



OLDER WOMEN'S NETWORK, EUROPE

OWN Europe analysis of Rome 2022 MIPAA Ministerial declaration and joint civil society and scientific research declaration – 30 September 2022

Background

Once every five years the [UNECE](#) and its member states undertake a [review of the Regional Implementation Strategy](#) (RIS) of the [Madrid International Plan on Active Ageing \(MIPAA\)](#) adopted in 2002. The 5th UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing held in Rome in June 2022 completed the 4th review of the implementation of the RIS for Europe since 2002, and marked the 20th anniversary of the MIPAA/RIS for Europe. Every five years, the MIPAA review also provides an opportunity for civil society and researchers to take stock of their own analysis of progress achieved since the previous review and to address recommendations to United Nations and national policy makers on areas where more efforts are needed.

To get an overview of the outcomes of this 4th MIPAA/RIS review and the recommendations endorsed by member states and civil society/researchers for the next five years, OWN Europe has analyzed the MIPAA2022 [Ministerial declaration](#) and [Joint civil society and scientific research declaration](#).

What we learnt from the MIPAA 2022 Rome events and declarations

The Ministerial Conference 2022 was entitled “*A Sustainable World for All Ages: Joining Forces for Solidarity and Equal Opportunities Throughout Life*”. When comparing the agendas of the Ministerial Conference and Joint Forum with the contents of their respective declarations, it seems that the events and the declarations are distinct processes, with the final declarations focusing on a broader policy agenda and both being agreed in advance of the MIPAA events.

On the [UNECE Population Ageing website](#) one can only find the MIPAA Ministerial Declarations. To help grassroots older citizens understand how civil society is involved in the MIPAA review process, a short paragraph would be welcome at the top of the civil society declaration to explain how NGOs and researchers are consulted during the joint Forum declaration drafting process and how the declaration is then used to bring the voice of civil society to policy makers.

The relevance of the MIPAA 2022 Ministerial Declaration for older women

Overall, the Ministerial Declaration covers the main issues of concern for all older persons, but political commitments are made to tackle gender inequality in old age in only a few specific policy areas. Although policy makers consider that progress has been achieved with regard to the implementation of the MIPAA/RIS in the past 5 years, the reality at grassroots



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level may look quite different in particular for some groups of older women and the oldest group.

National policy makers' commitments tend to focus on boosting the potential of older persons to work longer, live autonomously for longer and contribute to their communities as workers, volunteers and consumers. The specific references to gender equality are limited to a few general remarks on the need to address gender inequality in access to employment, pension and old age income. Although policy makers commit to mainstreaming gender in all their ageing related policy work, it is not clear what they concretely propose to tackle the increasing difficulties and inequalities faced by older women, especially the oldest old in today's context of rapidly accelerating climate change, rapid digital transformation, health crises and pandemics, and more recently armed conflicts and resulting energy and food crises.

We understand that the Ministerial Declaration is a highly aspirational list of political commitments developed through a lengthy drafting process that establishes common goals which have to be agreed by all UNECE countries. For that reason, although we are disappointed that older women, especially the oldest old who constitute the vast majority of the 80+ (the fastest growing population group), are not given more specific attention in the final declaration, we are pleased to see several references to older persons' human rights and the attention paid to elder abuse. We warmly welcome the renewed commitment of policy makers to take action to combat this egregious and widely spread violation of older persons' human rights endured by too many older women and still widely tolerated by society.

However we miss a clear commitment to protect older persons' rights through the adoption of a UN instrument on the rights of older persons and deeply regret that no progress has been achieved in the UNECE countries to support such a Human Rights instrument after more than 10 years of discussion in the UN Open Ended Working Group on Ageing.

For all these reasons we wonder to what extent the commitments listed in the MIPAA 2022 Ministerial Conference will deliver real progress for older women in the coming five years.

The relevance of the civil society/research joint declaration for older women

Although we assume the joint declaration is addressed to the Ministerial conference, we regret that the document is drafted in a rather technical and abstract language which is not easily accessible to older persons at the grassroots, including those who are active advocates at local and national level.

We agree and support the comments made in the joint declaration on many issues raised in the Ministerial declaration but we do not understand why the crucial issue of **elder abuse** was not extensively covered in the civil society/researchers declaration. OWN Europe contributed



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input, notably on the need to address elder abuse, in response to a call for feedback on the draft Forum declaration. Our call was stressed again during the Forum discussion, however we had been told that it was not necessary to cover elder abuse in the Forum declaration because it was already addressed in the Ministerial declaration. We struggle to understand this point since elder abuse is such a harsh violation of older persons' human rights, and on the actual day of the Forum (15 June) the UN Secretary General launched the new UN Guide entitled: *Tackling abuse of older people: five priorities for the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030* which aims to confront the growing problem of elder abuse. WHO research estimates that every year 1 in 6 people aged 60 years and older experience some form of abuse, with 2 in 3 staff in institutions such as nursing homes and other long-term care facilities admitting to committing abuse in the past year. Like many other forms of violence, **elder abuse has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic.** "*Abuse of older people is an injustice, which can have serious consequences, including premature mortality, physical injuries, depression, cognitive decline and poverty,*" said Etienne Krug, Director of WHO's Department of Social Determinants of Health. And with rapidly ageing population in many countries, WHO expects this growing trend to continue.

We are however pleased that several issues of concerns for older women were included in the Joint declaration mainly commenting on/ highlighting issues raised in the Ministerial Declaration. These include the need to mainstream gender in all relevant policies to tackle inequalities, a call for the recognition of unpaid care work which would help tackle gender inequalities in pensions, the need to raise awareness and understanding of how ageism, sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination disadvantage older women even more than men, the need to pay more attention and improve understanding of the needs and challenges faced by the oldest old amongst whom two-thirds are women, including through better gender disaggregated data collection on the oldest old and opening clinical trials to older poly-medicated patients of both sexes.

While we understand that the NGOs and researchers were merely reacting to a draft Ministerial declaration, we regret that the Joint Forum was not able to bring in some new views based on citizens' experience at the grassroots. Organised civil society has an advocacy role to play to challenge policy makers with views that may sometimes be disruptive. It was thanks to a broad civil society campaign and the work done by WHO that the UN became aware of the severe violations of human rights of older persons during the early months of the Covid 19 pandemic. And as indicated given the importance of mobilising policy makers to combat elder abuse, we feel that this issue deserved to be given higher visibility in the NGO/Research joint declaration.



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Furthermore social protection is a right for all people from the cradle to the grave. But with austerity policies and crisis responses to the pandemic and ongoing conflicts policy makers seem increasingly to consider population ageing as a burden to both society and to social protection systems rather than to value older persons as assets for and within their communities. It is our role as NGOs to remind them about such shared fundamental principles.

Ahead of the UNIDOP2022, to pay justice to the resilience and contributions of older persons in Europe, the joint declaration could have called on national policy makers, UN entities, UN Women, and civil society/researchers to pay due attention to older women, including the oldest old in all relevant policies. This includes the Agenda 2030 and the SDGs which must be inclusive of older women across their life course and ensuring gender equality for women of all ages as described in the Secretary-General's report of September 2021 that established the UN objectives for the next 25 years.

Finally we feel that the implementation of the MIPAA policy commitments would be greatly supported by a UN legally binding instrument to protect the human rights of older persons. This has been a claim by NGOs worldwide for more than 10 years and we are sorry to see that the civil society actors engaged in the MIPAA/RIS for Europe review have not yet been able to convince UNECE Ministers that such an instrument would be complementary to the MIPAA and is needed now more than ever to ensure respect for the human rights of older women and men and dignity for all in old age.

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