Society

EDADIS>

UN works to protect older people's rights with international convention

The organisation has just formed a team to shape a legally binding instrument to prevent age discrimination, such as access to health care.



Older people in a park in Fuyang City, China.

CFOTO (CFOTO/FUTURE PUBLISHING VIA GETTY IMAGES)



PABLO LINDE

Madrid - 17 APR 2025 - 05:30 CEST

1

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one of the pillars of the United Nations, falls short of defending the most vulnerable. Over time, the organisation has created specific legal figures for certain groups: the convention on the elimination of all forms racial discrimination (1965), against discrimination against women (1979), the convention on the rights of the child (1989) and, most recently, the convention on persons with disabilities (2006). Now, the UN has just set up a task force to add another sector of the population: that of "older persons".

On 3 April, the Human Rights Council established an intergovernmental group to "elaborate a draft legally binding international instrument to promote, protect and ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by older persons". Spain is among the 42 countries behind this initiative, whose mission is to draft a specific convention (a international treaty) to protect the rights of older persons.

It has taken 15 years of debate to reach this point, with previous working groups concluding that the rights of older people are systematically violated in many countries for the sole reason of their age. The reports they have handled show violations in access to health systems, social security, work, public participation or housing (it is not uncommon for older people to be refused rentals because of the landlord's fear that they might cause problems or need adaptations).

The problem, explains Nena Georgantzi, human rights coordinator at AGE Platform Europe, is that the protection system has not been adopted with an ageing and longevity perspective. "The adoption of a convention will not change the situation overnight, but it will make it more visible and make it more difficult to trivialise violations that are now ," she explains.

In the words of Vania de la Fuente, a doctor and specialist in ageism, it is a question of responding to the legal gaps that exist: "No human rights treaty specifically addresses the rights of the elderly, ageism is nowhere to be found. And without legal tools, it is more difficult to demand that states protect rights. A convention would strengthen the accountability of governments and international bodies, create universal standards. I would like to think that with a convention we would not see the horror of the pandemic with access to basic services [for older people].

The right to health is one of the most clearly violated, in the opinion both experts. "During the covid we saw that the reason of age was enough to exclude citizens from health care in some protocols, and as civil society we had no defence to challenge these decisions", summarises Georgantzi. Beyond the coronavirus, in the health sector there are surgical operations in which age limits are established or screening for diseases that are not carried out after a certain age.

De la Fuente adds the situation in old people's homes, where elderly people are sometimes subjected to constrictive measures, whether physical (tying them up) or chemical (with drugs) to make them easier to handle and care for. Or, without going to that extreme, the treatment of elderly patients by many health workers, who "talk to them as if they were children" or do not even address , and inform the family about their state of health.

At a certain age it seems justified to remove the person from social life, says Georgantzi. "There is a short-sighted approach to care. While the system for people with disabilities supports and promotes the right to live in the community, for older people it seems to make no difference whether they stay at home or in a nursing home, as long as they are no longer a burden on their families," he stresses.

Another example given by both experts is the field of employment. "There is a positive tendency to delay retirement and promote active ageing, but we have a legal system that allows age discrimination through a European directive that makes compulsory retirement possible," says Georgantzi. Beyond this very clear and concrete case, there are other, more subtle types of discrimination in the world of work, which have to do with the impossibility of participating in training, or of continuing to progress and changing functions.

The convention may be a tool to help change all this, but there is still a long way to go before it is adopted. The convention on the rights of persons with disabilities took five years to see the light of day from the time the working group was set up, the point at which the convention on the rights of persons with is now at. But it was the fastest in history; others have taken 10 to 15 years to receive final endorsement. "Hopefully, all the time spent working beforehand will serve to speed up the process," says Georgantzi.

The new working group will hold two annual sessions in Geneva and an organisational meeting before the end of 2025. The Council has requested the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to provide all necessary assistance and has called on States and relevant actors to hold virtual regional meetings to contribute to the process. It also encourages the active participation of all stakeholders, including older persons and their representative organisations, to ensure an inclusive and representative approach.

As time goes on, more people will benefit from the convention. According to the UN itself, there will be more than 1.5 billion people over the age of 65 in the world by 2050, twice as many as today. It is the fastest growing population group, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where protection systems are weakest.

ABOUT THE FIRM



Pablo Linde 𝕏

VIEW BIOGRAPHY

Receive the best information in your inbox

COMMENTS -

Standards '

MORE INFORMATION



José Manuel Ribera Casado, geriatrician: "Paternalism is a form of discrimination against the elderly".

ÁNGELES CABALLERO| MADRID



Vânia de la Fuente, ageism expert: "The cosmetics and industry aesthetics has turned the passing of the years into a nightmare".

PABLO LINDE| MADRID

ARCHIVED IN

Society - Discrimination - Ageism - UN - International treaties - Health - Public health - Public health -

Adheres to the criteria of

The Trust Project

More information ›

If you are interested in licensing this content, click here.

LATEST NEWS

08:40 **Breaking news on the Russia-Ukraine war, live| Top Trump advisers meet Macron in Paris on Thursday to discuss Ukraine**

08:00 **The Labour Inspectorate in Catalonia detects 35% more labour infractions related to foreigners**

07:27 **Donald Trump's tariff war, live on air| China says it will "ignore games.US tariff number "**

07:00 **Athletic - Rangers: when and where to watch Europa League quarter-final**

MOST VIEWED

1. UK Supreme Court limits legal definition of women to biological sex

2. Private tutor who raped 15-year-old student sentenced to nine years in prison

3. A platform to cyberbullying

4. 23 hospitals unite to stop doing things that are ineffective or may harm patients

5. The Public Prosecutor's Office is asking for two years in prison for a law professor who sexually assaulted a student at the .University of Salamanca

Recommendations EL



Wine offer for the month of April

6 BOTELLAS PALACIO DE BORNOS
FERMENTADO EN BARRICA. AÑADA 2023

46'95 € ~~59'95 €~~ ENVÍO GRATIS

A different kind of verdejo, fermented in barrels

6 BOTELLAS LUZ MILLAR ROBLE
AÑADA 2023 / D.O. RIBERA DEL DUERO

44'95 € ~~55'95 €~~ ENVÍO GRATIS

A red wine born for the most demanding palates

CONSÍGUELO EN:
EL PAÍS Colecciones

EL PAÍS

Buy now. EL PAÍS brings you the best selection of April