



ALONE Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UN Human Rights) and the Intergovernmental Working Group on Older Persons

22 April 2026



About ALONE

ALONE is a national organisation, with proven supports, that enables older people to age at home. Our work is for all older people and aims to improve physical, emotional and mental wellbeing. We have a national network of staff and volunteers who provide an integrated system of Support Coordination, Practical Supports, Support & Befriending, a variety of Phone Services, Social Prescribing, Housing with Support and Assistive Technology.

We use individualised support plans, to address health, financial benefits and supports, social care, housing, transport and other arising needs using technology and through harnessing other services. ALONE's services reduce demand on health services while bringing meaningful improvements to older people where it matters most to them.

We work to empower the whole sector of community support for older people through our Community Impact Network that provides Training, IT support and resources to other organisations.

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?

ALONE welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a legally binding international instrument on the human rights of older persons. Despite the existence of general human rights protections, older persons have remained largely invisible within international human rights law (Byrnes, 2025)¹. As a national organisation in Ireland working directly with over 48,000 older people across our services including those who are lonely, isolated, frail or ill, homeless, living in poverty, or are facing other difficulties, ALONE strongly supports the establishment of a comprehensive framework that recognises older persons as full and equal rights-holders.

The instrument should affirm that all human rights apply equally across the life course and do not diminish with age. It should explicitly recognise older persons as individuals with the right and capacity to make decisions about their own lives, with dignity and enforceable rights, and as active contributors to society. In addition, it should promote the right of older persons to live independently and be included in their community, with access to appropriate, person-centred supports and services that enable them to age in place with dignity. The explicit recognition of age as a prohibited ground of discrimination is essential.

The framework should adopt a life course approach, recognising that inequalities accumulate over time and frequently intensify in older age. This should be complemented by an intersectional approach, acknowledging that older persons may face multiple and

¹ Byrnes, A. 2025. The struggle for equality, freedom and visibility: the campaign to achieve a new United Nations treaty on the human rights of older persons, in Helen Meenan and Christa Tobler (Eds), *Realising Protection from Age Discrimination: International, Regional, and National Perspectives*: 24-54

compounded forms of discrimination, including, gender, disability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and geographic location.

ALONE recognises that no single theoretical framework is sufficient to fully capture the lived experiences of older persons and the practical challenges of implementation. Complementary approaches, such as the capabilities approach², can inform interpretation and implementation by focusing on what older persons are effectively able to do and be, while remaining firmly grounded in human rights standards.

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?

ALONE recommends that the instrument be underpinned by a clear and robust set of guiding principles, capable of addressing both existing gaps and emerging challenges affecting older persons. These guiding principles should be closely aligned with the core human rights principles of **Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination and Equality, Empowerment and Legality (PANEL)**.

ALONE supports suggested principles outlined by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People, including non-discrimination; equality; respect for inherent dignity, individual autonomy including the freedom to make one's own decisions, and independence of person; full, meaningful and equal participation and inclusion in society; accessibility; and consistent with existing human rights standards³.

The instrument should both reaffirm existing human rights standards applicable to older persons, referencing other human rights standards while also addressing significant gaps as they relate to older age. In particular, further development is required in the following areas (non-exhaustive):

- **Non-discrimination (UDHR Article 7)**, with further development required relating to ageism and structural discrimination
- **Freedom from exploitation, violence and abuse (UNCRC Article 16)**, with further development required relating to neglect
- **Social protection and financial security (UDHR Article 23, ICESCR Article 9)**, including adequate income, pensions and supports to prevent poverty. Reference could be made to older people who are living alone and/or bereaved, who frequently experience higher levels of poverty.
- **Work and retirement (UDHR Article 23, ICESCR Article 6)**, with further development required relating to the right to work, and the right to retire
- **Accessibility (UNCRC Article 9)**, with further development required relating to digital access and its alternatives

² Nussbaum, M.C. 2011. Capabilities, Entitlements, Rights: Supplementation and Critique, *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities: A Multi-Disciplinary Journal for People Centered Development*, 12(1): 23-37

³ [The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People, Discussion Paper 2026](#)

- **Health (UNCPRD Article 25, ICESCR Article 12)** with further development required relating to equitable access to age-appropriate healthcare, mental health care, and palliative care
- **Housing (ICESCR Article 11, UNCRPD Article 28)**, with further development required relating to the right of older persons to live independently or in supported housing, with appropriate supports that enable autonomy, safety and participation in the community. In addition, further development is required relating to energy and energy poverty (as outlined in General Comment No 4: The right to adequate housing).
- **Healthy environment (UNHRC Resolution 48/13, ICESCR Article 12)**, with further development required relating to climate change and climate justice.

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?

ALONE recommends that the legally binding instrument adopt a structure consistent with established international human rights treaties. A suggested structure may include the following:

- **Preamble:** Recognition of demographic ageing; acknowledgement of systemic ageism and protection gaps; and affirmation of older persons as full and equal rights-holders.
- **Definitions:** Clear definitions of key terms, such as “older person,” “age discrimination,” and “long-term care,” to support clarity and effective implementation. Of note, given that older age is socially constructed, and as stated by the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People, definition of older age should allow for “context-appropriate application”⁴.
- **General principles** (see response to question 2)
- **General obligations of States:** Clear articulation of States’ duties as duty -bearers to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of older persons, including obligations relating to data collection, policy development, resource allocation, as well as meaningful consultation with older persons and their representative organisations. Core minimum obligations should also be set out.
- **Substantive rights** (see response to question 2)
- **Implementation and monitoring:** Establishment of an international monitoring body, reporting obligations for States, and mechanisms for complaints and remedies, including requirements to assess the impact of policies on older persons and use disaggregated data to identify exclusion.

In addition, a General Comment(s) can be used to clarify State parties’ implementation and reporting requirements where required. This structure would ensure clarity,

⁴ [The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People, Discussion Paper 2026](#)

effectiveness and alignment with international human rights standards, while supporting meaningful implementation and accountability.

