investing in social policies with a view to facilitating the full realization of the right to development will advance not only the implementation MIPAA, but also the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and targets of Agenda 2030. Expert panelists will also present five priorities to combat violence against older persons in the Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), which have been selected on the basis of extensive consultations with experts and stakeholder in the field and a careful review of the evidence.

⁸ ECOSOC resolution 2020/8

The Programme

- Opening remarks** Susan B. Somers, President of INPEA
- Panel**
- The scale of the issue: global prevalence
Yongjie Yon, Technical Officer, WHO Regional Office for Europe
- Seeing the faces
Natasa Todorovic, Health and Care Program Manager, Red Cross of Serbia and INPEA representative
- Tackling elder abuse: 5 priorities for the Decade of Healthy Ageing
Amal Abou Rafeh, Chief of the Programme on Ageing Section, UN DESA
Christopher Mikton, Technical Officer, Demographic Change and Healthy Ageing, WHO
- Interactive dialogue** **Moderated by**
Alexandre Sidorenko, Senior Advisor at the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research International Tutor, International Institute on Ageing
- Closing remarks** Claudia Mahler, Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (tbc)