

Agenda and Background note



Economic, social and cultural rights of older persons

Strengthening the capacity of older persons to advocate for their human rights

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People are living longer, remain active longer, enjoy and contribute to society longer. By 2050, many persons might live up to 100 years old or more. Yet, we know that human rights protection gaps remain. Whether it concerns challenges to access social protection, housing, life-long learning or employment, ageism can prevent older persons from enjoying their human rights and contributing fully to society. Human rights-based social and economic policies need to correct this imbalance. Yet, the current legal and policy frameworks remain inadequate.

However, existing international human rights bodies and mechanisms can make the rights of older persons more visible and formulate pertinent recommendations when reviewing States' human rights records. These recommendations can then be used in advocating for changes at the national level. There is much scope to bring the perspective of older persons in the work of the UN mechanisms and in the implementation of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, in which States agreed to leave no one behind.

It is against this background that AGE Platform Europe and the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe are partnering to equip representatives of organizations of older persons with knowledge and tools on economic, social and cultural rights of older persons. At the end of the training, participants will be able to articulate the challenges faced by older persons in human rights terms and understand how to engage with the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and leverage its recommendations when involved in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of social policy and legislation using a human rights-based approach.



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Time	Session	Objective/Methodology
09.00-09.20	Opening <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ebbe Johansen, President, AGE Platform Europe Birgit Van Hout, Regional Representative, UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe 	Welcome by organizers
09.20-09.30	Introduction to training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nena Georgantzi, AGE Platform Europe 	Brief overview of the programme, introduction to trainers and objectives
09.30-10.45	Introduction to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: Understanding older people's issues as economic, social and cultural rights <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seynabou Benga, Human Dignity 	This session will aim to increase awareness of economic, social and cultural rights as they relate to the everyday life of older persons. Using examples from different European countries, key rights and state obligations deriving from the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) will be discussed.
10.45-11.15	Coffee break	
11.15-12.30	The Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights as instrument for change <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marie-Dominique Parent, UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe 	This session will present the work of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and some of the ways in which older people's organisations can engage with the Committee to advance human rights in their country.
12.30-13.30	Lunch break	
13.30 -15.30	From theory to practice: Interactive exercise in groups	During this session participants will have the opportunity to practice some of the knowledge they gained during the morning. They can choose to participate in one of the two parallel sessions <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>The why, when and how of NGO submission and follow-up</u>: Participants will work on a case study to identify the factors that prevent older persons from accessing certain rights. This exercise will be more relevant for NGOs that want to use the ICESCR in their national advocacy and to develop the necessary skills to submit a report to the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and to follow up on the Committee's recommendations. <u>Deep dive into the General Comment on Older Persons</u>: Does the 1995 General Comment still reflect the reality of older persons, or are there aspects missing? This exercise will be most relevant for NGOs that want to achieve normative change including at the international level. It will discuss neglected dimensions of human rights of older persons and how these could be better articulated.
15.30-16.00	Closing	Feedback and next steps

Background and objectives of the training

After a successful joint seminar in 2018, AGE Platform Europe and the UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe agreed to collaborate in order to enhance knowledge and skills among organisations representing older persons about international human rights, to promote their participation in UN human rights processes and to strengthen their advocacy at national level.

The aim of this training is to enable participants to:

- Understand human rights in the context of ageing
- Address issues of disadvantage and inequality in older age based on economic, social and cultural rights
- Recognise how international human rights standards influence domestic law and policy
- Gain the skills for human rights-based advocacy
- Identify specific ways to engage with the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, including by contributing and responding to State reporting.

About economic social and cultural rights

Economic, social and cultural rights are those human rights relating to the workplace, social security, family life, participation in cultural life, and access to housing, food, water, health care and education.

The United Nations have adopted the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR), which is binding for all EU Member States. The ICESCR is monitored by a Committee, made up of human rights experts that have the power to provide interpretations on different sections of the covenant (known as General Comments or General Recommendations), highlighting concrete ways that these rights can be provided for by governments.

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has produced [General Comment no. 6 on the economic, social and cultural rights of older persons](#). This highlights the protection of older people's rights to work, education, health and social protection and plays an important role in showing how the covenant can be applied with relation to ageing and older people

Each State that has ratified the ICESCR has to submit regular reports to the Committee on how it has implemented the rights included in the Covenant. The Committee then considers these reports in the presence of a delegation of the State party and in the light of all information received by the State, but also by United Nations agencies, national human rights institutions (NHRIs) and civil society actors, it adopts what are generally known as "concluding observations". The concluding observations include the Committee's assessment of the government's compliance with the ICESCR. They refer to the positive aspects of a State's implementation of the treaty and the areas where the treaty body recommends the State to take further action.

In order to assist States in implementing their recommendations, the Committee may request, in its concluding observations, that the State reports back within an agreed time frame on the measures taken in response to specific recommendations or "priority concerns". It may also undertake visits to countries, in order to follow up on the report and the implementation of concluding observations

The role of NGOs

Various actors in civil society, including NGOs, have crucial roles in working with individuals and groups to promote their economic, social and cultural rights, and in holding their government accountable for realizing these rights. They can monitor the realization of economic, social and cultural rights in their country and the efforts made by the State to meet its obligations under the ICESCR. For example, they can analyse whether national strategies are consistent with international law (i.e. whether they are enough to realise the right to work or adequate health care) and whether they are implemented. Additionally, they can encourage governments to meet reporting deadlines and can also work in partnership with governments when they are preparing their report to the Committee, by sharing information they have gathered through their activities. Moreover, NGOs can choose to submit a separate report (known as 'parallel report') analysing the extent to which law, policy and practice in their country comply with the principles and standards of the ICESCR. The most useful reports are often those produced through the cooperation and coordination of many civil society actors. NGOs are thus encouraged to submit jointly written information on a given country. This way it is more likely that the Committee will take their views into account when drafting its concluding observations. In addition, NGOs can raise public awareness about the Committee's concluding observations and put pressure on their government to follow up on its recommendations. Finally, NGOs can advocate for normative change at national or global level. For example, they may call for the adoption of a new law in their country or for the development of a new international convention in order to better protect and promote the human rights of older persons.

Useful resources

- [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR), in English, French and Spanish
- [General Comment no. 6 on the economic, social and cultural rights of older persons](#), adopted by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1995
- [Frequently asked questions on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (OHCHR)
- [Working with the UN Human Rights Programme: A Guide for Civil Society](#) (OHCHR) in English, French and Spanish
- [How to follow up on United Nations human rights recommendations, a Practical Guide for Civil Society](#) (OHCHR) in English, French, Spanish as well as Finnish and Swedish
- [Older Persons' Self Advocacy Handbook](#) (Age Platform)
- [General Comment no 27 on older women and the protection of their human rights](#), adopted by the Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2010
- [Training package on economic, social and cultural rights](#) by Human Dignity (in French)

The trainers

Ms. Seynabou Benga is the founding Director of Human Dignity, a Paris-based NGO promoting economic, social and cultural rights in SubSaharan Africa. She is a jurist specialized in human rights and international criminal law since 2001. Currently based in Paris, she is also an Associate Justice at the French National Court of Asylum, a human rights consultant and University lecturer. Since graduating in law from the University Panthéon-Assas in Paris, Seynabou has worked for various international NGOs (Amnesty France, FIDH, OMCT, ECPM), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, UN agencies, the National Human Rights Institution of Norway and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Seynabou has worked with many national human rights NGOs in Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia. An important aspect of her work involves training numerous lawyers and human rights defenders on regional and universal human rights protection systems; economic, social and cultural rights, as well as regional and international complaints mechanisms. She has lived and worked in the United States, Tanzania, Norway and Switzerland.

Ms. Marie-Dominique Parent joined UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe in September 2019. Ms. Parent has worked on a range of human rights themes in Africa and Asia, ranging from rule of law, the administration of justice, detention monitoring, economic, social and cultural rights with a focus on land and housing, business and human rights, and LGBT equal rights. Prior to joining the Brussels Office, she was Deputy Representative at OHCHR Cambodia office and from 2009 to 2013 she managed OHCHR-Cambodia's Prison Reform Support Program. In 2013, she headed the Secretariat team supporting the UN Sub-Committee on Prevention of Torture during their official visit to New Zealand. Prior to joining OHCHR, Marie-Dominique Parent worked with Penal Reform International for eleven years, including as head of its office in Paris, Malawi Country Director, and Regional Director for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa, working closely with government and criminal justice officials, civil society partners, UN agencies and other development partners. In 2008-2009, she worked as a consultant for NGOs in Africa as well as GIZ in Bangladesh, on prison reform and legal aid programs. Ms Parent has a Master in International Relations of Sorbonne University and a Master in Political Sciences of Sciences-Po Paris.

More information

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