



ICOLAHR

2027

International Conference on
Loneliness and Human Rights



Programme

International Conference on
**Loneliness and the Human Rights
of Older Persons**



Vienna, 10–12 February 2027



International Conference on Loneliness and the Human Rights of Older Persons

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Provisional Programme

Day 1 | WED, 10th February 2027 – Reception / Arrival of Delegates

14:00

Informal Exchange

Civil Society Dialogue and Bilateral Contacts

This informal session will provide a dedicated space for civil society organisations, advocates and representatives of older persons to exchange experiences, discuss common priorities and strengthen cooperation across countries and sectors. Participants will have the opportunity to share ongoing initiatives, identify common challenges and explore possible joint contributions to the conference discussions and the wider international process on the human rights of older persons.

The session will also allow for bilateral meetings and informal exchanges with representatives of governments, international organisations, academia and other stakeholders. It aims to strengthen civil society networks, facilitate new partnerships and ensure that the perspectives and lived experiences of older persons are meaningfully reflected throughout the conference.

18:00

Registration of participants

Evening reception - Connecting People, Ideas and Institutions

The Welcome Reception will mark the opening of ICOLAHR 2027 and provide an informal setting for participants to meet ahead of the substantive conference programme. Representatives of governments, international organisations, civil society, academia and practice will have the opportunity to exchange perspectives, establish new contacts and reconnect with existing partners.

The reception is intended to create a shared atmosphere of cooperation and to introduce the two closely linked themes of the conference: strengthening social connection and advancing the human rights of older persons. It aims to lay the foundation for open dialogue, cross-sectoral collaboration and constructive engagement throughout the following two conference days.

Day 2 | THU, 11th February 2027 – Loneliness / Main Political Day

9:30 – 12:00 **Opening Session & Political Panel**

Official Opening Session & Keynote Segment

Political Leadership for Social Connection: From Recognition to Action

This high-level panel will explore how governments are responding to loneliness and social isolation as growing societal and political challenges. Ministers and senior representatives will present national approaches, governance models and policy priorities, including measures relating to health, social participation, ageing, community development and social cohesion. Particular attention will be given to the question of how responsibility for social connection can be embedded across different areas of government rather than addressed through isolated initiatives.

The panel aims to identify shared political priorities, highlight promising national approaches and strengthen international cooperation on loneliness and social connection. It should provide political momentum for moving from general recognition of the issue towards coordinated and sustainable government action.

12:00 – 13:00 **Lunch break**

13:10 – 15:00 **Loneliness, an international and national challenge**

Making Loneliness Visible: Evidence, Lived Experience and Unequal Risk

Loneliness and social isolation often remain invisible in public policy, despite their considerable effects on individual well-being, public health and social cohesion. This panel will bring together scientific evidence, available data and the lived realities of affected persons. It will examine how loneliness can be defined and measured, which social and structural factors increase the risk of isolation, and which population groups may be particularly affected.

The discussion will also address gaps in existing data and the need to distinguish between temporary experiences of loneliness and persistent forms of social disconnection. The panel aims to establish a shared understanding of the scale and complexity of the challenge and to identify the evidence and indicators required for effective policy development and monitoring.

Building an Austrian Response: Challenges, Initiatives and Opportunities

Austria already has a broad range of initiatives that contribute to social participation, psychosocial health, volunteering, community development and the prevention of loneliness. This panel will present selected Austrian approaches and examine how existing structures—including the Austrian Platform against

Loneliness, Health Target 5, senior citizens' organisations, voluntary engagement and community-based initiatives—can work together more effectively.

The discussion will focus on existing strengths, remaining gaps and opportunities for stronger institutional coordination. The panel aims to identify the building blocks of a more coherent Austrian approach to loneliness and social connection and to explore how existing activities can be linked within a common strategic framework.

15:05 Coffee Break

15:15 – 17:00 Loneliness and Human Rights of older Persons

From National Strategies to International Action: European and Global Perspectives

A growing number of countries and international organisations have developed strategies, action plans and institutional mechanisms to address loneliness and strengthen social connection. This panel will compare experiences from different national and regional contexts and examine which policy instruments, governance structures and implementation models have proved effective.

Particular attention will be given to political leadership, cross-sectoral coordination, sustainable financing, local implementation, the involvement of civil society and mechanisms for measuring progress. The panel aims to identify transferable lessons and common success factors that can support governments seeking to establish or further develop national responses to loneliness and social isolation.

Loneliness, Social Isolation and Human Rights in Older Age

Loneliness and social isolation are not only health or social policy concerns. They may also reflect barriers to the effective enjoyment of human rights, including the rights to participation, equality and non-discrimination, autonomy, health, social protection, accessible services and inclusion in the community. This panel will examine the structural conditions that can place older persons at greater risk of exclusion, including ageism, poverty, limited mobility, digital exclusion, inadequate support services and changing family or community structures.

The panel aims to develop a clearer rights-based understanding of loneliness and social isolation. It will identify principles that should guide public policy and explore how social connection can be reflected in the ongoing international discussion on stronger human rights protection for older persons.

17:00 Closing of the day

Day 3 | FRI, 12th February 2027 – Human Rights of Older Persons / Expert Day

9:30 – 13:00 **From New York to Geneva and Beyond**
Official Opening Session & Keynote Segment

From New York to Geneva: Building a Legally Binding Instrument for Older Persons

This panel will review the development of the international process from the former Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing in New York to the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Human Rights of Older Persons in Geneva. It will examine why existing international human rights instruments have not provided sufficiently visible, coherent and effective protection for older persons and which normative gaps a new legally binding instrument could address.

Speakers will also consider the political and institutional challenges of the drafting process, the role of states, international organisations, national human rights institutions, civil society and older persons, and the potential impact of a convention at national and international levels. The panel aims to establish a shared assessment of the current stage of the process and identify substantive and procedural priorities for the next phase of negotiations.

Europe's Role: Coordination, Implementation and Momentum for a Legally Binding Instrument

European states and institutions can make an important contribution to the development of international human rights standards for older persons. This panel will examine how national experience, the European human rights framework, the work of the Council of Europe and relevant elements of the EU acquis can inform the emerging legally binding instrument.

The discussion will consider areas of existing convergence, remaining differences between European states and opportunities for more systematic coordination among countries willing to engage constructively in the drafting process. The panel aims to identify practical mechanisms for continued European cooperation, possible joint contributions to the IGWG and priority areas in which European expertise could add value to the future instrument.

13:00 **Lunch with networking opportunity**

14:10 – 15:00 Intersessional Working Session & Conference Conclusion

From Principles to Drafting Priorities: An IGWG Intersessional Dialogue

This focused working session will provide an opportunity for representatives of the IGWG Core Group, participating states, OHCHR, experts, national human rights institutions, civil society and older persons to exchange views on the next phase of the drafting process. The discussion may address the future timetable, consultation and participation modalities, priority thematic areas and the preparation of concrete substantive inputs between formal IGWG sessions.

The session is intended to move beyond a general exchange of positions and support a practical, inclusive and structured intersessional dialogue. Its aim is to identify areas requiring further work, opportunities for cooperation and possible contributions that participating actors can bring into the next stage of the IGWG process.

15:05 Conference conclusion and “Way forward”

The concluding session will bring together the central findings of both substantive conference days. It will reflect on how policies promoting social connection can support the dignity, participation and human rights of older persons and how a human rights-based approach can strengthen national and international responses to loneliness and social isolation.

Key messages, possible areas of follow-up and opportunities for continued cooperation will be identified and highlighted. The session aims to formulate a forward-looking set of priorities for national action on loneliness, international collaboration on social connection and further engagement in the development of a legally binding instrument on the human rights of older persons.

15:15 End of the conference