



Debate on a new UN convention for older people: Why and how to take action at national level?

The United Nations (UN) **Open Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG)** was established in 2010 to identify gaps in the international human rights framework and how to best address them, including by considering the feasibility of adopting a new convention. The OEWG is not currently drafting a new convention on the rights of older persons. Although this option is increasingly gaining traction as the preferred way forward, we need more governments to voice their support for a new convention for the OEWG to start drafting and negotiating the text of a new convention.

Why involve EU Member States in the UN debate?

All European Union (EU) Member States and the EU itself have a seat in the United Nations and can present their views with regard to older people at several UN fora, including at the OEWG. However, to date only a minority of EU governments have been actively involved in the OEWG discussions. Low levels of participation are evidence not only of the low prioritisation that ageing issues hold in national agendas, but also of the invisibility of older people in the international agenda. As the discussions are advancing, low participation is allowing the process to be driven and decided by just a handful of States, while ignoring the views of those governments and civil society who are not present.

In 2016 the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling *“on the EU and its Member States to be actively involved in the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing and to step up their efforts to protect and promote the rights of older people, including by considering the elaboration of a new legal instrument”*.

What should meetings with governments aim at?

- Confirm that the Ministry in charge is **aware of the debate** happening at the OEWG and agrees that guaranteeing the equal enjoyment of human rights in older age is important;
- Encourage your government **to participate in the OEWG**, by explaining that it is crucial for the government to be represented in this process that is developing concrete recommendations about how human rights can be guaranteed in older age. In case an official from the Ministry cannot attend ask them to prepare a statement to be read by their representative in New York;
- **Ask your government to respond to the OEWG Chair letter for written input.** The continued work of the OEWG on specific topics offers an important opportunity to improve understanding and consensus among UN Member States about key areas of older people’s rights and how their protection might be strengthened through UN mechanisms. The formulation of rights and recommendations made by the OEWG could be used by

existing treaty bodies (i.e. UN organs that monitor the implementation of UN human rights conventions) to better integrate older persons in their ongoing work.

- **Bridge divisions within the government:** for example, if you feel that the Ministry of Social Affairs is more favourable to further action on older people's rights than the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which sends diplomats to the UN, try to meet with representatives of both ministries and ask them to coordinate work internally. If possible, also contact directly the representative in your country's mission in New York, who is most likely to attend the meeting, to inform them on your organisation's position;
- Discuss both **positive features** of government policies but also how the rights of older people in your country are currently ignored or violated;
- Identify **specific aspects or rights** (such as elder abuse or non-discrimination) that your government is most interested in;
- Discuss how the **existing international human rights framework** does not adequately protect older people (you may refer to AGE [manifesto](#) for more information. This longer [briefing](#) by Helpage international is also very informative)
- Explain that the OEWG discussions (and a new convention) could have a **positive effect also in other countries** where the rights of older persons, where adequate ageing policies are scarce, leading to more frequent violations or neglect of human rights in older age
- Ask them to **consult NGOs** and [National Human Rights Institutions](#) (NHRIs) when they prepare their contribution to the OEWG and – if possible - to organise a meeting with civil society and government officials to commence a serious conversation on a convention and/or maintain government interest and momentum;
- Understand your **government's reservations** about a new instrument on older people and ask what they see as an alternative. Make sure you ask them exactly how they propose to implement MIPAA and other human rights treaties better and why they have not already done so. Explain to them why you feel a convention could be a good way forward;
- Depending on how the discussions go you may want to consider asking them to **support the participation of your NGO** to the OEWG financially and/or as part of their delegation.