

# Guidance For National Stakeholder Engagement on Future Ageing Policy Priorities

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## 1. Introduction

At the fifth United National Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Rome in June 2022, UNECE member States renewed their commitment to the implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and to regional cooperation and intergovernmental collaboration in the field of ageing. Recognizing the major transformations in the region since the adoption of MIPAA in 2002, member States also requested that the UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA) update the MIPAA Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS). Paragraph 47 of the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration “entrust(s) the Standing Working Group on Ageing with the task of updating RIS and exploring the possibility of also updating MIPAA to adapt ageing-related policy responses to economic, social, and digital transitions and emerging challenges, and developing further instruments to support them”. **The exercise encourages strategic foresight to address anticipated challenges for ageing societies going forward.**

A task force to carry out this work was established in 2023 and is composed of member State representatives and representatives of civil society and the scientific research community. The task force will revise the RIS between 2023 and 2026, submitting the revised draft to the SWGA at its nineteenth annual meeting in November 2026. The draft will be developed based on a review of international frameworks such as MIPAA, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, as well as stakeholder engagement exercises carried out at the national level between June 2024 and June 2025.

The objective of the national stakeholder engagement exercises is to look beyond expert voices to solicit views and perspectives from all those affected by individual and population ageing. By engaging diverse stakeholders of all ages from government, non-

governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society, and the research community, SWGA aims to identify policy areas and topics that, up until now, **may have been overlooked or inadequately addressed in regional efforts to build societies for all ages. Envisioned as broad conversations about ageing societies rather than a technical assessment of gaps in RIS, engagement with stakeholders should be seen as an opportunity to have open and provocative discussions on the topic.** Insights from the stakeholder engagement process will complement parallel activities of the task force in revising the RIS.

National Focal Points on Ageing (NFPAs) are seen as custodians of national stakeholder engagement exercises and are asked to organize—together with relevant government agencies and civil society organizations—the processes in their countries. They will share the results of the national processes with the UNECE secretariat for analysis and use by the task force. NFPAs will have the opportunity to present their work at the SWGA annual meetings and support the work of the task force.

While each member State should design and implement stakeholder engagement exercises according to national contexts, experiences, and priorities, the task force has prepared this guidance with general principles, good practice examples, and guiding questions to support national processes. Practical information on transmitting results to the secretariat and the timeline for the process are also included.

## 2. Formats

Each stakeholder engagement exercise should be designed and implemented according to national circumstances. While the results will be used as an input for the international process of updating RIS, **the exercise should also be viewed as an opportunity to support national policy objectives and advance [mainstreaming ageing at the national level](#).** For example, the process could be used as a starting point for the development of a national action plan on ageing or include consultation on national policy instruments that are under development. Taking a participatory approach to policymaking and involving a variety of stakeholders can create greater support and buy-in for policy decisions, which can make a policy more effective and legitimate.<sup>1</sup> NFPAs and other stakeholders involved in the development of the engagement exercise are therefore encouraged to approach its design strategically considering what exactly their country would like to get out of the discussions. It is also important to recognize how the results of the exercise might contribute to the fifth review and appraisal of the implementation of MIPAA/RIS at the national level (2023-2027) and activities under other international frameworks such as the

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<sup>1</sup> UNESCO: Inclusive Policy Lab: <https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/policy-marker-social-inclusion-inclusive-policies/participation-throughout-policy-cycle>

United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the process in the Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA). Clearly identifying and articulating the national-level objectives and benefits of the stakeholder engagement exercise will help to position the process as a priority in national work plans.

The engagement exercises can take many different forms. The purpose of the exercise is to gather the views and perspectives of a diverse group of stakeholders on goals and challenges for ageing societies. For this reason, the exercise should be designed in a way that encourages stakeholders to think broadly and share openly rather than review or respond to an already-drafted document or a prescribed set of topics. **It should be viewed as an opportunity for two-way exchange rather than a one-way information sharing exercise.** Formats for these types of stakeholder consultations include:

- Surveys
- Interviews
- Online discussion forums
- Roundtable discussions
- Focus groups
- Dialogue processes

When designing the engagement exercise, **it is important to consider the method of collecting and reporting the views, perspectives and opinions shared.** NFPAs will be asked to analyse, summarize, and report the key themes that emerged during the exercise (see section 5. How to share results). To facilitate this work, it is recommended to design exercises so that information shared can be reviewed and analysed. For in-person activities, this may involve the audio and/or video recording of discussions or the inclusion of a dedicated period during the event to collectively analyse and summarize the discussion. For surveys or online discussions, consider the use of software that facilitates the analysis and summary of responses such as Google Forms or Microsoft Forms. Several online meeting tools allow for the recording and transcription of discussions.

Each member State should **make use of existing national mechanisms for stakeholder engagement.** For example, if there are regular or recurring meetings between government and relevant stakeholder organizations, the engagement exercise could be integrated into the agenda of a future meeting or organized as a “side event.” Likewise, the exercise could be organized in the context of a planned national conference or meeting on demographic change or population ageing including those organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Health Organization (WHO) or other United Nations regional or country offices. In many countries, advisory councils made up of representatives of NGOs

and academia are regularly consulted during the policy process. Such councils could be engaged in the development and/or implementation of the exercise.

### **Good practice examples**

#### **Regular exchange**

In Finland, the Government regularly engages civil society on different themes. They organize roundtable discussions called “learning cafes” in which participants move from table to table sharing opinions on a unique topic at each table.

In Germany, the Government and civil society organizations regularly meet online and/or face-to-face for exchange to discuss various topics that concern or influence the lives of older persons. Results of the discussion are made public afterwards in written summaries.

#### **Consultative councils**

In Spain, the State Council of Older Persons is a consultative body composed of organizations representing older persons from different regions.

In Serbia, the Council for Intergenerational Cooperation and Exchange consists of representatives from various government ministries, NGOs working in the field of ageing, and academia. The Council reviews and approves draft policy instruments before adoption.

Building on MIPAA and RIS, the Austrian Federal Plan for Senior Citizens "Ageing and the Future" was developed by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, and Health and Consumer Protection on behalf of the Federal Senior Citizens' Advisory Council. Representatives of all federal ministries take part in the council, under the Chair of the Minister for Social Affairs, which is an instrument for fostering political dialogue about different issues of ageing policies.

#### **National networks of institutions and stakeholders**

In Italy, a national coordination initiative involves all government levels (municipalities, provinces, metropolitan cities, regions and central authorities) and relevant stakeholders from civil society in order to establish a shared model of intervention for the promotion of active ageing.

Where relevant, United Nations regional and country offices including UNFPA and WHO may be able to provide support for national stakeholder engagement exercises. The UNECE secretariat can help to facilitate engagement with the relevant regional and country offices. Organizations affiliated with the [WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities](#) may also represent relevant partners.

For more guidance on participatory approaches and the meaningful engagement of civil society in policymaking, see:

- [Meaningful participation of older persons and civil society in policymaking](#), UNECE 2021
- [Voice and meaningful engagement in the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing](#), WHO 2023

### **3. Stakeholders to include**

Demographic change and population ageing concerns people of all ages and touches nearly every aspect of society. Experiences of ageing are different for different people and depend on various characteristics that are also influenced by their lived experiences. Including persons from diverse backgrounds will provide a wide spectrum of views and new thinking about policy issues. While each member State should identify the relevant organizations and stakeholders to engage based on national contexts, NFPAs are encouraged to look beyond older persons' organizations and include a broad range of stakeholders in the discussion. Older persons in all their diversity, policymakers from all levels of government, and representatives from relevant sectors and civil society organizations should be included. A list of groups that may be relevant to include is provided in the Annex. In general, stakeholders should represent the social, economic, ethnic, and political diversity of the country.

To facilitate the equal and meaningful participation of diverse groups, it is important to identify and address potential barriers to participation. Special efforts may be required to reach certain groups and make them feel safe to participate and express their views. Interpretation and translation to minority languages should be provided. Materials and locations should be designed and selected with accessibility in mind.

### **4. Guiding questions**

The objective of the national stakeholder engagement exercises is to identify policy areas and topics that, up until now, may have been overlooked or inadequately addressed in regional efforts to build societies for all ages. While the results of the exercise will contribute to the update of the RIS, the discussion should be framed more broadly and

should not require specialized knowledge of MIPAA, RIS, or other ageing-relevant policy documents.

The discussion should be forward-looking, acknowledging recent changes and current trends, anticipating future conditions, their potential impacts on society, and the actions needed to prepare for and respond to these issues.

To guide the discussion, the following questions are proposed:

1. What key changes have societies experienced in the last 20 years?
2. Given these changes, what new challenges have emerged for creating societies for all ages?
3. What do you see as the primary challenges in the next 20 years in relation to demographic change and ageing?
4. What are the priority actions for policymakers for the future to create societies in which ageing is a positive experience?
5. In your opinion, what are the five priority areas for achieving a society for all ages?

### **Facilitating the discussion**

For in-person or online discussions, facilitators may wish to begin the exercise with nationally relevant icebreaker questions.

While the aim is to hold open discussions, it may be necessary to guide the conversation by prompting participants to think about certain topics, for example:

**Social, economic, and digital transformations:** demographic shifts and changes to family structures, progress towards gender equality, urbanization, changing neighbourhoods (physically and socially), climate change and natural disasters, military conflicts, migration and displacement, economic growth or recession, cost of living, labour market changes, digitalization, the emergence of artificial intelligence.

**Themes:** healthy and active ageing, age-friendly environment, human rights, ageism, health care and long-term care, gender equality, pension and social protection systems, social services, informal caregiving, poverty and inequality, lifelong learning, inclusive labour markets, involvement in policymaking, participation in social, cultural and civic life, mainstreaming ageing, intergenerational solidarity, violence and abuse, dementia, digital skills and literacy.

Participants should also be encouraged to think about new ageing-related challenges and themes that are not listed above or currently included in MIPAA/RIS.

## 5. How to share results

The results of each national stakeholder engagement exercise will be analyzed by the task force.

To facilitate the analysis, the secretariat will collect results via an online form that will request the following information:

1. Description of exercise(s)
  - a. When was the exercise(s) held?
  - b. Where was the exercise(s) held?
  - c. What type of exercise was held? Please describe the method of stakeholder engagement (survey, focus groups, etc.).
  - d. What guiding questions were used and which topics were discussed?
2. Participant details
  - a. List of organizations represented
  - b. Number of total participants
  - c. Number of male participants
  - d. Number of female participants
  - e. Number of participants by following age groups: under age 18, 18-24, 25-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75-84, 85+
3. Substantive results
  - a. Please describe the key themes that emerged from the discussion.
  - b. Please identify five priorities for the future based on the engagement exercise(s).

## 6. Timeline

The task force will revise the RIS between 2024 and 2026, submitting the revised draft to the SWGA at its nineteenth annual meeting in November 2026. To allow time for the analysis of information collected, member States are requested to carry out stakeholder engagement exercises during the second half of 2024 and first half of 2025. Countries are encouraged to make use of existing mechanisms and events. For example, discussions could be organized as part of a standing annual meeting or conference attended by relevant stakeholders. The timeline for implementing national stakeholder engagement exercises and transmitting results will depend on these national mechanisms, but the following general timeline is proposed.

**May 2024:** Guidance on national stakeholder engagement is presented to NFPAs

**June – December 2024:** Design of stakeholder engagement exercises at national level

**January – June 2025:** Implementation of national stakeholder engagement exercises

**30 July 2025:** Results of national stakeholder engagement exercises transmitted to secretariat

**November 2025:** Identification of main topics/themes to be included in new RIS

**November 2026:** Draft revised Regional Implementation Strategy presented to SWGA

## **7. Annex: Potential stakeholder groups to include**

The specific selection of stakeholders to include will differ depending on each country's context. The following list is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive. It is intended to support the identification of nationally relevant groups for diverse and inclusive participation.

Depending on the national context, the following groups may be relevant to include:

- Local authorities and municipal representatives
- Health professionals (medical doctors, nurses etc.)
- Care and social workers including students/trainees
- Persons with a disability
- Children and youth
- Migrants, refugees, and displaced persons
- Minority language and/or ethnic groups
- Indigenous populations
- Persons who identify as LGBTIQ+, including older persons
- People living with dementia and their carers
- Low-income persons, including older persons
- Persons living in rural areas, including older persons
- Older persons living in a range of care settings
- Informal and family caregivers
- Urban planners
- Academic researchers from relevant fields
- National human rights institutions
- Civil society activists
- Media