



IGWG on Human Rights of Older Persons 22 April 2026 Call for Input Submitted by the Stakeholder Group on Ageing Africa

1. What overarching framework should guide the international legally binding instrument on the human rights of older persons? Additionally, how can it best reflect and reinforce the recognition that older persons are rights-holders entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms?

Africa's demographic transition

Africa is undergoing a significant demographic shift in its population. While it remains the youngest region globally, the number of older persons is increasing rapidly in absolute terms. Older persons (60+) currently represent approximately 5.8% of the population, yet their numbers will more than double within one generation—from 65 million to 159 million in Sub-Saharan Africa alone.

This shift is a demographic certainty, already underway and set to continue. The people who will be older in 2050 are already alive today, and increasing survival into older age is accelerating this transition.

At the same time, Africa faces a dual demographic reality—both a large youth population and a growing older population—alongside systemic challenges, including high levels of informal work, limited social protection, gender inequality, and a gap between living longer and living those years in good health.

This context underscores that ageing in Africa is both a development opportunity and a pressing human rights priority, requiring forward-looking, life-course, and intergenerational responses.

(A summary of key demographic trends in Africa is provided in Appendix 1.)

Recognising older persons as full rights-holders.

In this context, the international legally binding instrument should be guided by a human rights–based, life-course, intergenerational, and personhood-centred framework.

At its core, the Convention must clearly affirm that older persons are full rights-holders, entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms, without discrimination on the basis of age, or any other status.

A human rights–based, life-course, and personhood-centred framework.

The Convention must shift how older persons are currently seen and treated—from being predominantly viewed as welfare beneficiaries, burdens, or passive recipients of care—toward the recognition of older persons as:

- full human beings with inherent dignity and rights
- equal members of society
- contributors to family, community, economy, and culture

- actors with voice, choice, and decision-making power

Older persons must not be seen as “at the side of the road,” but as integral to society—visible, valued, and engaged across all domains of life.

This requires explicit recognition of:

- continuing personhood and identity across all stages of life, including older age
- meaningful participation in decisions affecting their lives
- autonomy, independence, and self-determination ((the ability to make decisions about one’s own life) as fundamental to their dignity
- the ongoing capacity to learn, work, and contribute, where desired, in later life
- longer lives as a value and contribution to society and the economy, rather than a burden

A life-course and intergenerational approach

The framework should adopt a life-course approach, recognising that ageing is not a separate condition but part of the continuum of life, and that inequalities in older age often reflect accumulated disadvantage across the life course.

This is particularly relevant in Africa, where lifelong realities—such as informal work, limited access to social protection, and gender inequality—shape outcomes in older age.

A life-course approach must be combined with an intergenerational lens, recognising that:

- today’s young persons are the older persons of tomorrow
- ageing is a shared human experience across generations
- strengthening the rights of older persons benefits society as a whole

The Convention should therefore promote:

- intergenerational solidarity and dialogue
- forward-looking planning across the life course
- a societal understanding that ageing is normal, valued, promoted, and protected

Grounding the framework in African realities.

While universal in nature, the framework must be grounded in the lived realities of older Africans across different contexts:

- the persistence of ageism, stereotypes, and invisibility
- uneven respect, alongside harmful traditional practices in some contexts
- deep gender inequality, particularly affecting older women
- the central role of family and community in care, including strong preferences for ageing in place
- high levels of informal work, resulting in economic insecurity in older age
- the continued social, economic, and cultural contributions of older persons
- the persistent absence of accountability mechanisms for older persons' rights across African states, including lack of monitoring, reporting structures, and consequences for inaction
- the inadequate resourcing and protection of civil society organizations that monitor and advocate for older persons' rights

These realities highlight that older persons in Africa are both contributors and rights-holders, often navigating structural barriers that limit the full enjoyment of their rights.

From recognition to transformation

To be effective, the Convention must move beyond recognition toward transformative change. This includes:

- recognising the older person holistically, rather than through fragmented and uneven protections across existing instruments
- ensuring meaningful participation and leadership of older persons in decisions, policies, and processes affecting them
- ensuring equity, inclusion, and justice in both design and implementation
- establishing strong accountability, monitoring, and implementation mechanisms at national and international levels, with consequences for violations
- providing clear, accessible information so older persons can understand and use the Convention

The Convention should not be symbolic. It must drive implementation, accountability, and real change in lived experience.

2. What core principles should underpin the legally binding instrument, to ensure it effectively protects the rights of older persons? In addition, how can the legally binding instrument both reaffirm existing human rights for older persons and clearly identify and address gaps where further normative development is required?

The Convention should be grounded in a set of core principles that both reaffirm universal human rights standards and respond to the lived realities, structural inequalities, and demographic shifts shaping older age—particularly in the African context.

These principles are not new rights in themselves; rather, they guide how rights are understood, interpreted, implemented, and enforced. They serve as a consistent foundation against which all provisions of the Convention—and their application in practice—will be developed and can be assessed.

Core Principles

The following principles emerged clearly and consistently from regional dialogue:

- **Dignity and Respect:** Older Africans must be treated with inherent dignity and respect in all aspects of life, moving beyond narratives of pity or protection alone to recognition of their full human worth, voice, and contribution.
- **Substantive Equality and Justice:** All Older Africans must enjoy equal rights and substantive equality, with systems addressing structural and life-course inequalities to ensure justice in practice.
- **Non-Discrimination, Including Ageism:** No Older African shall be discriminated against on the basis of age, including through stereotypes, institutional neglect, or the dismissal of needs as a natural consequence of ageing.

- **Recognition of Personhood:** Older African must be recognised as full human beings with continuing identity, value, and social status across all stages of life, and not reduced to burdens, dependants, or passive recipients of care.
- **Participation and Meaningful Inclusion:** Older Africans must be heard, respected, and actively involved in decisions affecting their lives, including within families, communities, policy processes, and public life.
- **Self-Determination and Autonomy:** Older Africans must be able to exercise self-determination, including making choices, expressing preferences, directing their own lives, and maintaining independence, with appropriate support where needed.
- **Safety and Protection:** Older Africans must be protected from abuse, neglect, and harm, in ways that uphold and do not override dignity, autonomy, or participation.
- **Inclusion and Integration in Society:** Older Africans must be fully included and able to participate across all areas of society—social, economic, political, and cultural.
- **Life-Course Approach:** Rights must be understood and implemented across the entire life course, ensuring that policies and systems address cumulative inequalities and enable continuity of rights into older age.
- **Recognition of Care, Caregiver, and Community:** Care in older age must be recognised as rooted in families and communities, reflecting values of interdependence and mutual care (Ubuntu), with caregivers acknowledged and supported in ways that uphold rights and dignity.
- **Age-Friendly and Inclusive Systems:** All environments, systems, and services must be inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs and diversity of older persons.

Reaffirming Existing Rights

Older persons are entitled to the full and equal enjoyment of all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

The Convention should reaffirm these rights as they apply in older age, ensuring that they are not diminished, overlooked, or reinterpreted through age-based assumptions. It must also ensure that these rights are meaningfully realised in practice, so that older persons are fully recognised and treated as rights-holders in law, policy, and practice.

Addressing Normative Gaps

Reaffirmation alone is insufficient. Regional discussions highlight persistent and emerging gaps that limit the realisation of rights in older age and require further normative development. Key gaps include:

- The absence of explicit recognition and elimination of ageism across laws, policies, and institutions
- Weak protection of self-determination and supported decision-making, particularly where capacity is questioned
- Insufficient recognition of personhood in practice, especially in care, health, and family contexts

- Limited integration of ageing into health systems, including a lack of age-friendly and rights-based geriatric care
- Inadequate framing of long-term care, particularly the need for community-based and family-integrated approaches
- Lack of recognition and support for caregiving, especially informal and gendered care
- Persistent exclusion of older persons—especially older women—from broader equality and development agendas
- Economic insecurity linked to high levels of informal work and low pension coverage
- Limited participation of older persons in decision-making, governance, and public representation
- Weak implementation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms
- Limited access to funding and policy attention compared to other population groups
- Absence of monitoring mechanisms, reporting structures, and consequences for state inaction on older persons' rights
- Lack of recognition, resourcing, and protection for civil society organizations as watchdogs and advocates for older persons' rights across Africa
- Inadequate protection of older women from intersectional discrimination, including gender-based violence, the "feminization of old-age poverty" due to unpaid care work, and harmful traditional practices such as witchcraft accusations and property grabbing

The Convention should also recognise and build upon existing regional frameworks, including the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Older Persons, which has been adopted and ratified by the required number of Member States to enter into force within the Region.

In this context, the global Convention should complement and reinforce regional instruments, strengthen accountability, and support the implementation of existing commitments.

Emerging and Evolving Areas for Normative Development

In addition to addressing gaps, regional dialogue points to areas where further normative development is required.

These include:

- Stronger articulation of self-determination in older age, including in situations involving support needs, ensuring that older persons' will and preferences guide decisions, with appropriate supports and safeguards to prevent substitution or override. It is more than self-agency.
- Recognition of ageing as part of a continuous life-course, rather than a separate or residual stage.
- Integration of intergenerational solidarity as a guiding consideration in policy and implementation.
- Recognition and support for older persons caring for orphans and vulnerable children, a growing reality across African communities affected by HIV/AIDS, with older persons (predominantly grandmothers) receiving little to no state support
- Explicit prohibition of harmful traditional practices against older persons, including witchcraft accusations, ritual killings, banishment, and property grabbing—practices documented across multiple African countries
- Greater visibility of older persons within global policy frameworks, at parity with other population groups.

These areas reflect the need for the Convention not only to close existing gaps but also to respond to evolving demographic realities and lived experiences.

3. What overall structure or architecture should the legally binding instrument adopt to ensure clarity and effectiveness? For example, should it include a preamble, definitions, general principles, general obligations, specific rights, and implementation provisions?

To ensure clarity, effectiveness, and real-world impact, the Convention should adopt a coherent, comprehensive structure that reflects established human rights treaty practice, while strengthening provisions on implementation, accountability, and participation.

Core Structural Elements

The Convention should include:

- **Preamble:** Setting out the purpose, context, and human rights rationale, including demographic change and the lived realities of older persons.
- **Definitions:** Clarifying key concepts—including “older persons” and discrimination (including ageism)—to ensure consistent interpretation and prevent dilution or misapplication in practice.
- **General Principles:** Establishing the foundational values that guide the development, interpretation, and implementation.
- **General Obligations:** Defining State responsibilities to respect, protect, and fulfill rights, and ensure equality and non-discrimination in practice.
- **Specific Rights:** Articulating rights across all relevant domains, including health, social protection, participation, freedom from abuse, and access to justice.
- **Implementation Provisions:** Requiring States to adopt laws, policies, systems, and resources necessary to give effect to the Convention.
- **Monitoring and Reporting Mechanisms:** Providing for regular reporting, review, and oversight to support accountability.

Strengthening Implementation and Accountability

Regional discussions emphasised that the Convention must move beyond standard setting to ensure implementation in practice.

The architecture should therefore include:

- Clear accountability lines across national and subnational levels
- Robust monitoring and review mechanisms, including periodic reporting and independent oversight requiring age-disaggregated data collection on abuse, neglect, abandonment, and access to services
- Having Indicators and benchmarks to track progress
- Consequences for state inaction, including international review and progressive measures for persistent non-compliance
- Participation of civil society and older persons in monitoring and review processes including their recognition, resourcing, and protection as essential actors

- Consideration of resourcing, through dedicated, ring-fenced funding for older persons' rights at national and global level, recognising that implementation requires sustained investment
- Strong linkages to domestic implementation, including localisation within national systems.

These elements respond to the persistent gap between commitment and implementation and are essential to ensuring transparency, accountability, and follow-through.

About SGA Africa

The Stakeholder Group on Ageing Africa (SGA Africa), a member of the UNECA/ARFSD Mechanism for Major Groups and Other Stakeholders, is a regional multi-stakeholder coalition comprising civil society organizations, professional bodies, academia, research institutions, and human rights organizations. The group engages in multi-level advocacy to combat age discrimination and promote the inclusion and participation of older persons in implementing the African Union Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Agenda 2030.

SGA Africa coordinates the older persons' constituency across the African region. The platform has grown to include more than 150 organizations and provides an enabling environment to promote the inclusion of older persons in social, economic, cultural, and political life across the region.

Appendix 1: Demographic Trends in Africa: Ageing in Context

Source: [Pan-Africa Dialogue Series #1: The Quiet Demographic Shift: Ageing in Africa Comes into Focus](#)

Africa is undergoing a significant demographic transition. While it remains the youngest region globally, the number of older persons is rising steadily. This creates a dual demographic reality: responding to both a large youth population and a rapidly increasing older population.

Population ageing in Africa is most visible in absolute numbers. Older persons (60+) currently represent approximately 5.8% of the population. By 2050, this will increase across all regions—reaching approximately 16% in Northern and Southern Africa and 7–8% in Eastern and Western Africa. In absolute terms, the number of older persons will more than double within one generation, from 25 million to 59 million in Northern Africa and from 65 million to 159 million in Sub-Saharan Africa. As Africa's total population continues to grow, even modest percentage increases result in significant numerical shifts.

This shift is a demographic certainty—it is already underway and will continue. The people who will be older in 2050 are already alive today, and a large midlife cohort will move into older age over the

coming decades. Ageing in Africa is driven primarily by population growth and improving survival into older age, rather than sharply declining fertility as seen in regions such as Europe or Japan. The challenge is not only longer lives, but healthier ageing. Life expectancy at age 60 has increased from 15.6 years in 2000 to 17.4 years today and is projected to reach approximately 19 years by 2050. However, there remains a significant gap between years lived and years lived in good health. Africa also faces a double burden of disease, with rising non-communicable diseases such as cardiovascular conditions and diabetes alongside the continued presence of communicable diseases such as tuberculosis.

Ageing in Africa is deeply gendered and shaped by life-course inequalities. Women represent approximately 55% of older persons and tend to live longer, but with higher rates of disability and chronic conditions. They are more likely to live alone and often carry ongoing caregiving and economic responsibilities. In some contexts, “skipped-generation households,” where grandparents care for grandchildren, especially older grandmothers, are increasingly common especially due to cases of HIV/AIDS. Yet these older caregivers across Africa receive virtually no state support, despite carrying significant social and economic responsibilities. This gap between contribution and support represents a failure to recognize older persons as rights-holders and requires normative attention in the Convention.

Ageing is also closely linked to economic insecurity and structural labour conditions. Africa faces dual demographic pressures, with both a large youth population and an aging population. Rural areas are ageing more rapidly due to youth migration, often without benefiting from a demographic dividend. Older persons frequently remain in the labour force out of necessity, in contexts where over 90% of work is informal, pension coverage is limited, and livelihoods remain heavily dependent on agriculture. These conditions contribute to heightened risks of poverty in older age, food insecurity, and intergenerational economic strain.

This demographic transition presents both a policy imperative and a development opportunity. Without action, pressures on health, care, and social systems will intensify. With forward-looking responses, older persons can continue to contribute to social cohesion, knowledge transfer, and economic and community development.

Africa’s demographic future is not about choosing between young or old populations—it is about planning for both, together. Population ageing reflects an achievement of longer lives, but also a shared societal issue that requires a life-course approach, intergenerational solidarity, and forward-looking systems and policies.