
PARTICIPATION CHARTER – RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE BASE

Age Action / ISCP Collaboration Project

Supporting Research, Policy Analysis and Source Insights Document

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Table of Contents

1. Purpose of this Document	2
2. Research Methodology and Approach	3
3. How Sources Were Used	4
4. Research Themes Emerging Across Sources	4
5. Source Analysis and Evidence Review	5
5.1 Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report (2025 Consultation Findings)	5
5.2 National Positive Ageing Strategy (Ireland)	9
5.3 Commission on Care for Older People (2024–2026)	13
5.4 Citizens’ Assembly on Ageing (2017)	17
5.5 Public Participation Networks (PPNs)	22
5.6 Age Friendly Ireland / Older People’s Councils	26
5.7 Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)	31
5.8 Social Justice Ireland – Civic Engagement and Participation	36
5.9 Children’s Participation Action Plan (2024–2028)	40
5.10 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – Article 25	45
5.11 WHO Healthy Ageing and Participation Frameworks	48
5.12 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (UN)	53
5.13 European Social Charter – Article 23	58
5.14 Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty	59
6. Cross-Cutting Findings and Emerging Charter Principles	63
6.1 Participation must be meaningful, not tokenistic	64
6.2 Older people must be involved early, not after decisions are shaped	64
6.3 Participation should promote civic engagement, rights and dignity	65
6.4 Lived experience is a valid form of evidence	66
6.5 Participation requires accessibility and inclusion by design	66

6.6 Feedback and visible outcomes are essential.....	67
6.7 Representation must be accountable and transparent	67
6.8 Collaboration strengthens the collective voice of older people.....	68
6.9 Participation should be sustained, not one-off	69
6.10 Participation should influence decisions	70
6.11 Participation should be monitored, reviewed, and improved	71
6.12 Summary of Charter Principles Identified Through the Evidence Review	72
7. Charter Principle Mapping.....	72
7.1 Introduction and Purpose	72
7.2 Why Participation Matters.....	73
7.3 Principles for Participation.....	74
7.4 Practical Application of the Principles	77
7.5 Role of Organisations and the Sector	78
7.6 Looking Ahead.....	78
7.7 Summary Mapping Table	79
8. Charter Development Methodology and Process	80
8.1 Purpose of the Development Process.....	80
8.2 Evidence-Informed Development Approach	81
8.3 Selective Use of Sources	82
8.4 Role of the Steering Group	83
8.5 Charter Development Stages	83
8.6 Methodological Principles for the Charter Development Process	85
8.7 Concluding Observations	86
9. References and Source Links	87

1. Purpose of this Document

This document has been developed as the supporting research and evidence base for the Participation Charter produced through the Age Action / ISCP Collaboration Project.

Its purpose is to:

- consolidate the policy, research, consultation, and participation sources informing the Charter
- identify the most relevant principles, themes, participation models, and good practice approaches emerging across those sources
- explain why each source has been selected and how it contributes to the Charter framework
- provide a structured evidence base explaining and supporting the Charter's development

- provide a reference document demonstrating consistency, transparency and alignment throughout the Charter development process

This document provides a detailed research resource explaining the evidence and sources that informed the development of the Charter.

Unlike the Charter itself, which is concise, practical and accessible, this document provides a more detailed analysis of the evidence base underpinning the work, including:

- contextual analysis
- policy, rights, and equality references
- participation frameworks and models
- source rationale
- links to original materials
- emerging principles and themes

Note on terminology: References to *citizenship* and *active citizenship* throughout this document reflect concepts of civic participation, inclusion, and engagement in society. They are not intended to refer to nationality or legal citizenship status.

2. Research Methodology and Approach

The Participation Charter was developed through a structured and evidence-informed methodology combining:

- lived experience findings from consultation with older people
- Irish policy, equality, and participation frameworks
- rights-based, equality, and international reference points
- practical examples of participation and engagement models
- iterative Steering Group engagement and review

The approach recognises that meaningful participation cannot be built from policy alone. Instead, the Charter combines:

- practical experience
- participation principles
- rights-based and equality-informed approaches
- organisational learning
- accessible implementation guidance

The research process therefore focuses not only on identifying high-level commitments, but also on understanding:

- how participation is currently experienced by older people
- what barriers limit meaningful engagement
- what practical mechanisms support stronger participation
- how organisations can move beyond one-off consultation models

3. How Sources Were Used

The sources included in this document were not applied in full. Instead, each source has been selected for a specific purpose within the Charter framework.

Some sources provide:

- lived experience evidence
- national policy alignment
- legal or rights-based foundations
- equality, inclusion, and accountability frameworks
- practical participation models
- examples of structured engagement
- conceptual frameworks relating to civic engagement and participation

The Charter was not intended to be academic or policy-heavy. Relevant principles, commitments and examples were therefore selected to support a practical and credible participation framework.

The specific sections, themes and principles drawn from each source were refined through Steering Group discussion and the drafting process.

4. Research Themes Emerging Across Sources

The evidence review identifies a number of recurring themes emerging consistently across the evidence base.

These include:

- the importance of meaningful rather than tokenistic participation
- participation as a matter of rights, dignity, and civic engagement
- the importance of involving older people early enough to influence priorities, decisions, and outcomes
- the need for visible outcomes and accountability
- accessibility and inclusion as core participation requirements
- the importance of feedback, communication, and ongoing dialogue
- the role of collaboration and collective voice
- barriers relating to digital exclusion and complexity

- the need for sustained and structured participation mechanisms rather than one-off consultation exercises
- the importance of recognising older people as active citizens and full members of society with meaningful roles in shaping public policy, community life, services, and decision-making

These themes formed the foundation of the Charter principles.

5. Source Analysis and Evidence Review

5.1 Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report (2025 Consultation Findings)

Role in the Charter

Primary lived-experience evidence base

The Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report is the most important foundational source informing the Participation Charter.

Unlike the majority of the other sources referenced in this document, which provide policy frameworks, legal principles, or participation models, this report reflects the direct lived experience and expressed views of older people who participated in the project consultation process.

The consultation engaged 764 older people across Ireland and explored issues relating to participation, representation, engagement, accessibility, and voice. The findings provide a direct evidence base demonstrating both the appetite for participation among older people and the barriers that currently limit meaningful engagement.

As such, this report provides the Charter with legitimacy, grounding the work in the perspectives and expectations of older people themselves rather than relying solely on institutional or policy-based frameworks.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- reflects the direct voice of older people participating in the project
- provides evidence of demand for stronger participation mechanisms
- identifies practical barriers affecting engagement
- captures attitudes towards consultation and representation
- highlights expectations around accountability and responsiveness
- aligns directly with the purpose of the Charter

This source helped ensure that the Charter was developed as a response to identified participation needs rather than as a purely theoretical framework.

Key Findings Relevant to the Charter

1. Desire for Meaningful Participation

The consultation findings indicate that older people want participation processes that are meaningful, relevant, and connected to visible outcomes.

A recurring concern identified through the consultation was the experience of being repeatedly consulted without clear evidence that participation leads to action or change.

This finding strongly supports the need for Charter principles relating to:

- accountability
- transparency
- feedback loops
- visible outcomes

2. Consultation Fatigue

The consultation identified evidence of consultation fatigue, particularly where participation processes are perceived as repetitive, unclear, or disconnected from decision-making.

This is highly relevant to the Charter because it reinforces the importance of:

- purposeful engagement
- clarity of process
- communicating outcomes
- avoiding participation that feels symbolic or tokenistic

3. Accessibility and Digital Exclusion

The consultation identified barriers relating to:

- digital exclusion
- access to information
- accessibility challenges
- confidence and capacity to engage

This finding highlights the importance of designing participation processes that are:

- accessible by default
- available through multiple formats
- inclusive of people with different levels of digital access or confidence

This theme strongly informed the Charter's practical guidance.

4. Stronger Collective Voice

Participants expressed support for stronger collaboration across organisations representing older people.

This finding is particularly important because the Charter itself was developed through a collaborative process between Age Action and ISCP.

This supports Charter principles relating to:

- collaboration
- collective advocacy
- shared participation structures
- coordination across the sector

5. Appetite for Engagement

Importantly, the consultation findings demonstrate that older people do want to engage in public policy discussions when participation is:

- accessible
- respectful
- relevant
- clearly connected to outcomes

This is significant because it reframes older people as active contributors to policy formation rather than passive recipients of services or consultation exercises.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on findings relating to:

- meaningful participation
- accessibility and inclusion
- feedback and accountability
- representation and collaboration
- barriers to participation
- expectations around engagement and responsiveness

These findings informed:

- the rationale for the Charter
- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the core participation principles
- practical guidance for organisations

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Principles identified through this source include:

Participation should be meaningful, not tokenistic

Older people should be engaged in ways that are purposeful, respectful, and connected to real decision-making processes.

Participation processes should include feedback and visible outcomes

People who engage should understand how their participation contributed to decisions, actions, or future work.

Participation must be accessible by design

Engagement should not depend solely on digital access, technical confidence, literacy level, or physical mobility.

Older people should be recognised as active contributors to public policy

Participation should reflect the experience, knowledge, and perspectives of older people as valuable contributions to policy formation.

Collaboration strengthens participation and representation

Representative organisations should work collaboratively where possible to strengthen the collective voice of older people.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To explain why the Charter is needed and how it emerged from direct consultation with older people.

Why Participation Matters

To provide evidence of both appetite for engagement and barriers to participation.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles relating to meaningful engagement, accessibility, feedback, and collaboration.

What This Means in Practice

To support practical guidance on inclusive consultation and participation design.

Source Reference

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report (2025 Consultation Findings)
Internal project consultation findings and participant engagement outputs.

Related supporting outputs:

- Consultation Outcome Letter
- Consultation webpage

- 2025 participation findings summary

Observations

This source remained central throughout the drafting process.

While policy and international frameworks provide legitimacy and structure, this report provides the lived-experience foundation that gives the Charter relevance, authenticity, and credibility.

The Charter is therefore framed not simply as a policy exercise, but as a practical response to the participation needs identified directly by older people through the consultation process.

5.2 National Positive Ageing Strategy (Ireland)

Role in the Charter

National policy alignment and Irish ageing framework

The **National Positive Ageing Strategy** provides the core Irish Government policy framework for ageing and older people. Published by the Department of Health, it sets out Ireland's vision for ageing and older people and provides the national goals and objectives intended to promote positive ageing across Government policy and service delivery. The Government describes it as an overarching cross-departmental policy and a blueprint for age-related policy and service delivery.

For the Participation Charter, this source is important because it provides a national policy foundation for the idea that older people should be supported to participate fully in society. It helps position the Charter not as a new or isolated initiative, but as a practical contribution to an existing national policy direction around inclusion, participation, dignity, and positive ageing.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides the main Irish Government policy framework for ageing
- recognises positive ageing as a cross-government responsibility
- supports the idea that older people should be enabled to participate in social, economic, cultural, community, and family life
- aligns participation with wellbeing, inclusion, independence, and dignity
- provides a national policy basis for the Charter's principles

The strategy is especially useful because it places older people within a broader societal context, rather than treating ageing only as a health or care issue.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Vision for a society for all ages

The strategy's overall vision is highly relevant to the Charter because it frames ageing as a whole-of-society issue. It presents positive ageing as something that requires proper preparation, respect for older people's engagement, and intergenerational solidarity.

This is useful for the Charter's opening rationale because it supports the idea that participation by older people is not a narrow service-user issue, but part of building an inclusive society.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be recognised as active participants in civic, social, cultural, and community life.

2. Participation as part of positive ageing

The National Positive Ageing Strategy draws on the WHO concept of active ageing, which includes participation, health, and security. This is useful because it connects participation directly to wellbeing and healthy ageing, rather than treating consultation as an optional add-on.

This supports the Charter's argument that meaningful participation is part of what enables people to age well.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be understood as part of wellbeing, dignity, and positive ageing.

3. Cross-government and cross-sector responsibility

The strategy is described as an overarching cross-departmental policy framework for age-related policy and service delivery. This is important for the Charter because participation cannot sit with one organisation or one consultation process only.

This informed the Charter's recognition that meaningful participation requires shared responsibility across public bodies, representative organisations, community structures and the wider age sector.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be embedded across systems and organisations, not limited to one-off consultation exercises.

4. Engagement in community and civic life

The strategy supports older people's engagement in community, cultural, social, family, and wider public life. This is directly relevant to the Charter's focus on strengthening the voice of older people in public policy formation.

The Charter draws on this as national policy support for ensuring older people are not only recipients of services, but contributors to policy, advocacy, and community decision-making.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people's knowledge, experience, and civic contribution should be valued in decision-making.

5. Link to measurement and evidence through HaPAI

The Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative was established to monitor changes in older people's health and wellbeing linked to the goals and objectives of the National Positive Ageing Strategy. This is useful because it reinforces the importance of evidence, measurement, and monitoring, which can inform how the Charter addresses accountability and visible outcomes.

This informed the Charter's emphasis on feedback, evaluation and evidence-informed participation.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation processes should include mechanisms to monitor whether engagement is meaningful and whether outcomes are communicated.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- the strategy's national vision for positive ageing
- its emphasis on participation, inclusion, and engagement
- its framing of ageing as a cross-government and cross-sector issue
- its connection between participation, wellbeing, and dignity
- its emphasis on evidence and monitoring through the Healthy and Positive Ageing Initiative

These elements informed:

- the "Why Participation Matters" section
- the policy rationale for the Charter
- principles relating to inclusion, dignity, and civic participation
- the section on the role of organisations and the wider sector

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation is part of positive ageing

Participation should be recognised as central to wellbeing, dignity, inclusion, and ageing well.

Older people are active civic contributors

Older people should be engaged as contributors to public policy, community life, advocacy, and decision-making, not only as users of services.

Participation requires shared responsibility

Public bodies, representative organisations, community structures, and the wider age sector all have a role in enabling meaningful participation.

Participation should be embedded, not occasional

Engagement with older people should be planned, structured, and sustained rather than limited to isolated consultations.

Participation should be evidence-informed and accountable

Participation processes should include feedback, monitoring, and learning so that people can see how their contribution has been used.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To position the Charter as aligned with Ireland's national positive ageing policy framework.

Why Participation Matters

To connect participation with positive ageing, wellbeing, dignity, inclusion, and civic contribution.

Principles for Participation

To support principles relating to participation as part of ageing well, shared responsibility, and inclusion.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To reinforce that participation is a cross-sector responsibility and requires collaboration between organisations.

Source Reference

Department of Health, National Positive Ageing Strategy

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/national-positive-ageing-strategy/>

Observations

The National Positive Ageing Strategy serves as a national policy anchor, rather than as the main source of practical participation methodology.

Its value lies in providing legitimacy and alignment: it demonstrates that participation, inclusion, dignity, and engagement are already part of Ireland's stated approach to positive ageing. However, the Charter translates these high-level commitments into more practical principles and actions.

For that reason, this source is best used to support the **policy rationale** and **overall legitimacy** of the Charter, while other sources, such as PPR, PPNs, Age Friendly Ireland, and the Children's Participation Action Plan, provided more direct guidance on practical participation mechanisms.

5.3 Commission on Care for Older People (2024–2026)

Role in the Charter

Current policy context and formal engagement model

The **Commission on Care for Older People** is a current Irish Government process established to examine health and social care services and supports for older people across the continuum of care and to make recommendations for their strategic development. Its work is supported by a cross-departmental group considering wider supports for positive ageing across the life course.

For the Participation Charter, this source is relevant because it demonstrates that older people's needs, services, and supports are currently under active national review. It also provides an example of how Government-led processes can include structured stakeholder engagement through a formal Reference Group.

However, the Commission's contribution to the Charter is deliberately limited. Its primary focus is care and support systems, not a broader participation framework for older people in public policy formation. For that reason, its role in the Charter is to provide current policy context and to inform principles around structured engagement, lived experience and representation.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- is a current Irish Government process directly concerned with older people
- demonstrates active national policy attention to ageing, care, and supports
- includes a formal Reference Group with civil society, stakeholder, and lived-experience involvement
- shows how structured engagement can be built into a national policy process
- supports the need for older people and representative organisations to have a clear role in shaping policy

The Commission is particularly useful because it shows that participation and consultation are not abstract concepts. They are already being used in current national policy development, although not always in a way that fully answers the need for broader participation principles.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Establishment of a national review process on older people's care and supports

The Commission is charged with examining health and social care services and supports for older people and making recommendations to Government. This gives the Charter an important current policy context: older people's needs are being reviewed at national level, but the question remains how older people themselves and their representative organisations are meaningfully involved in shaping that agenda.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should have meaningful opportunities to influence policy processes that directly affect their lives.

2. Reference Group as a structured engagement mechanism

The Terms of Reference for the Commission commit to establishing a **Reference Group of non-governmental and civil society organisations and other key stakeholders, including those with lived experience**, to engage in an advisory capacity with the Commission and the Cross-Departmental Group.

This is highly relevant to the Charter because it provides a concrete example of a formal participation structure. It demonstrates that stakeholder and lived-experience input can be built into national policy processes, rather than treated as an afterthought.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be structured, resourced, and built into policy processes from the outset.

3. Communication pathway between the Commission and wider society

The Reference Group is described as providing a **communication pathway between the Commission and wider society**.

This concept is particularly useful for the Charter because it aligns closely with the role of representative organisations. Age-sector organisations can function as bridges between older people, public bodies, policymakers, and wider society, but this role needs clarity, trust, and accountability.

Relevant Charter principle:

Representative organisations should act as trusted bridges between older people and decision-making structures, with clear feedback mechanisms.

4. Plenary meetings and thematic focus groups

The Reference Group's work is advanced through bi-annual national plenary meetings and thematic focus groups, with reports prepared for the Commission.

This is useful because it shows that participation can involve different levels of engagement. Not all participation has to be one format or one event. A combination of plenary meetings, focused discussions, and written reporting can support a more layered participation model.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should use appropriate and varied methods, depending on the purpose, audience, and decision being shaped.

5. Civil society and lived experience within policy development

The Reference Group includes organisations from the community, voluntary, advocacy, health, care, disability, and older persons sectors. The official material also notes the inclusion of stakeholders with lived experience.

This informed the distinction between:

- organisational representation
- lived experience participation
- expert or professional input

All three have value, but they are not the same. A strong participation process should be clear about whose voice is being represented and how input is gathered, validated, and fed back.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be transparent about who is represented, how views are gathered, and how lived experience is reflected.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- the Commission as an example of a current national policy process affecting older people
- the Reference Group model as an example of structured stakeholder engagement
- the inclusion of civil society and lived experience as part of policy development
- the idea of creating a communication pathway between formal policy structures and wider society
- the use of plenary meetings, thematic focus groups, and reporting as layered participation methods

These elements informed:

- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the “Role of Organisations and the Sector” section
- principles relating to structured engagement, representation, feedback, and accountability
- practical guidance on participation mechanisms

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation should be built into policy processes from the outset

Older people and their representative organisations should be involved early, rather than only after policy options have already been developed.

Participation should include both representative organisations and lived experience

Good participation should recognise the distinct but complementary roles of organisations, experts, advocates, and older people directly affected by policy decisions.

Participation needs clear structures and communication pathways

Engagement should be organised through transparent mechanisms that connect people's experiences to decision-making processes.

Participation should use layered methods

Different formats, such as meetings, focus groups, surveys, workshops, and written submissions, may be needed to capture diverse perspectives.

Participation should include feedback and reporting

Where people or organisations contribute to formal policy processes, there should be clear reporting on what was heard and how it informed the outcome.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To demonstrate that older people's issues are currently under active national consideration and that participation in shaping policy is timely and relevant.

Why Participation Matters

To show that structured engagement with older people and civil society is already recognised within national policy processes.

Principles for Participation

To support principles on early involvement, structured engagement, representation, feedback, and transparency.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To inform the role of age-sector organisations as bridges between older people, policymakers, and wider society.

What This Means in Practice

To draw on examples such as reference groups, thematic focus groups, communication pathways, and reporting mechanisms.

Source Reference

Department of Health, Commission on Care for Older People

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/about-the-commission-on-care-for-older-people/>

Department of Health, Reference Group – Commission on Care for Older People

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/reference-group-commission-on-care-for-older-people/>

Observations

The Commission on Care for Older People serves as a **current Irish policy context source** and as an example of a formal engagement structure, rather than as a direct model for the Charter.

Its strongest contribution is the Reference Group model, particularly the inclusion of civil society organisations, stakeholders, and lived experience. This supports the Charter’s argument that meaningful participation requires structure, communication pathways, and clear mechanisms for feeding lived experience into decision-making.

The Charter builds beyond the Commission by applying these ideas more broadly to public policy formation and age-sector advocacy, not only to care and support services.

5.4 Citizens’ Assembly on Ageing (2017)

Role in the Charter

Democratic legitimacy and public mandate for stronger voice

The **Citizens’ Assembly on “How We Best Respond to the Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population”** provides an important democratic reference point for the Participation Charter. The Assembly considered ageing across two weekends in June and July 2017, supported by expert input, public submissions, deliberation, and formal voting by Assembly members. Its final report includes a set of recommendations relating to long-term care, pensions, and member-generated proposals.

For the Charter, the Citizens’ Assembly is useful because it demonstrates that the need to strengthen the voice, rights, and participation of older people has already been recognised through a formal national deliberative process. It also provides a democratic precedent for structured public participation in complex policy issues.

However, this source was used selectively. Most of the Assembly’s recommendations focus on care, pensions, services, and supports rather than participation in public policy formation more broadly. The most directly relevant recommendation is **Recommendation 16c**, which calls for steps to ensure that older people have a stronger voice in determining their own care needs. This does not fully match the broader aim of the Charter, but it provides an important starting point.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides a nationally recognised democratic process on ageing
- demonstrates public support for strengthening the voice of older people
- includes a specific recommendation relating to older people having a stronger voice
- reinforces the importance of dignity, care, inclusion, leadership, and representation
- provides a precedent for deliberative public engagement on ageing policy

The Citizens’ Assembly is particularly valuable because it helps show that the Charter is not emerging in isolation. It builds on existing national discussions about ageing, representation, and participation.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Recommendation 16c: stronger voice in determining care needs

The most directly relevant recommendation is **R16c**, where Assembly members recommended that steps should be taken to ensure that older people have a stronger voice in determining their own care needs.

This is narrower than the Charter’s intended scope, which is focused on participation in public policy formation and age-sector advocacy. However, it is still highly relevant because it establishes a clear principle: older people should not be passive recipients of decisions made about them. They should have a voice in shaping decisions that affect their lives.

Relevant	Charter	principle:
		Older people should have a meaningful voice in decisions that affect their lives, services, rights, and communities.

2. Recommendation 16b: dedicated point of contact and information access

The Assembly also recommended a dedicated point of contact for older people to access information about services, supports, and entitlements, supported by a national awareness campaign.

This is relevant to the Charter because access to information is a precondition for participation. People cannot participate meaningfully if they do not know what is available, how decisions are made, or where to engage.

This can support Charter content on:

- clear communication
- accessible information
- signposting
- trusted channels
- reducing complexity

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation requires clear, accessible, and trusted information.

3. Recommendation 16a and 16d: leadership and responsibility

Recommendations relating to a dedicated Minister of State for Older People and stronger governmental leadership are relevant because they point to the need for clear responsibility in ageing policy.

For the Charter, these recommendations can support the argument that participation should not be fragmented, informal, or dependent on individual goodwill. It should be built into systems with clear ownership, leadership, and accountability.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be supported by clear leadership, responsibility, and accountability.

4. Deliberative model of the Citizens' Assembly itself

The Assembly's process is also relevant as a participation model. The final report describes the Assembly's use of public proceedings, expert advisory input, public submissions, member deliberation, and structured voting.

This is useful for the Charter because it shows that meaningful participation on complex topics requires:

- preparation
- accessible information
- expert input
- facilitated discussion
- time for deliberation
- transparent recommendations

The Charter draws on this approach without copying the Citizens' Assembly model, recognising that participation is strongest when people are supported to engage thoughtfully rather than simply asked for quick opinions.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be supported by time, information, facilitation, and clear decision pathways.

5. Public submissions and direct testimony

The Assembly process included public submissions and direct testimony from people affected by the issues being considered. The final report notes that members heard directly from people with personal experience of care and caring.

This supports a key principle for the Charter: lived experience should be valued alongside professional, organisational, and expert input.

Relevant Charter principle:

Lived experience should be treated as a legitimate and necessary form of evidence.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- Recommendation 16c on strengthening older people's voice in decisions affecting them
- Recommendation 16b on access to information and supports
- recommendations on leadership and responsibility in ageing policy
- the Assembly's deliberative model as an example of structured participation
- the inclusion of public submissions and direct testimony as evidence of lived experience

These elements informed:

- the "Why Participation Matters" section
- principles relating to voice, information, accountability, and lived experience
- practical guidance on how participation should be structured
- the role of representative organisations in supporting older people to engage meaningfully

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Older people should have a stronger voice in decisions that affect them

Participation should apply not only to service delivery, but to policy, advocacy, rights, and wider decision-making.

Information is a condition of participation

Older people need clear, accessible, and trusted information in order to participate meaningfully.

Lived experience is evidence

The knowledge and experience of older people should be treated as a valid source of insight in policy development.

Participation requires structure and support

Good participation should include information, facilitation, preparation, time for reflection, and clear links to outcomes.

Accountability and leadership matter

Participation should be supported by clear responsibility, leadership, and feedback mechanisms.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To demonstrate that the need for stronger voice and participation by older people has already been recognised in national deliberative processes.

Why Participation Matters

To support the argument that older people should not simply be consulted, but should have a stronger voice in decisions affecting their lives.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles on meaningful voice, information, lived experience, deliberation, and accountability.

What This Means in Practice

To draw on the Assembly model as an example of structured, informed, facilitated participation.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To support the role of age-sector organisations in helping older people access information, understand policy issues, and engage with decision-making structures.

Source Reference

Citizens' Assembly, Final Report on How We Best Respond to the Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population

<https://citizensassembly.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Final-Report-on-Older-People-Incl-Appendix-A-D.pdf>

Observations

The Citizens' Assembly serves as a **supporting democratic legitimacy source**, not as the main foundation for the Charter.

Its strongest contribution is the recognition that older people should have a stronger voice in decisions affecting them, particularly through Recommendation 16c. However, because this recommendation focuses specifically on care needs, the Charter broadens the principle carefully to public policy formation, advocacy, representation, and participation across issues affecting older people.

The Assembly's process is also valuable. It demonstrates that meaningful participation requires structure, information, facilitation, deliberation, and transparency. These process elements can help shape the Charter's practical guidance, especially around how organisations should design participation activities that are more meaningful than one-off consultation exercises.

5.5 Public Participation Networks (PPNs)

Role in the Charter

Existing local participation structure and practical model for representation

Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are an established participation structure in Ireland, operating in each local authority area. They bring together community and voluntary, environmental, and social inclusion groups and provide a formal route for community voices to engage with local government decision-making. The Department of Rural and Community Development describes PPNs as structures that give citizens a greater say in local government decisions affecting their own communities and allow diverse views and interests to be considered as part of local decision-making.

For the Participation Charter, PPNs are useful because they show that participation infrastructure already exists in Ireland. The Charter does not need to propose participation from a blank page. Instead, it can encourage older people and age-sector organisations to use, strengthen, and influence existing structures where appropriate.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides an existing Irish model of structured public participation
- links local communities to local authority decision-making
- includes representation mechanisms through committees and boards

- demonstrates how participation can be organised through community networks
- offers a practical route for older people and age-sector organisations to influence local policy

PPNs are particularly relevant because they represent a bridge between grassroots community experience and formal local decision-making. This is directly aligned with the Charter's aim of strengthening older people's participation in public policy formation.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. PPNs as formal local participation structures

The Department of Rural and Community Development states that a PPN is a structure that brings together community and voluntary, environmental, and social inclusion groups in each local authority area.

This is relevant because it gives the Charter a concrete example of participation architecture already operating in Ireland. It also shows that participation can be organised collectively through groups rather than only through individual consultation.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should build on existing structures where possible, while ensuring those structures are accessible and responsive to older people.

2. PPNs as a route into local government decision-making

PPNs are designed to give citizens and community groups a greater say in local government decisions affecting their communities. The Department notes that they strengthen democracy by allowing diverse views and interests to be considered in local government decision-making.

This is important for the Charter because it demonstrates that participation is not only about gathering opinions. It is about creating routes into decision-making structures.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should connect older people's views to real decision-making channels.

3. Representation through local authority boards and committees

PPNs nominate and elect community representatives to local authority committees and boards. Government material notes that where local authorities require community representatives to sit on boards or committees, they must source these representatives from the PPN.

This is relevant because it shows a practical representative model. For the Charter, it raises useful questions about how older people are represented in existing structures, how mandates are gathered, and how representatives report back to the communities they represent.

Relevant Charter principle:

Representation should include clear mandates, accountability, and feedback to the people represented.

4. PPNs as a mechanism for community and voluntary expertise

The Department describes PPNs as the “go to” structure for local authorities wishing to benefit from community and voluntary expertise in their area.

This is especially relevant for the Charter because older people and age-sector organisations hold substantial lived, community, and organisational expertise. The Charter can use this idea to position older people’s experience not simply as “feedback”, but as a form of expertise that should inform policy.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people’s lived experience and community knowledge should be recognised as expertise.

5. Review and strengthening of PPN structures

The publication of the independent review of PPN structures in 2022 is also useful. The review was intended to assess how PPNs were operating against their objectives, identify opportunities for strengthening them, and highlight good practice that could be replicated across the network.

This is useful for the Charter because it shows that participation structures require review, support, and improvement. It reinforces that creating a structure is not enough. Participation mechanisms must remain accessible, effective, representative, and accountable.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation structures should be reviewed and improved over time.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- PPNs as an existing Irish participation infrastructure
- their role in linking community groups to local authority decision-making
- the representative model of nomination to boards and committees
- the principle that community and voluntary expertise should inform decisions
- the need for feedback, mandates, and accountability in representative participation

These elements informed:

- the “Role of Organisations and the Sector” section
- practical guidance on using existing participation structures
- principles relating to representation, accountability, and feedback

- discussion of how older people can influence local decision-making

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation should connect to existing decision-making structures

Participation should not sit outside the system. It should link older people and their representative organisations to real local, regional, and national decision-making channels.

Older people's experience is community expertise

The knowledge and lived experience of older people should be recognised as valuable community expertise.

Representation must be accountable

Where organisations or individuals represent older people, there should be clear processes for gathering views, reporting back, and maintaining trust.

Participation should build on existing structures

The Charter should encourage use of existing structures such as PPNs where they are relevant, while also identifying where older people may need stronger support to engage effectively.

Participation structures require ongoing review

Participation mechanisms should be monitored and improved to ensure they remain inclusive, accessible, and meaningful.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To show that Ireland already has participation structures that can be strengthened and made more accessible to older people.

Why Participation Matters

To demonstrate that public participation is a recognised part of local democracy and community decision-making.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles on connection to decision-making, representation, accountability, and community expertise.

What This Means in Practice

To include practical guidance on participation routes, mandates, feedback loops, and use of existing structures.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To clarify how age-sector organisations can support older people to engage with PPNs and other local structures, and how they can help ensure older people's voices are not diluted or sidelined.

Source Reference

Department of Rural and Community Development, Public Participation Networks

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-rural-and-community-development-and-the-gaeltacht/policy-information/public-participation-networks/>

Department of Rural and Community Development, Public Participation Networks User Guide

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-rural-and-community-development-and-the-gaeltacht/publications/public-participation-networks-user-guide/>

Department of Rural and Community Development, Independent Review of Public Participation Network Structures

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-rural-and-community-development-and-the-gaeltacht/press-releases/minister-joe-obrien-announces-publication-of-independent-report-reviewing-public-participation-network-structures-2/>

Observations

PPNs serve as a practical Irish participation model, especially for the Charter sections dealing with representation, local structures, accountability, and feedback.

They are not older-people-specific, so they should not be presented as a complete solution for older people's participation. However, they are highly useful because they show that Ireland already has formal participation infrastructure that can be used or strengthened.

For the Charter, the strongest argument is that older people and age-sector organisations should not always need to create new structures from scratch. Where appropriate, they should be supported to engage effectively with existing structures, while also identifying where those structures may need to become more accessible, visible, and responsive to older people.

5.6 Age Friendly Ireland / Older People's Councils

Role in the Charter

Practical participation model and existing older people's voice infrastructure

Age Friendly Ireland and **Older People's Councils** provide one of the most directly relevant Irish practice models for the Participation Charter.

Age Friendly Ireland supports local authorities and communities to prepare for population ageing by addressing environmental, social, economic, and service factors that influence the health and wellbeing of older adults. Local Age Friendly programmes include mechanisms for older people to participate in shaping age-friendly strategies, services, and local priorities.

Older People's Councils are particularly important because they are established in every local authority area under the local Age Friendly Programme. They are representative groups of older people designed to bring the voice of older people into local government and to inform public and private service provision.

For the Charter, this source is valuable because it demonstrates that older people's participation can be structured, representative, local, and connected to decision-making processes.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides an existing Irish model specifically focused on older people's participation
- demonstrates how older people can identify priorities and influence local strategies
- includes representative structures through Older People's Councils
- connects older people's voices to Age Friendly Alliances and local authority processes
- provides practical examples of co-design, consultation, monitoring, and feedback
- aligns strongly with WHO age-friendly principles and Ireland's National Positive Ageing Strategy

Unlike more general participation sources, this one is directly concerned with older people and therefore has strong relevance to the Charter.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Older People's Councils as representative structures

Age Friendly Ireland describes Older People's Councils as representative groups of older people established in every local authority area under the local Age Friendly Programme. Their purpose is to bring older people's voices into local government and help inform public and private service provision.

This is highly relevant to the Charter because it provides an existing model of structured participation by older people. It also reinforces the importance of representative mechanisms that are not occasional or informal, but embedded within wider local structures.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people's participation should be structured, representative, and connected to decision-making processes.

2. Identifying priorities and influencing local strategies

Older People's Councils identify priority areas, raise issues of importance, and inform local Age Friendly strategies. Age Friendly Ireland's guidance describes their role in identifying priority areas of need, raising issues, and informing and influencing the decision-making process of the local Age Friendly Programme.

This is important because the Charter should not frame older people as passive respondents to consultations. Instead, older people should help identify priorities from the outset.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be involved in setting agendas, not only responding to pre-selected questions.

3. Co-designing solutions to barriers and challenges

Age Friendly Ireland describes one of the key roles of Older People's Council members as co-designing solutions in response to barriers and challenges facing older people.

This is directly relevant to the Charter's aim of moving beyond consultation towards meaningful participation. Co-design implies shared problem-solving and practical influence, not simply the collection of views.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should include opportunities for older people to shape solutions, not only describe problems.

4. Monitoring implementation of strategies

Older People's Councils provide a citizen or service-user perspective in monitoring the implementation of Age Friendly strategies.

This is particularly important for the Charter because it connects participation to accountability. Older people are not only involved at the beginning of a process, but can also play a role in monitoring whether agreed actions are delivered.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should include feedback, monitoring, and accountability after decisions are made.

5. Two-tier membership and elected Executive Committees

Older People's Councils operate as two-tier structures, with a wide membership base and an elected Executive Committee. Members may include individual older people and older people's groups, including active retirement groups, people with dementia, people living in residential care, and people of different ethnicities. Executive Committee members are elected by the full membership every two years.

This is useful because it provides a practical model for representation, diversity, and internal accountability.

Relevant Charter principle:

Representative participation should be transparent, inclusive, and accountable to a wider base.

6. National Network of Older People's Councils

Each local Older People's Council nominates a representative to the National Network of Older People's Councils, which meets three times annually to discuss policy issues of national significance and work in partnership to resolve issues that cannot be resolved locally.

This is highly relevant because it shows how local voices can be escalated to national policy discussion. For the Charter, this supports a principle around connecting local experience to national advocacy.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should create pathways from local experience to national policy influence.

7. Age Friendly Alliances and multi-agency accountability

The Older People's Council Guide explains that Age Friendly programmes include two key pieces of infrastructure: the Age Friendly Alliance and the Older People's Council. The Alliance is a high-level cross-sector group, often chaired by the local authority Chief Executive, whose member agencies form a strategic partnership to develop and oversee the Age Friendly strategy.

This provides a valuable example of multi-agency collaboration, where older people's voices are linked to organisations with responsibility for implementation.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be connected to organisations with the authority and responsibility to act.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- the structure and role of Older People's Councils
- the connection between local voice and local authority decision-making
- co-design as a stronger form of participation
- monitoring and accountability as part of participation
- representative structures, including broad membership and elected committees
- the escalation of local issues through the National Network of Older People's Councils
- the relationship between Older People's Councils and Age Friendly Alliances

These elements informed:

- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the “Principles for Participation” section
- the “What This Means in Practice” section
- the “Role of Organisations and the Sector” section

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Older people should help set the agenda

Participation should involve older people in identifying priorities, not only responding to topics chosen by organisations or decision-makers.

Participation should support co-design

Older people should be involved in shaping solutions to the barriers and challenges they identify.

Participation should be representative and accountable

Structures should be clear about who is represented, how representatives are selected, and how they report back.

Participation should include implementation and monitoring

Older people should have opportunities to monitor progress and hold systems accountable after consultation takes place.

Local voices should influence national policy

Participation mechanisms should create pathways for local experience to inform wider advocacy and national policy discussions.

Participation should connect to structures with authority to act

Older people’s voices should be linked to decision-making bodies, implementation structures, and organisations with responsibility for change.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To show that Ireland already has established older people’s participation structures that can inform the Charter.

Why Participation Matters

To demonstrate that older people’s voices can shape local strategies, services, and wider policy issues.

Principles for Participation

To support principles around co-design, representation, accountability, agenda-setting, and local-to-national voice.

What This Means in Practice

To provide concrete examples of participation structures such as Older People's Councils, Executive Committees, Age Friendly Alliances, and monitoring roles.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To clarify how organisations can support older people's participation through existing structures and ensure that local voices inform wider advocacy.

Source Reference

Age Friendly Ireland, Older People's Council

<https://agefriendlyireland.ie/older-peoples-council/>

Age Friendly Ireland, Older People's Council Guidelines

<https://agefriendlyireland.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/AFI-OPC-Guidelines.pdf>

Age Friendly Ireland, Older People's Council Guide

https://www.dublincity.ie/sites/default/files/media/file-uploads/2018-07/online_OPc-GUIDE.pdf

Observations

Age Friendly Ireland and Older People's Councils represent one of the strongest practical models for the Charter. They are directly relevant because they already provide structured participation mechanisms for older people in Ireland.

However, they should not be presented as the complete answer. Their strongest contribution is as a model of how participation can be structured locally, linked to decision-making, and connected to monitoring and accountability.

For the Charter, the key opportunity is to build on this model and extend its principles into wider age-sector advocacy and public policy participation. The Charter draws from Older People's Councils while also addressing gaps identified in the consultation, including consultation fatigue, digital exclusion, visibility of outcomes, and the need for stronger collective voice.

5.7 Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)

Role in the Charter

Rights-based participation model and accountability framework

Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) provides a strong rights-based participation model that is particularly useful for the Charter because it moves beyond consultation and focuses on

empowering people to organise, define priorities, gather evidence, and hold decision-makers accountable.

PPR describes itself as a human rights NGO that works to turn international human rights standards into grassroots tools for social, economic, and environmental change. Its approach is especially relevant because it supports communities to assert their right to participate in decisions that affect their lives and to challenge decision-making practices that exclude them.

For the Participation Charter, PPR is useful as a model for translating lived experience into practical action. It supports the shift from “consulting people” to creating conditions where people can organise, identify demands, monitor progress, and seek accountability.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides a rights-based model for participation and community empowerment
- demonstrates how lived experience can be translated into practical indicators and demands
- connects participation with accountability and measurable change
- challenges exclusionary decision-making practices
- supports a move from passive consultation to active participation and organising

PPR is particularly valuable because it frames participation as something people do **with power and purpose**, not simply as something organisations invite them into.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Turning rights into practical tools

PPR’s stated purpose is to turn international human rights standards into grassroots tools for change. This is directly relevant to the Charter because the Charter should not simply reference rights at a high level. It should translate rights into practical organisational behaviours and commitments.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation rights should be translated into practical actions, commitments, and accountability mechanisms.

2. Participation in decisions that affect people’s lives

PPR’s model is grounded in the right of people and communities to participate in government decisions that affect their lives. This aligns closely with the purpose of the Charter, which is to

strengthen older people's participation in public policy formation through and with representative organisations.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should have a meaningful role in shaping decisions that affect their lives, rights, services, and communities.

3. Challenging exclusionary decision-making

PPR focuses on challenging government decision-making practices that exclude affected communities and can lead to poor service delivery, entrenched inequalities, and ineffective use of public money. This is relevant because the Charter should not only encourage participation in a general sense; it should address the consequences of weak participation.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should address exclusion and improve the quality, fairness, and effectiveness of decisions.

4. Community-led evidence and indicators

PPR's approach is associated with the use of human rights indicators and community-generated evidence. External analysis of PPR describes how rights-based monitoring and indicators can help people use qualitative and quantitative information to claim their rights.

This is useful for the Charter because it reinforces the importance of moving from general statements to evidence-based accountability. Older people's organisations could use indicators to track whether participation processes are meaningful, accessible, representative, and followed by feedback.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be supported by evidence, monitoring, and measurable commitments.

5. Organising, strategy, and grassroots monitoring

Commentary on PPR's model describes an approach involving organising, evidence gathering, strategy building, media work, grassroots monitoring, and legal and policy support.

This is relevant because it shows participation as an active process rather than a one-off event. For the Charter, this supports a broader understanding of participation that includes preparation, collective voice, evidence gathering, advocacy, and follow-up.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be part of an ongoing cycle of organising, evidence, advocacy, and accountability.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- PPR’s rights-based approach to participation
- the idea of translating human rights into practical tools
- the importance of affected communities participating in decisions that affect their lives
- the use of community-generated evidence and indicators
- the link between participation, accountability, and measurable change
- the shift from consultation to organised collective voice

These elements informed:

- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the core principles around meaningful participation and accountability
- practical guidance on moving beyond consultation
- possible indicators or prompts for assessing whether participation is meaningful

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation should be rights-based

Participation should be framed as part of dignity, equality, and rights, not simply as organisational good practice.

Participation should create power, not only feedback

Older people should be supported to influence decisions, shape priorities, and make collective demands where appropriate.

Lived experience should be translated into evidence

The experiences of older people should be documented, analysed, and used to inform advocacy and policy.

Participation should include accountability

Decision-makers and organisations should be clear about what they heard, what they will do, and how progress will be monitored.

Participation should move from consultation to organised voice

Participation should support older people to develop collective priorities and influence systems, rather than simply respond to questions.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To position the Charter as a practical rights-based tool, not simply a consultation statement.

Why Participation Matters

To explain that meaningful participation improves decisions, challenges exclusion, and strengthens accountability.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles relating to rights, accountability, evidence, and organised voice.

What This Means in Practice

To suggest practical mechanisms such as community-generated evidence, indicators, monitoring, and feedback loops.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To clarify how age-sector organisations can support older people to move from being consulted to being organised, heard, and influential.

Source Reference

Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR), About Us

<https://www.nlb.ie/about>

PPR written submission to the Northern Ireland Assembly

<https://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/ofmdfm/inquiries/building-a-united-community/written-submissions/participation-and-practice-of-rights1.pdf>

Atlantic Philanthropies, Indicators: Essential Tools in the Realization of Human Rights

<https://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/news/essential-tools-realization-human-rights>

Observations

PPR serves as a **methodological and rights-based participation model**, not as an older-people-specific policy source.

Its strongest contribution is the idea that participation must be connected to power, evidence, demands, and accountability. This is highly relevant to the Charter because one of the central issues identified through the project is that older people do not only want to be consulted; they want their participation to matter and to lead to visible outcomes.

For the Charter, PPR helps frame participation as an active process: identifying issues, gathering evidence, shaping demands, engaging decision-makers, and monitoring change. This can help ensure the Charter does not become a soft statement of values, but a practical framework for meaningful participation.

5.8 Social Justice Ireland – Civic Engagement and Participation

Role in the Charter

Conceptual and policy rationale for participation as active citizenship

Social Justice Ireland’s work on civic engagement and participation provides an important conceptual foundation for the Participation Charter. It frames participation as a core element of active citizenship and argues that people should have a meaningful say in shaping the society they live in and the decisions that affect them.

For the Charter, this source is useful because it helps move the argument beyond consultation as a service-design exercise. It supports the broader principle that older people’s participation is part of citizenship, democracy, and social justice. This is particularly important because the Charter is not only about improving engagement methods but about strengthening the role of older people in public policy formation.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides a broad Irish social policy rationale for participation
- connects participation with civic engagement and democratic life
- argues that participation means more than voting
- supports deliberative, evidence-based decision-making involving stakeholders
- links participation to the idea of a fairer and more inclusive social contract

This source is useful because it helps articulate why participation by older people matters not only for age-sector advocacy, but for the quality and legitimacy of public decision-making.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Participation as more than voting

Social Justice Ireland argues that real participation involves more than voting in elections and referenda. It includes the right to participate in shaping society and decisions that affect people’s lives.

This is directly relevant to the Charter. Older people’s participation should not be reduced to electoral participation or occasional consultation. The Charter can frame participation as an ongoing part of active citizenship.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions beyond elections and one-off consultations.

2. Participation in shaping society and decisions

Social Justice Ireland states that everyone should have the right to participate in shaping the society in which they live and the decisions that impact on them.

This provides a strong conceptual anchor for the Charter's rights and dignity framing. It reinforces the idea that older people should not only be consulted when policies are already designed, but involved in shaping priorities, decisions, and solutions.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should enable older people to influence the issues, decisions, and structures that affect their lives.

3. Deliberative and evidence-based decision-making

Social Justice Ireland calls for a deliberative decision-making process involving stakeholders and grounded in reasoned, evidence-based debate.

This is useful for the Charter because it supports participation that is thoughtful, structured, informed, and connected to evidence. It strengthens the case for moving beyond simple surveys towards processes that include discussion, reflection, and accountability.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be informed, deliberative, and supported by evidence.

4. Participation as essential to a new social contract

Social Justice Ireland links participation to the need for a new social contract, arguing that public policy should deliver a vibrant economy, decent infrastructure and services, just taxation, good governance, and sustainability.

For the Charter, this is relevant because ageing policy is not isolated from wider social policy. Older people's participation should be seen as part of the broader democratic and social contract between the State, communities, and citizens.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people's participation should be recognised as part of a fair and inclusive social contract.

5. Contribution to the common good

Social Justice Ireland describes the social contract as involving citizens contributing to the common good, whether economically, socially, or culturally, with the expectation that the State protects basic rights and provides essential services and infrastructure.

This is useful because it counters a deficit-based framing of older people. The Charter draws on this to position older people as contributors to the common good, not only recipients of support.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be recognised as contributors to society and the common good.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- participation as a core element of civic engagement
- the idea that participation means more than voting
- the right to shape society and decisions that affect one's life
- the importance of deliberative and evidence-based decision-making
- the concept of a social contract grounded in good governance, services, rights, and sustainability

These elements informed:

- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the rights and civic engagement rationale of the Charter
- principles relating to meaningful participation, dignity, and democratic inclusion
- the section on older people as active contributors to public policy and society

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation is part of citizenship (civic engagement)

Older people's participation should be understood as part of active citizenship, not as a discretionary consultation exercise.

Participation goes beyond voting

Older people should have opportunities to influence policy, services, advocacy, and community decisions between electoral cycles.

Participation should shape society and decisions

Older people should be involved in shaping the issues and structures that affect their lives.

Participation should be deliberative and evidence-informed

Good participation requires time, information, evidence, dialogue, and reasoned debate.

Older people contribute to the common good

Older people should be recognised as contributors to society, communities, knowledge, and public life.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To position the Charter within a broader civic engagement and social justice rationale.

Why Participation Matters

To argue that older people's participation is essential to democratic life, not only to service improvement.

Principles for Participation

To support principles on active citizenship, deliberation, voice, and influence.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To frame representative organisations as enabling older people's active citizenship and contribution to public policy.

Implications for the Charter

To connect the Charter to wider ideas of good governance, social contract, and collective responsibility.

Source Reference

Social Justice Ireland, Citizenship and Participation

<https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/citizenship-and-participation>

Social Justice Ireland, A New Social Contract is Needed

<https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/new-social-contract-needed>

Observations

Social Justice Ireland serves as a **conceptual and policy rationale source**, rather than a practical implementation model.

Its strongest contribution is the idea that participation is central to citizenship (civic engagement) and democratic life. This helps the Charter avoid becoming a narrow consultation guide and instead positions it as part of a wider commitment to inclusion, good governance, and social justice.

For the Charter, this source is especially useful in the opening rationale and “Why Participation Matters” section, where it can support the argument that older people’s participation is not simply beneficial, but necessary for fair and legitimate public decision-making.

5.9 Children’s Participation Action Plan (2024–2028)

Role in the Charter

Comparative national participation model and practical policy precedent

The **Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making: Action Plan 2024–2028** provides a highly relevant comparative model for the Participation Charter. It is the second Irish Government national plan to support children and young people’s participation in decision-making and builds on the first National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020.

For the Charter, this source is valuable because it shows that the Irish State has already developed a dedicated participation framework for one population group. While older people’s participation requires a different approach, the existence of this Action Plan provides a useful precedent: participation can be formally recognised, resourced, supported through national infrastructure, and embedded across sectors.

This source was used carefully. The Charter does not imply that children’s participation and older people’s participation are identical. Instead, it draws selectively from the Action Plan’s structure, methodology and implementation model to demonstrate what a dedicated participation framework can look like.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides a current Irish Government example of a dedicated participation policy framework
- recognises participation as a right and a policy priority
- shows how participation can be supported across Government, services, communities, and organisations
- includes structures, resources, training, practice supports, and implementation mechanisms
- provides useful comparative leverage for the absence of an equivalent participation action plan for older people

The source is particularly useful because it demonstrates that participation requires more than a statement of principle. It requires supports, structures, capacity-building, and implementation pathways.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Participation as a right and policy priority

The Action Plan is grounded in the right of children and young people to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives. The Government states that the Plan aims to promote their inclusion in decision-making at all levels, including in the home, school, community, and national level.

For the Charter, this provides a strong comparative policy point: participation can and should be recognised as a structured policy priority, not simply as optional good practice.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should have meaningful opportunities to participate in decisions that affect their lives, communities, services, and rights.

2. Embedding participation across Government and sectors

The Action Plan is designed to drive the development of participation structures and practice at local, national, and international level, among organisations, sectors, practitioners, Government departments, and agencies.

This is highly relevant for the Charter because older people's participation also cannot sit within one organisation or one consultation mechanism. It requires cross-sector ownership and practice change.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be embedded across organisations, services, advocacy structures, and public decision-making systems.

3. National infrastructure and specialist support

The Action Plan is supported by structures such as **Hub na nÓg**, the national centre of excellence on child and youth participation, and the National Participation Office. These provide expertise, training, practical assistance, and methodological support for involving children and young people in decision-making.

For the Charter, this is one of the most important elements. It shows that meaningful participation requires capacity-building and support, not just goodwill. While the Charter may not establish an equivalent hub, it can make the case for participation support, guidance, training, and shared practice across the age sector.

Relevant Charter principle:

Organisations need guidance, skills, and practical supports to enable meaningful participation.

4. National Participation Framework and practical tools

The Government's youth participation policy ecosystem includes a National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making, which provides tools and guidance to Government, State agencies, and non-governmental organisations to improve practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making.

This is directly relevant to the Charter's intended practical function. The Charter can act as a first step towards a similar practical framework for older people, setting out principles and guidance for organisations.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be supported by practical tools, guidance, and shared standards.

5. Participation in evaluation and monitoring

The Government states that the successful implementation of the Action Plan will result not only in children and young people's views informing policy, services, legislation, and research, but also in their views being sought in evaluation and monitoring of relevant services and policies.

This is highly relevant to older people's participation because it reinforces that participation should not end once a consultation closes. People should also have a role in reviewing whether services, policies, or commitments are working in practice.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should include follow-up, evaluation, and monitoring, not only initial consultation.

6. Inclusion of seldom-heard and vulnerable groups

The Action Plan includes commitments to establishing and improving mechanisms to ensure the participation of seldom-heard and vulnerable children and young people.

For the Charter, this is very relevant to older people who may face digital exclusion, disability, isolation, language barriers, transport barriers, low confidence, or limited access to representative structures.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should proactively include people who are least likely to be heard.

7. Data, monitoring, and evaluation of participation initiatives

The Action Plan includes collection of data, monitoring, and evaluation of participation initiatives as one of its fundamental principles.

This strongly supports a Charter principle around accountability and learning. If participation is to be meaningful, organisations should be able to assess who was engaged, who was missed, what was heard, and what changed.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation processes should be monitored, evaluated, and improved over time.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- the Action Plan as an Irish precedent for a dedicated participation framework
- its recognition of participation as a right and policy priority
- its use of support structures such as Hub na nÓg and the National Participation Office
- the National Participation Framework as an example of practical tools and guidance
- the emphasis on embedding participation across Government, agencies, sectors, and organisations
- inclusion of seldom-heard groups
- monitoring and evaluation of participation initiatives

These elements informed:

- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the “Role of Organisations and the Sector” section
- principles relating to inclusion, capacity-building, evaluation, and structured practice
- the “What This Means in Practice” section

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation should be recognised as a structured policy priority

Older people’s participation should not depend on occasional consultation or individual organisational goodwill.

Participation requires infrastructure and support

Meaningful participation needs guidance, skills, training, tools, and shared standards.

Participation should be embedded across systems

Older people’s voices should be included across public policy, services, advocacy, research, monitoring, and evaluation.

Participation should include seldom-heard voices

Organisations should proactively design engagement to reach older people who are less likely to participate through standard channels.

Participation should be monitored and improved

Organisations should collect learning from participation processes and improve practice over time.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To explain that Ireland already has a national participation model for another population group and that the Charter can begin to articulate an equivalent standard for older people.

Why Participation Matters

To support the argument that participation is a recognised right and policy priority.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles around inclusion, infrastructure, capacity, monitoring, and evaluation.

What This Means in Practice

To draw on the model of practical supports, participation frameworks, training, and tools.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To support the case for a shared age-sector approach to participation standards and practice.

Implications for the Charter

To position the Charter as a possible first step towards wider participation infrastructure for older people.

Source Reference

Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024–2028

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/participation-of-children-and-young-people-in-decision-making-action-plan-2024-2028/>

Department of Children, Disability and Equality, Youth Participation

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/policy-information/youth-participation/>

Hub na nÓg, Participation of Children and Young People in Decision-making Action Plan 2024–2028

<https://hubnanog.ie/participation-of-children-and-young-people-in-decision-making-action-plan-2024-2028/>

Observations

The Children’s Participation Action Plan serves as a **comparative policy model**, not as a direct template.

Its strongest contribution is that it demonstrates how participation can be formalised through a national framework, supported by structures, training, tools, monitoring, and cross-sector implementation. This is directly relevant to the Participation Charter because no equivalent participation action plan currently exists for older people.

For the Charter, this source can help make the case that older people's participation also requires structure, resources, and shared standards. It can support a strong argument that participation should not be treated as a one-off consultation activity, but as an embedded practice across organisations and policy systems.

5.10 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – Article 25

Role in the Charter

Rights-based legal foundation

Article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights provides a concise but important rights-based foundation for the Participation Charter. It states that the European Union recognises and respects the rights of older people to lead a life of **dignity and independence** and to **participate in social and cultural life**.

For the Charter, this source is valuable because it establishes participation as part of a recognised rights framework. It connects participation with dignity, independence, inclusion, and social belonging. While Article 25 is brief and not a practical methodology, it gives the Charter a strong legal and rights-based anchor.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- explicitly recognises the rights of older people
- links dignity, independence, and participation
- provides a European rights-based foundation for the Charter
- supports the argument that participation is not merely organisational good practice
- strengthens the Charter's legitimacy beyond national policy

Article 25 is especially useful because it helps frame the Charter as part of a broader rights-based approach to ageing.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Dignity

Article 25 recognises older people's right to lead a life of dignity.

This is directly relevant to the Charter because participation is closely linked to dignity. People are treated with dignity when their experience, knowledge, and views are respected and taken seriously.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should respect the dignity, experience, and contribution of older people.

2. Independence

Article 25 also recognises the right of older people to independence.

For the Charter, this supports the argument that older people should not be positioned as passive recipients of decisions made by others. Independence includes having a say in the services, supports, policies, and environments that shape everyday life.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be supported to influence decisions that affect their independence and autonomy.

3. Participation in social and cultural life

Article 25 specifically recognises participation in social and cultural life.

Although the wording does not explicitly mention participation in political or public policy decision-making, it is still relevant to the Charter because it establishes participation as part of the rights of older people. The Charter can build on this by applying the principle of participation to advocacy, consultation, and public policy formation.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be understood broadly, including social, cultural, civic, community, and policy participation.

4. Participation as part of inclusion

The Charter's recognition of participation alongside dignity and independence reinforces the idea that inclusion is not passive. Older people should be enabled to remain visible, active, and influential in society.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should support inclusion and prevent marginalisation.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- Article 25's recognition of older people's dignity
- Article 25's recognition of independence

- Article 25's recognition of participation
- the connection between rights, inclusion, and participation

These elements informed:

- the Charter's rights-based rationale
- the "Why Participation Matters" section
- principles relating to dignity, independence, inclusion, and voice
- the framing of participation as more than a discretionary consultation practice

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation is connected to dignity

Older people should be engaged in ways that respect their knowledge, experience, identity, and contribution.

Participation supports independence

Older people should have meaningful opportunities to influence decisions affecting their autonomy and everyday lives.

Participation is part of inclusion

Older people should be supported to remain active, visible, and connected in society.

Participation should be understood broadly

The Charter should recognise social, cultural, civic, community, and policy participation as connected dimensions of voice and inclusion.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To establish the Charter's rights-based foundation.

Why Participation Matters

To connect participation with dignity, independence, and inclusion.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles relating to dignity, autonomy, participation, and respect.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To reinforce the responsibility of organisations to uphold older people's right to meaningful participation.

Source Reference

EU Charter of Fundamental Rights – Article 25: The rights of the elderly

<https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/25-rights-elderly>

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, full text

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>

Observations

Article 25 should be used as a **rights-based anchor**, not as a detailed participation model.

Its strongest contribution is the link it makes between dignity, independence, and participation. This helps position the Charter as a rights-informed document rather than simply a good-practice guide.

However, because Article 25 refers specifically to participation in social and cultural life, the Charter should avoid overstating it as a direct legal basis for public policy participation. Instead, it should use Article 25 as a foundation and then connect it with other sources that more directly address civic participation, consultation, advocacy, and decision-making.

5.11 WHO Healthy Ageing and Participation Frameworks

Role in the Charter

International best practice and healthy ageing framework

The **WHO Healthy Ageing and Participation Frameworks**, particularly the **UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030**, provide an important international reference point for the Participation Charter. The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing is the current global framework for coordinated action on ageing and is led by WHO in collaboration with UN partners. It is described as ten years of concerted, catalytic, sustained collaboration to improve the lives of older people, their families, and communities.

For the Charter, this source is useful because it places older people at the centre of healthy ageing and emphasises dignity, autonomy, participation, age-friendly environments, and collaboration across sectors. It helps position participation not as an optional engagement activity, but as part of what enables people to age well and continue doing what they value.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides the current global framework for healthy ageing
- recognises ageing as a whole-of-society issue
- places older people, their families, and communities at the centre of action
- links participation with dignity, autonomy, wellbeing, and age-friendly environments
- supports collaboration between governments, civil society, communities, academia, professionals, media, and the private sector
- provides internationally recognised best practice that can strengthen the Charter's legitimacy

This source is particularly useful because it connects participation to the wider conditions that enable older people to live well, remain included, and continue contributing to their communities.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Older people at the centre of healthy ageing

The UN Decade of Healthy Ageing Plan of Action states that older people themselves will be at the centre of the plan, alongside governments, civil society, international agencies, professionals, academia, the media, and the private sector.

This is directly relevant to the Charter because it reinforces that older people should not be treated as passive beneficiaries of ageing policy. They should be active participants in shaping the policies, services, environments, and advocacy that affect their lives.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be central to decisions, policies, and advocacy that affect their lives.

2. Age-friendly environments

WHO describes age-friendly environments as places where people can grow, live, work, play, and age, and where social determinants of healthy ageing are addressed so people can continue doing the things they value and live dignified lives.

This is highly relevant to the Charter because participation depends on enabling environments. People cannot participate meaningfully if communication, transport, digital systems, venues, information, or processes exclude them.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be supported by environments, systems, and processes that remove barriers and enable involvement.

3. Participation as part of wellbeing and functional ability

WHO's healthy ageing approach is grounded in enabling older people to maintain functional ability, autonomy, and wellbeing. The Decade's baseline report describes healthy ageing as rights-based,

whole-of-society, and enabling older people to have a central role, including decision-making about their own lives.

For the Charter, this supports the argument that participation is not only about consultation. It is connected to autonomy, wellbeing, dignity, and the ability to remain active in society.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should support autonomy, wellbeing, dignity, and the ability to continue contributing to society.

4. Collaboration across sectors

The Decade of Healthy Ageing is described as a global collaboration bringing together diverse sectors and stakeholders to improve the lives of older people.

This is directly relevant to the Charter because the project itself is built on collaboration between Age Action and ISCP, with potential wider sector involvement. WHO's framing supports the idea that meaningful participation requires collaboration across organisations and systems.

Relevant Charter principle:

Strengthening older people's participation requires collaboration across organisations, sectors, and levels of decision-making.

5. Four action areas of the UN Decade

The Decade focuses on four action areas:

- changing how we think, feel, and act towards age and ageing
- ensuring communities foster the abilities of older people
- delivering person-centred integrated care and primary health services
- providing access to long-term care for older people who need it

These action areas are relevant because they show that participation is connected to wider structural issues, including ageism, environments, services, and care systems.

For the Charter, this supports a broad view of participation that includes challenging ageism, enabling civic participation, and involving older people in shaping systems.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should challenge ageism and recognise older people's rights, capacities, and contributions.

6. Data, evidence, and visibility

The Decade baseline report notes that lack of data on healthy ageing and older age groups increases the invisibility of older people, and calls for better information that captures what older people value and can do.

This strongly connects to the Charter because one of the purposes of participation is to make older people's experiences visible in policy and advocacy. Participation should therefore generate evidence that reflects what older people value, experience, and prioritise.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should make older people's experiences visible and generate evidence that can inform decisions.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing as the current global framework for ageing
- the principle that older people should be at the centre of healthy ageing action
- the concept of age-friendly environments as enabling conditions for participation
- participation as connected to autonomy, dignity, wellbeing, and functional ability
- cross-sector collaboration as essential to improving the lives of older people
- the need to challenge ageism and increase visibility of older people's experiences

These elements informed:

- the "Why Participation Matters" section
- principles relating to inclusion, dignity, autonomy, accessibility, and collaboration
- the "What This Means in Practice" section, especially around removing barriers to engagement
- the "Role of Organisations and the Sector" section

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Older people should be at the centre

Participation should place older people at the centre of decisions, policies, advocacy, and environments that affect them.

Participation requires enabling environments

Organisations should remove practical, social, digital, informational, and physical barriers to participation.

Participation supports dignity and autonomy

Meaningful participation is connected to older people's ability to live with dignity, independence, autonomy, and wellbeing.

Participation should challenge ageism

Participation should be designed in ways that recognise older people's capacities, rights, knowledge, and contribution.

Participation requires collaboration

No single organisation can deliver meaningful participation alone. Participation requires collaboration across organisations, communities, services, and decision-making systems.

Participation should make older people visible in evidence

Older people's experiences, priorities, and values should be captured and used to inform policy, advocacy, and service development.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To position the Charter within the current global movement towards healthy ageing and age-friendly societies.

Why Participation Matters

To connect participation with healthy ageing, dignity, autonomy, wellbeing, and visibility.

Principles for Participation

To support principles on centrality of older people, inclusion, dignity, ageism, collaboration, and enabling environments.

What This Means in Practice

To inform practical guidance on accessibility, communication, digital inclusion, physical access, and barrier removal.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To reinforce the need for cross-sector collaboration and shared responsibility in enabling participation.

Source Reference

WHO, UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030

<https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>

UN Decade of Healthy Ageing: Plan of Action 2021–2030

<https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/decade-of-healthy-ageing/decade-proposal-final-apr2020-en.pdf>

Observations

The WHO Healthy Ageing and Participation Frameworks serve as an international best-practice anchor, with the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing as the main source.

Its strongest contribution is the connection it makes between participation, dignity, autonomy, enabling environments, and healthy ageing. This helps ensure the Charter is not framed only as a consultation tool, but as part of a broader approach to ageing well, inclusion, and social participation.

For the Charter, WHO's framework is especially useful in supporting principles around accessibility, barrier removal, age-friendly environments, collaboration, and the central role of older people in shaping the systems and decisions that affect their lives.

5.12 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (UN)

Role in the Charter

Global policy foundation for ageing, participation and empowerment

The **Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA)** was adopted in **2002** at the **Second World Assembly on Ageing**. It remains the main global policy framework on population ageing and provides a long-term international foundation for how governments and societies should respond to ageing.

For the Participation Charter, MIPAA is useful because it recognises older people as active participants in society and not simply as recipients of care or support. Its strongest contribution is its emphasis on **empowerment, full participation, development, dignity, inclusion and societies for all ages**.

Because it is an older framework, it does not serve as the main practical model for the Charter. Instead, it provides a global policy anchor, supporting the wider legitimacy of older people's participation in public life, policy development and community decision-making.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- remains the key global policy framework on ageing
- recognises older people as contributors to society and development
- links ageing policy to participation, empowerment and inclusion
- supports the idea of building “a society for all ages”
- provides international legitimacy for participation as part of ageing policy

- reinforces the importance of involving older people in decisions that affect them

MIPAA is particularly useful because it places older people within social, economic and civic development, rather than viewing ageing only through the lens of health, dependency or care.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Empowerment and full participation

MIPAA states that the **empowerment of older persons and the promotion of their full participation are essential elements for active ageing**. This is one of the strongest lines for the Charter because it directly supports the idea that participation is not optional or symbolic. It is central to active ageing and to the role of older people in society.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be empowered to participate fully in decisions, advocacy and public life.

2. A society for all ages

MIPAA was developed to promote the development of a **society for all ages** and to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the 21st century.

This is highly relevant to the Charter because it supports the idea that older people's participation is not a niche issue. It is part of building inclusive systems, communities and public policy structures that work across the life course.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should support a society for all ages, where older people remain visible, valued and influential.

3. Older persons and development

One of MIPAA's three priority directions is **older persons and development**. The Plan recognises that older people contribute to social and economic development and should be included in development policy.

This is useful for the Charter because it challenges the idea that older people are only service users. Instead, it supports a strengths-based approach, recognising older people as contributors to communities, policy, advocacy and public life.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should be recognised as contributors to social, civic and community development.

4. Enabling and supportive environments

Another priority direction of MIPAA is **ensuring enabling and supportive environments**.

This is directly relevant because participation depends on conditions that make engagement possible. The Charter can use this to support principles around accessibility, information, transport, digital inclusion, confidence, community supports and practical participation design.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be enabled through accessible, supportive and inclusive environments.

5. Mainstreaming ageing into policy

MIPAA calls for ageing to be mainstreamed across policy areas and recognises that population ageing should be considered across development, social and economic policy.

This is relevant to the Charter because older people's participation should not be confined to "older people's issues" narrowly defined. Older people should have a voice across wider public policy areas, including housing, transport, digital services, health, social protection, local development, climate, community infrastructure and public services.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people's participation should be embedded across policy areas, not limited to age-specific services.

6. Review, monitoring and implementation

MIPAA includes a strong emphasis on review and appraisal. Later UN material notes that systematic review of MIPAA implementation is considered essential to improving the quality of life of older persons.

This is useful for the Charter because it reinforces the importance of follow-up, monitoring and accountability. Participation should not end with consultation. It should include mechanisms to review implementation and communicate outcomes.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should include follow-up, monitoring and accountability.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- MIPAA's emphasis on empowerment and full participation
- the concept of building a society for all ages
- the recognition of older people as contributors to development
- the importance of enabling and supportive environments
- the need to mainstream ageing across policy areas
- the value of review, monitoring and accountability

These elements informed:

- the “Why Participation Matters” section
- the rights and global-policy rationale of the Charter
- principles relating to empowerment, inclusion, contribution and accessibility
- the “Role of Organisations and the Sector” section
- practical guidance on follow-up and accountability

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation should be empowering

Older people should be supported to influence decisions and shape policy, not simply provide feedback.

Older people are contributors to society

The Charter should recognise older people as active contributors to communities, public life, advocacy and development.

Participation should support a society for all ages

Participation should help build systems and communities where people of all ages are valued and included.

Participation requires enabling environments

Organisations should remove practical, digital, social, informational and structural barriers to engagement.

Older people’s voice should be mainstreamed across policy

Older people should have opportunities to contribute to a wide range of policy areas, not only care or ageing-specific topics.

Participation requires follow-up and accountability

Engagement should include review, monitoring, reporting back and evidence of how input has been used.

Contemporary International Developments

Recent international developments also indicate growing recognition of the need to strengthen the visibility and participation of older people within policy and rights frameworks. In 2025, the United Nations established the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Human Rights of Older Persons (IGWG), reflecting increasing international discussion around the rights, dignity, inclusion, and participation of older people in public life and decision-making.

While the Participation Charter is not intended as a legal rights instrument, these developments reinforce the importance of ensuring that older people are visible, heard, and meaningfully involved in decisions affecting their lives and communities.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Introduction and Purpose

To position the Charter within a global commitment to active ageing, empowerment and full participation.

Why Participation Matters

To support the argument that older people's participation is part of inclusion, development and a society for all ages.

Principles for Participation

To inform principles relating to empowerment, contribution, enabling environments and accountability.

What This Means in Practice

To support guidance on removing barriers, designing enabling participation processes and ensuring follow-up.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To reinforce the role of representative organisations in mainstreaming older people's voices across policy areas.

Implications for the Charter

To connect the Charter to longer-term international commitments on ageing and participation.

Source Reference

United Nations, Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002

<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/MIPAA/political-declaration-en.pdf>

UN ESCAP, Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002 and the 2030 Agenda

https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/event-documents/MIPAA_2022_IGM.3_2_E.pdf

Observations

The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing serves as a global policy foundation, rather than as an operational guide.

Its strongest value is that it provides an internationally recognised framework that explicitly connects ageing with empowerment, full participation, development and enabling environments. It helps the Charter sit within a wider global policy tradition that sees older people as active contributors to society.

However, because it was adopted in 2002, it was not used as a standalone source. It was considered alongside more current sources, such as the WHO UN Decade of Healthy Ageing, the Commission on Care for Older People and the Children's Participation Action Plan. This gives the Charter both historical legitimacy and contemporary relevance.

5.13 European Social Charter – Article 23

Role in the Charter

Participation, inclusion, and older people as full members of society

Article 23 of the European Social Charter provides an additional European framework relevant to participation, dignity, inclusion, and the role of older people within society. While the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights establishes broad principles relating to dignity and participation, Article 23 of the European Social Charter is particularly useful because it places stronger emphasis on enabling older people to remain full members of society.

The Charter states that older persons should have opportunities to remain active participants in community life and should not experience exclusion, isolation, or marginalisation on the basis of age.

For the Participation Charter, this framework is useful because it reinforces the idea that participation is not limited to consultation exercises alone, but forms part of wider citizenship, inclusion, representation, and democratic participation.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- reinforces the principle of older people as full members of society
- supports participation, inclusion, dignity, and visibility
- complements Article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights
- strengthens the wider European rights and participation context of the Charter
- aligns closely with the themes emerging from the consultation findings and evidence review

Key Themes Relevant to the Charter

The sections considered most relevant to the Participation Charter include:

- participation in community and public life

- protection from social exclusion and marginalisation
- dignity, independence, and inclusion
- enabling older people to remain active members of society
- support structures that enable participation and engagement

Contribution to the Charter

This framework strengthens:

- the civic engagement and inclusion framing of the Charter
- principles relating to participation and visibility
- the idea that older people should remain active participants in decisions affecting their lives and communities
- the wider European context underpinning the Charter

Source Reference

Council of Europe – European Social Charter (Revised), Article 23

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-social-charter>

5.14 Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 and the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

Role in the Charter

Irish legislative framework supporting equality, inclusion, participation, and accountability

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 established the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) and introduced the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, commonly referred to as the Public Sector Duty.

The Duty places a statutory obligation on public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment, and protect the human rights of those affected by their policies, services, and decisions.

For the Participation Charter, this source is relevant because it provides an Irish legislative context that reinforces the importance of inclusion, accountability, dignity, equality, and meaningful engagement with people affected by public decision-making. While the Act does not prescribe specific participation mechanisms, it supports many of the principles underpinning the Charter, particularly those relating to inclusion, transparency, representation, and responsiveness.

Why This Source Was Selected

This source was selected because it:

- provides an Irish legislative framework relating to equality and human rights
- establishes obligations on public bodies to consider the rights and experiences of people affected by their decisions
- reinforces the importance of inclusion, accessibility, and non-discrimination
- supports accountability and transparency in public decision-making
- strengthens the national rights-based context underpinning participation
- complements existing policy and participation frameworks included within this review

The Act is particularly useful because it demonstrates that participation, inclusion, and respect for human rights are not solely matters of organisational good practice but are also linked to broader public responsibilities and governance standards.

Key Findings and Sections Relevant to the Charter

1. Equality and Human Rights as Public Responsibilities

The Public Sector Duty requires public bodies to assess, address, and report on equality and human rights issues relevant to their functions.

This is relevant because meaningful participation is strengthened when organisations actively consider whose voices are being heard, whose voices may be absent, and how barriers to participation can be addressed.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be inclusive, equitable, and designed to remove barriers to engagement.

2. Consideration of People Affected by Decisions

The Act encourages public bodies to consider the impact of policies, services, and decisions on those affected by them.

This aligns closely with the Charter's focus on ensuring that older people have opportunities to contribute to discussions and decisions that affect their lives, communities, services, and wellbeing.

Relevant Charter principle:

Older people should have meaningful opportunities to contribute to decisions that affect them.

3. Promotion of Equality of Opportunity

The Duty requires public bodies to promote equality of opportunity and treatment across a range of groups and circumstances.

This is relevant because participation processes can unintentionally exclude people through barriers relating to communication, accessibility, digital access, confidence, mobility, language, literacy, or other factors.

The Charter draws on this principle to reinforce the importance of designing participation opportunities that are accessible and inclusive from the outset.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be accessible by design and responsive to diverse needs and circumstances.

4. Accountability and Transparency

The Public Sector Duty requires public bodies to assess, address, and report on equality and human rights considerations within their work.

This is particularly relevant because one of the strongest themes emerging from the consultation process was the desire for participation to lead to visible outcomes, clear communication, and meaningful feedback.

The Charter draws on this principle by emphasising accountability, transparency, and reporting as essential elements of meaningful participation.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation processes should include clear feedback, accountability, and visible outcomes.

5. Dignity, Respect, and Human Rights

The Act reflects a broader commitment to protecting human dignity and respecting the rights of all individuals.

For the Charter, this reinforces the idea that participation is not solely about improving decisions. It is also about recognising older people as equal citizens whose experiences, perspectives, and contributions have value.

Relevant Charter principle:

Participation should be grounded in dignity, respect, equality, and recognition of older people as active citizens.

Specific Areas Used in the Charter

The Charter drew particularly on:

- the principles of equality, dignity, and human rights
- the importance of inclusion and non-discrimination
- the need to identify and remove barriers to participation
- accountability and transparency in decision-making processes

- recognition of the perspectives and experiences of those affected by decisions
- organisational responsibility for creating meaningful opportunities for engagement

These elements informed:

- the "Why Participation Matters" section
- principles relating to inclusion and accessibility
- principles relating to accountability and feedback
- discussion of participation as civic engagement and voice
- practical guidance for organisations seeking to strengthen participation

Emerging Charter Principles from this Source

Participation should be inclusive and equitable

Participation opportunities should be designed to include people with different experiences, needs, backgrounds, and circumstances.

Participation should be accessible by design

Organisations should actively identify and reduce barriers that may prevent people from participating.

Participation should respect dignity and human rights

Older people should be recognised as equal citizens whose experiences and perspectives deserve consideration and respect.

Participation should include accountability and transparency

People should understand how their contributions have informed decisions and what actions have resulted from engagement processes.

Participation should influence decisions that affect people's lives

Those affected by policies, services, and decisions should have opportunities to contribute to their development and review.

Application Within the Charter Structure

Why Participation Matters

To strengthen the Charter's rights, dignity, equality, and inclusion rationale.

Principles for Participation

To support principles relating to inclusion, accessibility, accountability, and civic engagement.

What This Means in Practice

To reinforce the importance of identifying barriers, supporting inclusion, and communicating outcomes.

Role of Organisations and the Sector

To emphasise organisational responsibility for creating meaningful and equitable participation opportunities.

Source Reference

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC)

Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

<https://www.ihrec.ie>

<https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

Observations

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 serves as a supporting legislative and policy context, rather than as a detailed participation framework.

Its strongest contribution is reinforcing the principles of equality, dignity, inclusion, accountability, and respect for the voices of those affected by public decisions. These themes align strongly with the findings of the consultation and complement the wider national and international frameworks reviewed within this document.

For the Charter, the Act provides additional Irish context supporting the principle that meaningful participation should be inclusive, accessible, transparent, and connected to decision-making processes that affect people's lives.

6. Cross-Cutting Findings and Emerging Charter Principles

This section brings together the key findings emerging across the evidence base reviewed in Section 5.

While each source has a distinct role, several common themes recur across the consultation findings, Irish policy frameworks, participation models, rights-based sources, and international ageing frameworks. These themes provide the foundation for the Participation Charter and help translate the research into practical principles.

The principles below represent the core ideas identified through the evidence review and subsequently reflected in the final Charter.

6.1 Participation must be meaningful, not tokenistic

A central theme across the evidence base is that participation must go beyond symbolic consultation.

The Age Action / ISCP consultation findings indicate that older people want to be included in ways that matter, not simply asked for views without clear follow-up. This is reinforced by rights-based and participation models such as PPR, which emphasise that participation should lead to influence, accountability, and practical change.

The Charter should therefore make a clear distinction between:

- asking for views
- listening meaningfully
- using what is heard
- communicating what happens next

Participation should be designed with a clear purpose, a defined connection to decision-making, and an honest explanation of what can and cannot be influenced. Meaningful participation also supports the recognition of older people as active citizens and full members of society, rather than passive recipients of services or policy decisions.

Emerging Charter Principle:

Older people should be engaged in ways that are meaningful, purposeful, and connected to real decision-making processes.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Be clear from the outset about the purpose of participation.
- Explain what decisions participants can influence.
- Avoid consultation where no action, response, or learning is possible.
- Make participation part of decision-making, not a separate symbolic exercise.

6.2 Older people must be involved early, not after decisions are shaped

Several sources highlight the importance of involving people before decisions have already been made.

The Commission on Care for Older People, the Citizens' Assembly model, PPR, and the Children's Participation Action Plan all support the idea that participation should be structured into processes early enough to shape priorities, options, and outcomes.

This is particularly important for older people, who are often consulted after policy directions, service changes, or advocacy priorities have already been largely defined.

The Charter should therefore promote participation at the earliest possible stage.

Emerging Charter Principle:

Older people should be involved early enough to shape priorities, options, and decisions.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Involve older people before priorities are finalised.
- Avoid presenting pre-decided options as consultation.
- Allow space for older people to identify issues themselves.
- Build participation into planning stages, not only review stages.

6.3 Participation should promote civic engagement, rights and dignity

Across the evidence reviewed, participation is consistently linked to civic engagement, rights, dignity, equality, inclusion, and the ability of people to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Several sources emphasise that older people should be recognised as active citizens and contributors to society, with valuable knowledge, experience, and perspectives. Participation is therefore not simply about improving policies or services; it is also about recognising the right of older people to be heard, respected, included, and involved in public life.

The evidence suggests that meaningful participation is strongest when it is grounded in respect for human rights, equality of opportunity, inclusion, and recognition of older people as full members of society.

The evidence also suggests that participation should be understood as both a right and a practical means through which older people can contribute to public life, influence decisions, and exercise active citizenship.

This theme reinforces the importance of designing participation processes that value lived experience, remove barriers to engagement, and create opportunities for older people to contribute to decisions that affect their communities, services, rights, and wellbeing.

Key Implications for the Charter:

- participation should recognise older people as active citizens and contributors
- participation should be grounded in dignity, equality, inclusion, and respect
- organisations should create opportunities for older people to influence decisions affecting their lives
- participation should support both individual voice and collective representation

6.4 Lived experience is a valid form of evidence

Across the evidence base, lived experience emerges as a critical source of knowledge.

The evidence also suggests that lived experience should not be viewed as separate from, or secondary to, professional, academic, or policy expertise. Rather, meaningful participation brings different forms of knowledge together, recognising that people directly affected by policies, services, and decisions can provide insights that may not otherwise be captured through research, data, or organisational perspectives alone.

The Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report provides the strongest evidence for this Charter because it is grounded in the voices of older people themselves. The Commission on Care for Older People also recognises lived experience within its Reference Group model, while PPR emphasises community-generated evidence as a basis for rights-based change.

The Charter should explicitly recognise lived experience as evidence, alongside policy research, professional expertise, organisational knowledge, and statistical data.

Emerging Charter Principle:

The lived experience of older people should be recognised as a valid and necessary form of evidence in policy and advocacy.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Treat lived experience as evidence, not anecdote.
- Combine lived experience with policy and data analysis.
- Use consultation findings to shape advocacy priorities.
- Avoid extracting stories without linking them to action or influence.

6.5 Participation requires accessibility and inclusion by design

Accessibility and inclusion are recurring themes across the evidence base. The Age Action / ISCP consultation findings identified barriers such as digital exclusion, accessibility challenges, and confidence in participation, while WHO healthy ageing frameworks, Age Friendly Ireland, Older People's Councils, PPNs, the Children's Participation Action Plan, and the Irish Human Rights and Equality framework all reinforce the importance of designing participation processes that are genuinely inclusive.

This means accessibility cannot be an afterthought. Participation should be planned from the beginning to accommodate different needs, preferences, abilities, locations, and levels of digital access. The evidence also highlights the importance of actively seeking out and supporting the participation of people whose voices may be underrepresented or less frequently heard. Inclusive participation is not achieved simply by creating opportunities and waiting for people to engage. It often requires organisations to identify barriers, build trust, adapt approaches, and take proactive

steps to ensure that diverse experiences and perspectives are reflected within participation processes.

Emerging Charter Principle:

Participation should be accessible and inclusive by design.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Use plain English.
- Offer digital and non-digital participation options.
- Provide accessible venues, times, formats, and materials.
- Consider transport, mobility, sensory, language, literacy, and confidence barriers.
- Proactively reach people who are least likely to participate through standard channels.

6.6 Feedback and visible outcomes are essential

One of the strongest messages from the consultation findings is the frustration caused when people are consulted but do not see what happens afterwards.

This links directly to consultation fatigue. If older people are repeatedly asked for their views without feedback or visible outcomes, trust is weakened and future participation becomes less likely.

PPR, the Children's Participation Action Plan, MIPAA, and the Commission on Care for Older People all reinforce the need for accountability, monitoring, and reporting.

The Charter should therefore make feedback and visible outcomes a core participation standard.

Emerging Charter Principle:

People who participate should receive clear feedback on what was heard, what changed, what did not change, and why.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Publish short summaries after consultations.
- Explain how input was used.
- Be honest where change is not possible.
- Keep participants informed of next steps.
- Build reporting back into the participation process from the start.

6.7 Representation must be accountable and transparent

Participation often happens through representative organisations, committees, councils, networks, and advocacy bodies. This creates opportunities, but also responsibilities.

PPNs, Older People's Councils, and the Commission on Care for Older People all show the importance of representative structures. However, representation must be transparent and accountable if it is to remain legitimate. Effective representation is strengthened when there are clear mechanisms for ongoing dialogue between representatives and those they represent, including opportunities to gather views, test emerging positions, and report back on outcomes and decisions.

The Charter should recognise that representative organisations have a vital role, but should also encourage clarity around:

- who is being represented
- how views are gathered
- how decisions are made
- how feedback is shared
- how diverse voices are included

Emerging Charter Principle:

Representation should be transparent, accountable, and connected to the people it seeks to represent.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Be clear about whether input comes from individuals, members, representatives, or wider communities.
- Use clear processes for gathering and validating views.
- Report back to those represented.
- Ensure representation includes diverse older people, not only the most confident or connected voices.

6.8 Collaboration strengthens the collective voice of older people

The Age Action / ISCP consultation findings and the purpose of the current project both highlight collaboration as central to strengthening the voice of older people.

This is reinforced by WHO's emphasis on multi-sector collaboration, Age Friendly Ireland's local structures, PPNs, and the Commission on Care for Older People's Reference Group model.

The Charter should recognise that no single organisation can fully represent the diversity of older people's experience. Collaboration across the age sector can help reduce duplication, strengthen advocacy, and increase policy influence.

Emerging Charter Principle:

Collaboration between organisations should strengthen, not dilute, the collective voice of older people.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Coordinate consultation and advocacy activity where possible.
- Avoid duplication that creates fatigue or confusion.
- Share learning, findings, and participation tools.
- Work together where a united voice can increase influence.
- Respect organisational independence while seeking alignment on shared priorities.

6.9 Participation should be sustained, not one-off

A major cross-cutting finding is that participation should not be limited to isolated surveys, single events, or occasional consultations.

The Children's Participation Action Plan, PPR, Age Friendly Ireland, PPNs, MIPAA, and WHO all point towards participation as an ongoing process supported by structures, tools, relationships, and feedback mechanisms.

The evidence suggests that participation is most effective when viewed as an ongoing cycle rather than a single engagement activity:

1. prepare
2. engage
3. listen
4. analyse
5. act
6. report back
7. review and improve

Emerging Charter Principle:

Participation should be sustained through ongoing structures, relationships, and feedback loops.

The evidence review also suggests that meaningful and sustained participation requires appropriate support structures, accessible communication methods, organisational capacity, and opportunities for people to engage confidently and consistently over time.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Develop ongoing participation mechanisms.

- Build relationships before asking for input.
- Use consultation findings beyond a single report.
- Create regular opportunities for older people to shape priorities.
- Review participation practice over time.

6.10 Participation should influence decisions

Several sources challenge the idea that older people's participation should be limited to health, care, or pension issues.

The National Positive Ageing Strategy, Social Justice Ireland, WHO, MIPAA, and Article 25 of the EU Charter all support a broader view of participation, connected to civic engagement, dignity, inclusion, community life, development, and public policy.

Older people are affected by decisions across many areas, including:

- housing
- transport
- digital services
- healthcare
- social protection
- local development
- climate and environment
- community safety
- public services
- cultural and civic life

The Charter should therefore support older people's participation across the full range of policy areas that affect their lives. The evidence also suggests that participation is most meaningful when older people have opportunities not only to express views on policy issues, but also to contribute to the development of priorities, proposals, and solutions. This reflects the wider principle, emerging across several sources, that older people should continue to be recognised as active participants and full members of society, with meaningful roles in shaping the communities and systems in which they live.

Emerging Charter Principle:

Participation should have a genuine opportunity to influence decisions, priorities, policies, services, and actions.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Avoid limiting older people's participation to care or pensions.
- Include older people in wider public policy debates.
- Recognise older people as citizens, not only service users.
- Link age-sector advocacy to broader social, economic, and community policy.
- Ensure participation processes are linked to decision-making and opportunities for influence.

6.11 Participation should be monitored, reviewed, and improved

The evidence base also points to the importance of learning and improvement. Monitoring and review are important not only for improving participation practices, but also for demonstrating accountability, transparency, and commitment to meaningful engagement.

Participation should not be assumed to be effective simply because it took place. Organisations should ask:

- who participated?
- who was missing?
- what barriers appeared?
- what changed as a result?
- what feedback was provided?
- what can be improved next time?

The Children's Participation Action Plan, PPR, MIPAA, Age Friendly Ireland, and PPNs all support the importance of monitoring, review, and accountability.

Cross-Cutting Implementation Consideration:

Participation processes should be reviewed and improved over time.

Practical implications for organisations:

- Track who is reached and who is not.
- Review accessibility and inclusion.
- Evaluate whether participation influenced decisions.
- Build learning into future engagement.
- Share findings across the sector where appropriate.

6.12 Summary of Charter Principles Identified Through the Evidence Review

The evidence review identified the following principles, which are reflected in the final Participation Charter:

1. Participation should be meaningful and connected to real decision-making processes.
2. Participation should be inclusive and accessible by design.
3. Older people should be involved early enough to shape priorities, options, and decisions.
4. Lived experience should be recognised as a valid and necessary form of evidence.
5. Participation should have a genuine opportunity to influence decisions, priorities, policies, services, and actions.
6. Feedback and visible outcomes should be built into participation processes.
7. Collaboration should strengthen the collective voice of older people.
8. Representation should be transparent, accountable, and connected to the people it seeks to represent.
9. Participation should be sustained through ongoing relationships, structures, and feedback mechanisms.
10. Participation should promote civic engagement, rights, dignity, equality, inclusion, and voice.

7. Charter Principle Mapping

This section maps the cross-cutting findings from the evidence review against the final Participation Charter.

The purpose of this mapping is to ensure that the Charter principles are:

- clearly grounded in the evidence base
- linked to practical organisational behaviours
- easy to understand and apply
- aligned with the final Charter structure

The mapping below shows how the evidence review informed the structure, principles and practical guidance contained in the final Charter.

7.1 Introduction and Purpose

This section explains why the Charter is needed and why it has been developed.

Evidence informing this section

- Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report
- National Positive Ageing Strategy
- Citizens' Assembly on Ageing

- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (Article 25)
- European Social Charter (Article 23)
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 / Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty
- WHO UN Decade of Healthy Ageing
- United Nations Principles for Older Persons (1991)
- Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

Key message

Older people have a right to participate meaningfully in decisions that affect their lives, and this Charter responds directly to what older people have said about voice, participation, barriers, and visible outcomes.

Charter wording and direction

The Charter is introduced as a practical framework to strengthen the participation of older people in public policy formation, advocacy, and decision-making, through and with their representative organisations.

7.2 Why Participation Matters

This section provides the rationale for participation as a matter of rights, dignity, civic engagement, wellbeing, and better decision-making.

Evidence informing this section

- Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report
- Social Justice Ireland
- EU Charter Article 25
- WHO Healthy Ageing Frameworks
- National Positive Ageing Strategy
- MIPAA

Key messages

Participation matters because it:

- recognises older people as active citizens
- supports dignity, independence, and inclusion
- reinforces equality and respect for human rights
- recognises participation as an expression of active citizenship and democratic engagement
- improves the quality of decisions

- makes lived experience visible
- reduces tokenism and consultation fatigue
- strengthens trust and accountability

Charter wording and direction

Participation should not be treated as an optional consultation activity. It should be understood as part of democratic life, active citizenship, equality, inclusion, healthy ageing, and respect for the dignity, experience, rights, and contributions of older people. Meaningful participation benefits individuals, organisations, communities, and public institutions by strengthening decision-making, accountability, and trust.

7.3 Principles for Participation

Charter Principles

Principle 1: Meaningful Participation

Older people should be engaged in ways that are purposeful, respectful, and connected to real decision-making.

Evidence base:

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, PPR, Social Justice Ireland, Children's Participation Action Plan.

Practical meaning:

Participation should have a clear purpose, defined scope, and a visible connection to decisions or actions.

Principle 2: Inclusive and Accessible Participation

Participation should be accessible and inclusive by design.

Evidence base:

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, WHO, Age Friendly Ireland, PPNs, Children's Participation Action Plan.

Practical meaning:

Participation should use plain language, mixed formats, accessible venues, non-digital options, and proactive outreach to people whose voices may be underrepresented or less frequently heard. Organisations should actively identify and address barriers that may prevent participation and take steps to ensure that diverse experiences and perspectives are reflected in engagement processes.

Principle 3: Early Involvement

Older people should be involved early enough to shape priorities, options, and decisions.

Evidence base:

Commission on Care for Older People, Citizens' Assembly, PPR, Children's Participation Action Plan.

Practical meaning:

Older people should not only be asked to react to pre-decided proposals. They should have opportunities to help identify issues, define priorities, shape discussions, contribute to solutions, and influence decisions from the earliest stages of a process.

Principle 4: Lived Experience as Evidence

The lived experience of older people should be recognised as a valid and necessary form of evidence.

Evidence base:

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, Commission on Care for Older People, PPR, Citizens' Assembly, Children's Participation Action Plan.

Practical meaning:

The experiences, knowledge and perspectives of older people should be treated as valid evidence alongside research, data, policy and professional expertise. Organisations should gather and use lived experience responsibly and show how it has informed priorities, advocacy and decision-making.

Principle 5: Participation Should Influence Decisions

Participation should have a genuine opportunity to influence decisions, priorities, policies, services, and actions.

Evidence base:

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, WHO, Age Friendly Ireland, PPNs, Children's Participation Action Plan.

Practical meaning:

Participation should have a clear connection to decision-making processes and opportunities for influence. Older people should have opportunities not only to express views, but also to help shape priorities, proposals, policies, services, advocacy positions and actions. Organisations should be transparent about where influence is possible and how participation will inform decisions.

Principle 6: Feedback and Visible Outcomes

People who participate should know what was heard, what changed, what did not change, and why.

Evidence base:

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, PPR, Children's Participation Action Plan, MIPAA.

Practical meaning:

Every participation process should include a feedback stage and a clear explanation of next steps.

Principle 7: Collaboration and Collective Voice

Collaboration between organisations should strengthen the collective voice of older people.

Evidence base:

Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, WHO, Age Friendly Ireland, Commission on Care for Older People.

Practical meaning:

Organisations should coordinate where appropriate, avoid duplication, share learning, and work together when a united voice would strengthen influence.

Principle 8: Transparent and Accountable Representation

Representation should be transparent, accountable, and connected to the people it seeks to represent.

Evidence base:

PPNs, Older People's Councils, Commission on Care for Older People.

Practical meaning:

Organisations and representatives should be clear about who they represent, how views are gathered, how decisions are informed, and how feedback is returned. Effective representation should include ongoing dialogue with those being represented, creating opportunities to gather views, test emerging positions, and report back on outcomes and decisions.

Principle 9: Sustained Participation

Participation should be ongoing, not limited to one-off consultations.

Evidence base:

Children's Participation Action Plan, PPR, Age Friendly Ireland, PPNs, WHO.

Practical meaning:

Participation should be supported through ongoing structures, relationships, feedback mechanisms, organisational commitment, and opportunities to shape future priorities. Meaningful participation requires more than occasional engagement activities; it should be embedded within organisational practice and sustained over time.

Principle 10: Participation Should Promote Civic Engagement, Rights and Dignity

Participation should promote civic engagement, rights, dignity, inclusion, and voice of older people, recognising them as active members of society with valuable contributions to make to their communities, public life, and decision-making processes.

Evidence base:

National Positive Ageing Strategy, Social Justice Ireland, WHO, MIPAA, EU Charter Article 25, European Social Charter (Article 23), Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014/Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Practical meaning:

Participation should be grounded in dignity, equality, inclusion, civic engagement, and respect for human rights. Older people should be recognised as active citizens whose experiences, knowledge, perspectives, and contributions have value. Participation should create opportunities for older people to influence decisions, contribute to public life, and help shape the policies, services, communities, and systems that affect their lives.

7.4 Practical Application of the Principles

This section translates the principles into usable guidance.

Possible practical commitments

Organisations applying the Charter should aim to:

- define the purpose of participation before beginning
- involve older people early
- identify and address barriers that may prevent participation
- ensure participation has a clear pathway to influence decisions
- support collaboration and collective voice where shared priorities exist
- actively seek out voices that may be underrepresented or less frequently heard
- use accessible and inclusive methods
- offer digital and non-digital participation routes
- gather and analyse lived experience responsibly
- create opportunities for older people to help shape priorities, proposals, and solutions
- recognise older people as active citizens and contributors, not only service users
- avoid duplication and unnecessary repeated consultation
- provide feedback after engagement

- explain what changed and what did not
- work collaboratively where possible
- review and improve participation practice

7.5 Role of Organisations and the Sector

This section explains the role of Age Action, ISCP, and wider age-sector organisations.

Key message

Representative organisations have a responsibility to create bridges between older people and decision-making structures. This includes gathering views, supporting meaningful participation, ensuring that diverse voices are heard, representing issues transparently, collaborating where appropriate, and reporting back on outcomes and decisions.

Possible sector commitments

- Build trust through clear communication.
- Coordinate consultation activity where possible.
- Share findings, effective participation practices, tools and learning across the sector.
- Support and enable older people to engage confidently with existing participation structures such as PPNs, Older People's Councils, consultations, and other decision-making forums.
- Actively seek to engage older people whose voices may be underrepresented or less frequently heard.
- Strengthen collective advocacy where there is shared purpose.
- Ensure that advocacy, representation, and policy positions are informed by the views, experiences, and priorities of older people.

7.6 Looking Ahead

This section positions the Charter as a foundation for future work, rather than an endpoint.

Key message

The Charter should be treated as a first step towards stronger participation practice across the age sector.

Possible future uses

- sector sign-up to shared principles
- development of practical participation tools

- future consultation guidance
- training or capacity-building for organisations
- annual review of participation practice
- sharing of learning, examples and effective participation practice across the sector
- stronger collaboration between age-sector organisations
- exploration of opportunities to strengthen participation infrastructure and support mechanisms for older people

7.7 Summary Mapping Table

Charter Area	Main Principles	Key Sources
Introduction and Purpose	Rights, dignity, lived experience, voice, and participation	Foundations Report, National Positive Ageing Strategy, EU Charter Article 25, European Social Charter Article 23, Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 / Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, WHO
Why Participation Matters	Civic engagement, dignity, equality, inclusion, wellbeing, influence, and better decision-making	Social Justice Ireland, National Positive Ageing Strategy, WHO, MIPAA, EU Charter Article 25, European Social Charter Article 23, Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 / Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty
Principles for Participation	Meaningful participation, accessibility and inclusion, early involvement, lived experience, influence, feedback, collaboration, representation, sustained participation, civic engagement, rights and dignity	Foundations Report, PPR, Children's Participation Action Plan, Social Justice Ireland, Commission on Care for Older People

Charter Area	Main Principles	Key Sources
Practical Application of the Principles	Practical implementation, accessibility, inclusion, influence, feedback, collaboration, representation, and continuous improvement	Age Friendly Ireland, PPNs, PPR, Children's Participation Action Plan
Role of Organisations and the Sector	Representation, accountability, collaboration, participation support, and collective voice	PPNs, Older People's Councils, Commission on Care for Older People, Age Friendly Ireland
Looking Ahead	Wider adoption, shared learning, stronger participation practice, collaboration, and future development	Children's Participation Action Plan, MIPAA, WHO, Age Friendly Ireland

8. Charter Development Methodology and Process

8.1 Purpose of the Development Process

The Participation Charter was developed as a practical, evidence-informed and collaborative framework to strengthen the participation of older people in public policy formation and age-sector advocacy.

The development process was designed to ensure that the Charter:

- is grounded in the lived experience of older people
- reflects Irish policy and participation structures
- incorporates rights-based and international frameworks
- promotes dignity, inclusion, civic engagement, and meaningful participation
- remains practical and accessible
- can be realistically applied by organisations and participation structures
- supports both participation principles and practical implementation

The Charter is not intended to be an academic document or a technical policy framework. Instead, it provides a shared set of participation principles and practical guidance that can support stronger, more meaningful, inclusive, and influential participation by older people across organisations, communities, and policy processes.

8.2 Evidence-Informed Development Approach

The Charter has been developed through a staged evidence-informed process combining:

- lived experience consultation findings
- Irish policy, equality, and participation frameworks
- practical participation models
- rights-based and equality-informed approaches
- international ageing and participation standards
- Steering Group discussion and refinement

The process recognises that no single source fully addresses participation by older people in public policy formation. Instead, the Charter draws selectively from multiple complementary sources, each contributing a different element to the framework.

Examples include:

Source Type	Main Contribution
Consultation findings	Lived experience and participation barriers
Irish policy frameworks	National legitimacy and alignment
Participation models	Practical mechanisms and structures
Rights and equality frameworks	Dignity, civic engagement, participation, equality, inclusion, and accountability principles
International frameworks	Broader ageing and participation standards

The Charter therefore combines:

- principles
- practical guidance
- participation standards

- organisational commitments
- implementation considerations
- continuous learning and improvement mechanisms

rather than reproducing any one source directly.

8.3 Selective Use of Sources

The evidence sources identified in this document are not adopted wholesale.

Instead, specific sections, themes, principles and mechanisms from each source were selectively incorporated into the Charter where they are directly relevant to:

- participation
- representation
- accessibility
- inclusion
- accountability
- feedback
- collaboration
- lived experience
- civic engagement and voice
- public policy engagement

This selective approach is important because some source documents focus primarily on:

- care
- pensions
- local government structures
- child participation
- healthy ageing
- rights and equality frameworks

rather than specifically addressing participation by older people in public policy formation.

The Charter development process focused on extracting:

- transferable principles

- practical participation mechanisms
- accountability approaches
- inclusion standards
- representative models
- implementation ideas

that could strengthen the Charter framework.

8.4 Role of the Steering Group

The Steering Group played an important role throughout the Charter development process.

Its role included:

- reviewing and refining the evidence base
- agreeing key source documents and how they would inform the Charter
- shaping and refining the Charter principles and content
- helping build shared ownership and consensus around the Charter's development
- ensuring relevance to older people and the wider age sector
- identifying practical considerations and implementation issues
- providing strategic guidance throughout drafting and refinement stages

The Steering Group also helped ensure that the Charter remained:

- practical
- balanced
- accessible
- collaborative
- grounded in real participation experience and lived experience

rather than becoming overly theoretical or policy-heavy.

8.5 Charter Development Stages

Stage 1 – Evidence Review and Source Analysis

Activities included:

- identification of relevant Irish, EU, and international sources

- review of participation and ageing frameworks
- extraction of relevant principles and mechanisms
- development of research and evidence review document
- mapping of cross-cutting themes and emerging principles

Main outputs

- Research and Evidence Base document
- Source analysis summaries
- Cross-cutting principles mapping

Stage 2 – Charter Framework Development

Activities included:

- refinement and testing of core Charter principles
- agreement on Charter structure
- mapping of principles into practical guidance
- drafting of organisational commitments and participation standards
- Steering Group discussion and refinement

Main outputs

- Draft Charter structure
- Draft participation principles
- Draft practical guidance framework

Stage 3 – Drafting of the Participation Charter

Activities included:

- preparation of first full Charter draft
- integration of evidence base and agreed principles
- development of accessible and practical language
- drafting of implementation-oriented guidance
- refinement of tone, format, and structure

Main outputs

- First complete Charter draft

Stage 4 – Review and Refinement

Activities included:

- Steering Group review and feedback
- revision and refinement of Charter content
- clarification of principles and commitments
- consistency and accessibility review
- final editing and formatting

Main outputs

- Final Participation Charter

Stage 5 – Planned Sector Briefing and Engagement

(this stage will follow publication of the Charter)

Activities include:

- preparation of briefing materials
- communication of project findings and Charter purpose
- engagement with wider age-sector organisations
- invitation to support, endorse, adopt or align with Charter principles

Main outputs

- Sector briefing note
- Charter dissemination materials

8.6 Methodological Principles for the Charter Development Process

The Charter development process sought to model good participation practice wherever possible. It was guided by the following principles:

Collaborative

The Charter was developed with and through relevant organisations and established participation structures.

Evidence-informed

The development process was grounded in lived experience, policy, participation practice, rights and equality frameworks, and established good practice.

Accessible

Clear language and practical framing were used throughout the development process.

Selective and focused

Only the elements most relevant to the purpose and scope of the Charter were drawn from each source.

Practical

The Charter was designed with realistic implementation and organisational use in mind.

Reflective

The drafting process allowed for ongoing refinement, feedback and learning.

8.7 Concluding Observations

The evidence review identified a number of recurring themes that emerge consistently across the sources examined:

- older people want participation that feels meaningful and connected to outcomes
- participation requires accessibility, inclusion, and trust
- consultation fatigue is a real risk where feedback is weak or duplication occurs
- representative structures work best when accountability and communication are clear
- collaboration can strengthen the collective voice of older people
- participation should be embedded across systems rather than treated as an isolated activity
- participation is closely connected to dignity, civic engagement, inclusion, and the recognition of older people as active contributors to society
- older people should have opportunities not only to express views, but also to help shape priorities, decisions, and solutions

9. References and Source Links

Project Sources

- Age Action / ISCP Foundations Report, 2025 Consultation Findings
- Project Progress and Activity Report
- Consultation Outcome Letter
- Consultation webpage: www.mosaicsocialimpact.ie/have-your-say

Irish Policy and Participation Sources

- National Positive Ageing Strategy
<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/national-positive-ageing-strategy/>
- Commission on Care for Older People
<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/campaigns/commission-on-care-for-older-people/>
- Citizens' Assembly on Ageing
<https://citizensassembly.ie/reports/>
- Public Participation Networks
<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-rural-and-community-development-and-the-gaeltacht/policy-information/public-participation-networks/>
- Age Friendly Ireland / Older People's Councils
<https://agefriendlyireland.ie/older-peoples-council/>
- Children's Participation Action Plan 2024–2028
<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/participation-of-children-and-young-people-in-decision-making-action-plan-2024-2028/>
- Irish Human Rights and Equality Act 2014 / Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty
<https://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty/>

Rights-Based, Participation and International Sources

- Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR)
<https://www.nlb.ie>
- Social Justice Ireland, Citizenship and Participation
<https://www.socialjustice.ie/article/citizenship-and-participation>

- United Nations Principles for Older Persons (1991)
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/united-nations-principles-older-persons>
- WHO/UN Decade of Healthy Ageing 2021–2030
<https://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing>
- WHO Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Framework
<https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/>
- Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing
<https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/MIPAA/political-declaration-en.pdf>
- EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Article 25
<https://fra.europa.eu/en/eu-charter/article/25-rights-elderly>
- European Social Charter (Revised), Article 23
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