

Human Rights Council Intergovernmental Working Group to elaborate a legally binding instrument on the human rights of older persons: GAROP detailed proposals for modalities

The GAROP Steering Group presents these proposals for consideration by governments about the possible modalities for the new Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) to elaborate a legally binding instrument on the human rights of older persons, established by [Resolution 58/13](#) of the United Nations Human Rights Council in 2025. This builds on our previous recommendations drawing on feedback received and particularly on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) drafting process as well as other relevant processes.

While the proposals are not presented in any order of priority, GAROP views the centering of the voices of older persons and their representative organisations as the most important element of any modality.

Civil society accreditation

In support of a fully open and inclusive process, Member States should support the participation of all interested civil society organisations, including:

- Those representing older persons
- Those that have ECOSOC consultative status
- Those previously accredited to the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG)
- Any other civil society organisation wishing to participate

With regards to the approval of accreditation of non-ECOSOC civil society organizations and older persons and their representative organizations, Member States should consider the following:

- Expanded participation is best accomplished through an open registration system managed by the United Nations secretariat.
- Participants should be allowed to register, be accorded temporary UN passes to access the UN building during the days of relevant meetings, and have the same rights of participation as ECOSOC civil society organizations.

Further rationale:

The process will benefit from being as open and inclusive as possible to civil society and older persons and their representative organizations. Many civil society organizations that do not

have ECOSOC consultative status will be interested to participate, including those that were previously accredited to the OEWG¹ in New York who have engaged actively and constructively in the work of the OEWG over the years and are ready to contribute to the work of the IGWG. Similar approaches have been taken by other relevant UN processes, including the Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities² and the Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action³.

Civil society participation and centering the voices of older persons

Accredited civil society organizations, including older persons and their representative organizations should be able to participate directly in the process by:

- Attending formal and informal meetings of the IGWG
- Making oral statements during the meetings in accordance with UN practice
- When speaking time is limited, selecting from among themselves spokespersons
- Receiving copies of official documents in a timely way
- Making their materials available to delegations
- Making written submissions to consultations of and calls for input from stakeholders

The IGWG should prioritize the active participation of older persons and their representative organisations from all regions of the world, including dedicated speaking time that ensures:

- A defined number of civil society organizations on any dedicated treaty drafting group, including a defined number of older persons and their representative organizations.
- A guaranteed number of speaking slots for civil society organizations at all IGWG sessions, including a guaranteed number of speaking slots for older persons and their representative organizations.
- Civil society organizations and older persons and their representative organizations have the same number of minutes of speaking time as Member States.

¹ [List of NGOs Accredited to the OEWG on Ageing](#) and [report of the 14th OEWG session](#)

² While all non-governmental organizations enjoying consultative status with the Economic and Social Council received accreditation to the Ad Hoc Committee, other non-governmental organizations could also apply for accreditation (https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/rights/a_58_118_e.htm).

³ The [Intergovernmental Working Group on the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action](#) allows NGOs that have been accredited to the Durban process to participate in its sessions in addition to NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC.

- Civil society speaking time interspersed with Member States, rather than left to the end of each meeting.

Further rationale

This form of direct participation aligns to the approach taken by the Ad Hoc Committee of the CRPD⁴. It respects the self-organising nature of civil society and supports the full and meaningful participation of civil society, including older persons and their representative organizations. The process of drafting the CRPD was greatly enhanced by the civil society participatory model that benefitted from involvement and coordination of persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, and civil society organizations. This IGWG should draw on that experience and ensure that older persons are meaningfully involved at all levels of these negotiations.

Civil society coordination

The self-organizing nature of civil society must be respected and where necessary civil society representation ensured by a fair, inclusive and transparent civil society process. GAROP and the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva are ready to facilitate the nomination and selection of civil society representatives, speakers or experts for IGWG sessions or any dedicated treaty drafting group on behalf of wider civil society. This would be achieved in consultation with all participating civil society organisations and on a balanced and transparent basis, taking into account equitable geographic representation and diversity of NGOs. To support effective collaboration, there should be a clear line of communication between the IGWG leadership and civil society via GAROP and the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva.

Rationale:

GAROP and the NGO Committees on Ageing have been successfully co-facilitating the self-organisation and collective engagement of civil society organizations, including representative

⁴ See [report of the first session of the Ad Hoc Committee in 2002](#) where it was decided that representatives from non-governmental organisations accredited to the Ad Hoc Committee may participate in the work of the Ad Hoc Committee by:

- Attending any public meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee;
- Making statements, given the availability of time, in accordance with current United Nations practice;
- When time is limited, selecting from among themselves spokespersons, on a balanced and transparent basis, taking into account equitable geographical representation and the diversity of non-governmental organizations;
- Receiving copies of the official documents, as well as making written or other presentations.

organizations of older persons, in the OEWG and the Human Rights Council (HRC) for years. Their joint document ‘Working Together in Geneva’⁵ provides clarity for key stakeholders on how engaging with GAROP and the NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva as a democratic convening platform enables them to engage with the wider civil society community in an inclusive and transparent way embedding the principles of regional representation and prioritisation of older persons’ voices. This convening extends beyond GAROP and the NGO Committee on Ageing’s own membership to wider civil society engaged in this space in the interest of facilitating coordination and effective engagement.

Hybrid participation

Member States should guarantee civil society’s hybrid participation in the IGWG sessions, including live, online oral interventions, webcasting and live captioning. This facilitates access by and inclusion of older persons and their representative organizations and civil society organizations.

Rationale (including any precedents):

Older persons with disabilities, mobility challenges, caregiving responsibilities or experiencing poverty may not be able to participate in the IGWG without these services. Travel to Geneva is prohibitively expensive for many civil society organizations working on older persons’ human rights around the world. Civil society organizations from the global south in particular tend to be under-represented in many UN discussions as a result. When hybrid participation was enabled for informal negotiations on HRC resolutions, many civil society organizations joined online negotiations and the value of hybrid participation has been noted in other processes⁶. Hybrid meetings can also significantly reduce travel costs and related emissions, thus supporting sustainability efforts.

Transparency

All drafts, working documents, submissions, and inputs received and considered by the IGWG should be made public on its dedicated website at least four weeks before the session to

⁵ [Working Together in Geneva](#), GAROP and NGO Committee on Ageing Geneva, 2025

⁶ The [Open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights](#) and the [Intergovernmental Open-ended Working Group on the Right to Development](#) have both supported hybrid participation, including by civil society organizations, in their sessions acknowledging how this helps to facilitate the widest possible participation.

support civil society and other stakeholders' adequate preparation for the sessions. The sessions of the IGWG should be webcast and recordings made available on UN Web TV.

Rationale:

The IGWG's work should be as inclusive and transparent as possible to enable the full, effective and meaningful participation of all stakeholders. Other processes have firmly established this as standard practice, including the Open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights⁷, which publishes latest drafts with textual proposals and statements by all stakeholders.

Work Planning

The IGWG's work to elaborate a legally binding instrument should begin with a thorough consideration and framing of the underpinning conceptual basis, fundamental principles, and scope of a new legally binding instrument⁸. The first two substantive sessions of the IGWG should be dedicated to this work before negotiating detailed articles or a full zero draft of the instrument.

Rationale:

This has generally been the approach followed by other international convention drafting processes where line-by-line negotiations on a detailed text have followed extensive work on the scope, elements and conceptual basis of the instrument. This approach will build on the work of the OEWG and ensure that the instrument fully addresses the fundamental conceptual deficiencies around the rights of older persons in the existing human rights system (including those already identified by the OHCHR⁹) as a key priority.

Accessible consultations

All consultations at all levels should be designed to enable full and equal participation of older persons and their representative organizations, civil society organisations, and other stakeholders. To ensure inclusive and accessible treaty negotiations, the IGWG should guarantee the full and effective participation of older persons and their representative

⁷ [Open-ended intergovernmental working group on transnational corporations and other business enterprises with respect to human rights | OHCHR](#)

⁸ This involves defining what change the treaty will bring about, the values and core beliefs it should be based on, and which rights and issues should be included.

⁹ [Normative standards and obligations under international law in relation to the promotion and protection of the human rights of older persons](#), report by OHCHR, 2022

organizations, including those representing older persons with disabilities, and civil society organizations. This includes ensuring:

- the transparency of consultation processes,
- the provision of accessible information, and
- the availability of reasonable accommodation when required.

Those designing the modalities for participation in regional consultations should actively seek robust participation by civil society, including older persons and their representative organizations, and legal and academic experts including on gender, disability and equality and non-discrimination at all stages. Reasonable accommodation should be provided to facilitate the participation of older persons with disabilities.

Rationale:

These measures are aligned with the principles and obligations set out in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.¹⁰ Substantive regional consultations held outside of Geneva and input from a broad range of stakeholders, including older persons and legal or academic experts without affiliation to a civil society organization, is critical to inform the process taking place in Geneva and give it global legitimacy.

Additional recommendations for Member States

In addition to the above recommendations for the modalities of the IGWG itself, individual States should be encouraged by the IGWG to:

- Conduct open, accessible, and inclusive national consultations with civil society organisations and older persons at key stages of the treaty drafting process, before each negotiation round, after the release of draft articles, and prior to submitting national positions. This promotes national ownership of the convention, increases accountability, and ensures that state positions presented at the IGWG reflect experiences and priorities of older persons in their country.
- Include representatives of civil society organisations, particularly organisations of older persons, within their official national delegations to the IGWG to embed civil society

¹⁰ For example, [UNGA resolution 56/168](#) calls upon States, in cooperation with regional commissions, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Division for Social Policy and Development and the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development, to hold regional meetings or seminars to contribute to the work of the Ad Hoc Committee by making recommendations regarding the content and practical measures that should be considered in the international convention.

contributions at the heart of negotiations. Such participation strengthens expertise within delegations and promotes transparency and collaboration. It also aligns with practice in other UN treaty processes, where States often include national human rights institutions, disability organisations, and women’s rights groups.

- Explore partnerships and opportunities to fund the participation of representatives of older persons’ organisations who lack the resources to self-fund. This would recognise the financial barriers faced by many community-based and grassroots older persons’ groups especially from low- and middle-income countries. Such partnerships would ensure equity in representation, enabling those most directly affected by the treaty to shape its content and achieve more balanced regional representation in the negotiations.