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AGE Platform Europe Oral Statement

UN Intergovernmental Working Group on Older Persons

'Definitions': 28 October 2026

Distinguished Chair, delegates and colleagues,

I am speaking on behalf of AGE Platform Europe, the largest regional network bringing together more than 100 organisations of older persons. As founding member of GAROP, we also align with its statement and discussion paper.

The definitions and concepts included in the future legally binding instrument should be guided by its fundamental purpose: ensuring the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, in all their diversity.

The Convention should avoid defining older persons through a fixed chronological age threshold. Ageing is a lifelong and dynamic process, shaped by social, economic, and cultural norms. There is no single age at which people begin to experience ageism, or barriers to the enjoyment of their rights on an equal basis with others. The LBI also needs a definition that is future-proof: we should not define older persons based on today's life expectancy, today's pension age or today's perceptions of old age, as such a threshold may prove inadequate or irrelevant as societies and populations evolve.

As mentioned by the former Independent Expert this morning, normative assumptions and expectations influence how older persons are perceived and treated and whether they are able to exercise their rights. A chronological threshold, even a flexible one, risks undermining the paradigm shift we are trying to achieve: moving away from age-based assumptions and recognising the diversity of older persons. It will also considerably narrow the scope of protection, failing to adequately address structural barriers to the equal enjoyment of human rights in old age.

Chair, the definition, is not simply a legal matter. It has practical consequences for older people seeking to exercise their rights. It is important that it is broad enough to help

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individuals understand that the real rights violations they are facing fall under the convention's protection. Because ageism is also internalized, the definition should help older persons themselves challenge their own biases and assumptions and support them to detect and report violations and claim their rights. Only an open functional definition will ensure that the convention can respond to the lived realities of older persons' lives and the different ways in which ageism affects them.

We therefore call for an inclusive and open definition that ensures protection for all persons who experience, or are at risk of, human rights violations because of their known, perceived or imputed older age, whether alone or in interaction with other grounds of discrimination.

An open, non-chronological definition would not prevent States from using age criteria in their national context where appropriate, provided these are consistent with the principles and obligations of the Convention. It would however avoid making a particular age threshold a defining condition for protection under the convention itself.

Ultimately, the definition should serve the purpose of the convention, not limit it. It should ensure that no-one is left without protection simply because they do not meet an arbitrary age threshold.

In addition, the UN Convention should go beyond addressing age-based discrimination and explicitly recognise ageism as a root cause of violations of older persons' human rights. The convention should recognize that ageism can operate at interpersonal, institutional, systemic and structural levels, shaping laws, policies, social norms, and everyday interactions.

The right to equality and non-discrimination should be a central element of the Convention, reflecting the notions of formal, substantive, and transformative equality. This should include explicit recognition of intersectionality, multiple and cumulative discrimination, as well as reasonable accommodation and accessibility as essential elements of equality and non-discrimination.

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The definitions included in the future Convention should be guided by the treaty's purpose and scope and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by older persons in their whole diversity.

AGE Platform Europe stands ready to support the development of definitions that live up to the mandate and aspirations of this working group, serve the purpose of the LBI and that are robust enough to stand the test of time.

Thank you.

For more information

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