

Summary of the 21st Rountable with AGAC Global Advisory Group

The 21ST event of ‘Talking about the Human Rights of Older Persons’ took place in the form of online roundtable meeting with the members of the AGAC Global Advisory Group. AGAC Global Advisory Group consists of five members that represent Europe, Asia and North America, as well as academia, civil society, think-tanks and the medical professions. The list of AGAC Global Advisory Group members can be found through this link: [아셈노인인권정책센터 \(asemgac.org\)](http://아셈노인인권정책센터 (asemgac.org))

This is a summary of the meeting held on March 27, that Prof. Thanh Long Giang (National Economics University, Vietnam), Prof. Titti Mattsson (Lund University, Sweden), Dr. Kai Leichsenring (Former Executive Director, European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Austria) and Ms. Margaret Young (Past Chair, Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) and Founder, Age Knowble, Canada) took part in. From AGAC, Dr. Chung Ha Suh, Executive Director, Dr. Sung Jae Choi, Chairperson of the Board of Directors, and Dr. Geun Koh, Operations Director, took part. During the meeting, four participants talked about their recent involvement in (research) activities and shared their views on notable developments and trends relating to the rights of older persons.

Dr. Choi first welcomed and expressed her thanks to the participants for joining the AGAC Advisory Group as well as for their great contributions to the Center’s various projects for the last years. After Dr. Choi’s remark, Dr. Suh briefly introduced himself and delivered a short greeting as the newly appointed Executive Director. Dr. Koh introduced the main activities of the Center and its achievements in 2025, from policy research and hosting the ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons: Present and Future to its periodical <Issue Focus>.

By outlining the primary activities of AGAC and sharing the current research and professional engagement of each advisor, alongside their insights into global trends, this Roundtable has proven very significant. We anticipate that it has fostered mutual understanding among advisors, and provided foundational basis for us to seek tailored advice and consultations on AGAC’s operation, and thereby enhancing collaboration and facilitating informed decision-making.

Who Decides: Human Rights Principles That Matter to Older Persons with Dementia



140 participants
2 Keynotes
8 panelists – global, cross-sector,
older persons with dementia

Key learnings – six principles, three
cross-cutting themes, imperatives

Event highlight: [Showreel: Who Decides? Human Rights Principles That Matter to Older Persons with Dementia](#)
[Who Decides? The Human Rights Principles That Matter to Older Persons with Dementia. - Age Knowble](#)



Dr. Kai Leichsenring (Former Executive Director, European Center for Social Welfare Policy and Research, Austria)

Dr. Leichsenring began by explaining a recent transition in his professional role. As of March 1, he stepped down from his position as Executive Director of the European Centre, but continues to work as a researcher as he approaches retirement. He emphasized that this transition allows him to move away from administrative responsibilities and focus more intensively on research related to ageing and older persons, dedicating more time to project-based work.

One of the key ongoing projects he introduced is a study on violence and abuse against older persons in Austria, conducted in collaboration with the Austrian Ministry of Social Affairs. The aim of this project is to prepare for a nationwide survey to assess the prevalence and characteristics of abuse against older persons. However, due to budget constraints, it remains uncertain whether the survey will ultimately be implemented. At present, the work focuses on developing the methodological framework and survey instruments. Dr. Leichsenring emphasized that such research is highly complex, requiring careful consideration of multiple variables and sensitive factors in order to produce reliable data. The preparatory phase is expected to be completed by the end of the year, and the results could serve as a valuable foundation for international comparative studies and applications in other countries.

He also introduced a study on informal care, commissioned by the Swedish Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. This research examined good practices in supporting informal carers across countries with relatively advanced long-term care systems. The findings have already been published in a report, which highlights the gap between formal policy frameworks and their actual implementation. Notably, the study was based on expert interviews rather than solely

on document analysis, allowing for a more realistic understanding of how policies function in practice.

In this context, Dr. Leichsenring identified recurring challenges in the field of informal care. First, even when support systems exist, they often fail to reach those who need them most, largely due to issues of information accessibility and service delivery. Second, there are persistent problems related to the social perception of informal carers. In some cases, they are viewed negatively or even suspected of misusing benefits, and individuals who exercise their legal rights may be treated unfairly. Therefore, he stressed that improving not only institutional design but also public awareness and information dissemination systems is essential.

Dr. Leichsenring further discussed a project supporting the implementation of a long-term care system in Slovenia. After more than two decades of discussion, Slovenia introduced a Long-Term Care Act and is currently in the implementation phase. He highlighted the structural challenges that arise during this transition, particularly the difficulty of transforming a fragmented system into a comprehensive and integrated long-term care framework.

Although various benefits and service entitlements have been established legally, the system faces serious limitations in actual service delivery capacity. In practice, insufficient staffing and organizational capacity prevent services from being delivered effectively, even when legal rights are guaranteed. This issue is particularly critical in long-term care, where timely service provision is essential.

Specific bottlenecks were also identified. For example, although a single entry point system has been introduced to improve access, many individuals must wait six to seven months for needs assessments. In addition, IT infrastructure remains underdeveloped, and both staffing shortages and service limitations persist at the provider level, especially in rural areas.

To address these challenges, ongoing efforts include improving assessment procedures in collaboration with needs assessors and developing local action plans with municipalities to expand service provision. This approach involves both public and private providers and aims to establish an integrated system covering both community-based and residential care.

Finally, Dr. Leichsenring referred to discussions related to the 25th anniversary of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. In Europe, work is underway to update the regional implementation strategy, including the development of a zero draft and preparation for a ministerial conference. He concluded by raising the question of whether similar processes are being actively pursued in the Asian region.

Prof. Thanh Long Giang (National Economics University, Vietnam)

Professor Giang from the National Economics University of Vietnam provided a comprehensive overview of recent policy developments, research activities, and future challenges related to ageing in Vietnam. As an advisor to the Ministry of Health and the

Ministry of Home Affairs, he is actively involved in shaping policies on ageing, healthcare, and social protection, and shared both national and regional perspectives on older persons' rights.

He emphasized that Vietnam has experienced rapid policy transformation over the past two years. Between 2024 and 2025, approximately six major policy documents were introduced, signaling significant changes in both policy direction and implementation systems. These include a national ageing strategy extending to 2045, expansion of social insurance systems, and the introduction of population-related legislation. Importantly, these policies adopt a long-term, structural approach that addresses not only current older persons but also future generations.

A key policy shift is the transition from treatment-centered healthcare to a prevention-oriented approach, with a stronger emphasis on primary care. This reflects the increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases and the trend toward earlier onset of health conditions in Vietnam. At the same time, administrative restructuring and expansion of community-level healthcare systems aim to improve accessibility for older persons.

One distinctive model highlighted was the Intergenerational Self-Help Club system, with over 9,000 clubs operating nationwide. These community-based initiatives go beyond basic care to include social participation, emotional support, and income-generating activities, while ensuring that vulnerable groups, including persons with disabilities, are not excluded.

Professor Giang also presented his own research activities. He collaborated with UNFPA to produce a policy brief on low fertility and its implications, reflecting a critical demographic challenge also observed in Vietnam. In addition, he worked with UNDP on social protection systems for ageing populations and conducted projections on care needs and beneficiaries for public care facilities, providing evidence to support long-term planning by the Ministry of Health.

Furthermore, he has been involved in multiple international research collaborations with institutions such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), contributing to projects on the Active Ageing Index, a Disability Index for older persons across Asia, and a Financial Preparedness Index. These comparative studies, covering countries with different income levels and ageing stages, aim to provide a broader understanding of regional challenges and inform policy development.

Professor Giang emphasized that, despite differences in economic development and demographic transition, many Asian countries face similar structural challenges. These include low pension coverage, high out-of-pocket healthcare expenditures, underdeveloped long-term care systems, and limited opportunities for social participation among older persons. These issues are evident not only in Vietnam but also in countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

To address these challenges, he proposed several policy directions. First, income security for older persons should be strengthened through expanded social insurance coverage. Second, long-term care systems need to be developed in a more integrated and coordinated manner, as current systems remain fragmented across home, community, and institutional care. Third,

policies supporting older persons' participation in the labor market should move beyond general encouragement to include concrete support mechanisms.

Finally, he suggested enhancing collaboration with AGAC through regular webinars and joint research initiatives. He highlighted emerging issues such as climate change, elder abuse, health consequences, and re-employment of older persons as key areas for multi-country studies. He stressed that comparative research across countries with different socioeconomic conditions is essential for developing realistic and context-sensitive policy recommendations.

During the discussion, he also addressed the issue of migration of care workers. While Vietnam has sent a significant number of care workers abroad—particularly to Japan—many of these workers return but are unable to find appropriate employment domestically due to a lack of institutional frameworks and adequate compensation. As a result, many re-migrate abroad, highlighting a structural mismatch between domestic demand and institutional capacity in the care sector.

Prof. Titti Mattsson (Lund University, Sweden)

Professor Mattsson provided an in-depth analysis of the country's ageing dynamics, institutional challenges, and emerging issues related to AI and human rights. She began by noting that ageing is not a new issue, but political responses often lag behind scientific understanding. However, in Sweden, the rapid increase in the older population has recently brought the issue to the forefront of policy discussions.

Currently, approximately 25% of Sweden's population is aged 65 or older, and this proportion is expected to rise significantly. This demographic shift is placing considerable pressure on public welfare systems, particularly in elder care, workforce availability, and continuity of services. While Sweden has traditionally relied on a strong public care system, its capacity has not expanded sufficiently to meet increasing demand, leading to a growing reliance on informal caregivers. However, Professor Mattsson cautioned that informal care is not a sustainable long-term solution within the Swedish welfare model.

Inequalities within the system were also highlighted. While certain groups with specific legal protections receive high-quality services, many older persons experience disparities in care depending on geographic location. For example, home care systems with designated contact persons exist, but their effectiveness varies across regions, leading to inconsistencies in service continuity and quality.

Structural challenges are becoming increasingly evident. The number of trained care workers is insufficient relative to the growing demand, and resource constraints affect multiple areas, including housing, home care, and institutional care. As a result, issues such as loneliness, mental health problems, and unmet care needs are becoming more prominent, along with a concerning increase in suicide rates among older men.

Another emerging issue is the rise in crimes targeting older persons, particularly within care settings. These include theft, abuse, and serious offenses such as sexual violence. In response,

the Swedish government has initiated investigations and policy measures to strengthen safety in elder care environments. Professor Mattsson emphasized that older persons are particularly vulnerable when the perpetrator is a caregiver, especially in private or institutional settings.

She further explained that these challenges are linked to a broader shift in care paradigms—from institutional care to home-based care. While enabling older persons to remain at home promotes autonomy, it also increases the risk of hidden abuse, as violence occurring in private settings is more difficult to detect. This parallels patterns observed in domestic violence against women and children.

Ageism remains a persistent issue in Sweden, particularly in the labor market. Despite extensive discussions and research, older persons continue to face exclusion from employment opportunities, even when they possess high levels of competence and experience. Efforts are underway to address this through policy initiatives and research.

Professor Mattsson also discussed the growing importance of AI and digitalization in welfare policy. The Swedish government views AI as a key tool for improving efficiency, accessibility, and service quality. However, the implementation of AI must prioritize availability, usability, and understandability, particularly for older persons, to ensure inclusiveness and autonomy.

Digital literacy programs for older persons are being developed to support their engagement with new technologies. These initiatives are seen not only as technical training but also as essential for enhancing participation and independence.

Finally, she addressed the EU AI Act, noting that while it regulates high-risk AI systems and prohibits certain harmful practices, it does not fully protect older persons from all potential harms. Therefore, more nuanced regulatory and policy approaches are needed to address the impact of AI on health, safety, autonomy, and decision-making among older persons.

Ms. Margaret Young (Immediate Past Chair, Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) and Founder, Age Knowble, Canada)

Ms. Young presented a global perspective on older persons' human rights, with a particular focus on the development of a UN convention. Drawing on her experience engaging with stakeholders across regions, she emphasized that challenges related to ageing are largely universal, although they manifest differently depending on cultural and socioeconomic contexts.

She highlighted her research on the concept of dignity, conducted with Chinese Canadian older adults. While core elements such as autonomy, access to services, and voice were consistently valued, cultural differences—particularly between individualistic and collectivist societies—played a significant role. Concepts such as intergenerational relationships, community belonging, and mutual respect were especially prominent.

Ms. Young argued that a meaningful and effective convention must be grounded in diversity, incorporating different cultural perspectives into its foundational principles. She emphasized

the importance of general principles, such as “do no harm,” which can guide interpretation and implementation across various contexts, including emerging issues like AI and elder abuse.

She also discussed outcomes from a global workshop on human rights principles for older persons with dementia, where “personhood” emerged as a key principle. This concept emphasizes the preservation of identity and dignity even in the context of cognitive decline.

Regarding the UN process, she explained that the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) is now moving into the drafting phase of the convention. Civil society has been recognized as a central driving force in this process, and participation has been broadened to encourage wider engagement. However, she noted uneven levels of support among member states, highlighting the need for greater advocacy and coordination.

She concluded by stressing that the current stage—focused on conceptual frameworks and general principles—is critical. Establishing inclusive and adaptable principles now will determine the long-term effectiveness of the convention.

DISCUSSION

The final session of the roundtable focused on key cross-cutting issues and future directions for AGAC. The Chair emphasized that this was the most important segment of the meeting, aiming to generate concrete policy ideas and strategic recommendations. The discussion centered on AI, ageism, human rights education, and international cooperation.

AI was identified as a major emerging issue. While it offers opportunities to improve quality of life—such as health monitoring, fall prevention, and social interaction—it also raises concerns related to autonomy, identity, and potential harm. Participants emphasized the need to evaluate AI through a human rights lens rather than purely technological considerations.

The discussion also addressed the UN convention process, with participants noting the transition from exploratory discussions to actual drafting. Civil society was highlighted as a key driver, and the importance of inclusive participation was emphasized.

Ageism emerged as another critical issue, both at individual and structural levels. Participants pointed out that age-based policies and institutional frameworks often reinforce inequality, and that clearer definitions and targeted research are needed to address this problem effectively.

Human rights education for older persons was also discussed. While formal educational materials are important, alternative approaches—such as intergenerational interaction, community engagement, and digital platforms—were suggested as more effective means of raising awareness and fostering mutual understanding.

Finally, the discussion highlighted the importance of international cooperation and policy alignment. Participants noted gaps between regions, particularly in relation to frameworks

such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and called for stronger global coordination.

Overall, the discussion underscored that older persons' human rights represent a complex, multidimensional issue involving technology, labor, welfare, culture, and global governance. A rights-based and integrated approach was widely recognized as essential for addressing these challenges in the context of rapid demographic and technological change.