



The Belonging Forum

2027 Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program

Partner Organization: Human Rights Watch

Project Title: An Older People's Rights Treaty Fit for
Belonging

2027 Samuel Fellows in Belonging:

Project Proposal

Partner Organization: Human Rights Watch

Established in 1978, Human Rights Watch is known for its accurate fact-finding, impartial reporting, effective use of media, and targeted advocacy, often in partnership with local human rights groups and others. Each year, we publish more than 100 reports and briefings on human rights conditions in over 90 countries, generating extensive coverage in local and international media. With the leverage this brings, we meet with governments, the United Nations, regional groups, financial institutions, and corporations to press for changes in policy and practice that promote human rights and justice around the world.

Learn more at: <https://www.hrw.org/>

Location of the Project:

Human Rights Watch's lead person on the rights of older people is based in its London, UK office. However, given the nature of the project, the Fellow can be based in any location and work remotely.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Section 1: Description of the Project

This project will explore the relationship between the enjoyment of human rights, social connectedness and belonging in older age.

The United Nations is currently drafting a new international treaty on the rights of older people. This presents a unique opportunity to ensure that international human rights law addresses not only discrimination and

exclusion, but also the conditions that enable older people to experience connection, participation, and belonging in their communities.

Using the Belonging Forum's definition of belonging, the Fellow will explore how different human rights can contribute to older people's social connectedness and belonging, and identify what elements of those rights should be included in the treaty text. Rights could include, but not be limited to, health, work, social security, participation, and living independently within the community.

The project is extremely timely. The UN working group tasked with drafting the new treaty was established in 2025. In July 2027, it will meet to discuss an outline of the treaty's content. In November 2027, the Chair of the working group will present a first draft of the treaty text. Preliminary findings from the project can feed into the discussion in July 2027. The project's final output can inform responses to, and advocacy around, the November 2027 draft and subsequent treaty drafts. By demonstrating how human rights can foster social connectedness and belonging, the project can directly influence the development of international human rights law, placing social connectedness and belonging at its heart.

Section 2: Goals of the Project

The goal of the project is to equip older people, civil society organizations and others with the tools necessary to advocate for a new treaty on the rights of older people that will foster social connectedness and belonging.

The Fellow will conduct research and produce advocacy resources that older people, civil society organizations and others can use to influence states who will negotiate, and then adopt the text of a treaty on the rights of older people.

Section 3: Guiding Questions

- Which human rights contribute to social connectedness and belonging among older people?
- What are the core elements of these human rights?
- How do these elements apply to the experiences, barriers, and opportunities associated with older age?
- How should these elements be framed in the treaty on the rights of older people to ensure the treaty contributes to enhancing older people's social connectedness and belonging?

Section 4: Research Methods & Dissemination Approach

The Belonging Forum propose **three research streams**:

- **Creative**
- **Advocacy**
- **Academic**

The tracks are designed to articulate the possibilities of diverse Fellowship on belonging. The program recognizes that creative methods, advocacy-focused research, and academic research are all Fellowly. All three tracks have the potential to address similar topics. The **key difference is the outputs and methodologies**. The beauty of the tracks is that they all overlap and interweave, only strengthening each other and the Belonging Forum's impact. The streams **instill belonging in process and product**.

We encourage Samuel Fellows and Partners to explore different ways of asking questions and sharing knowledge that instills belonging for the researcher and participants.

Methodological Approach

- **Desk research:** Discussions on the need for a new treaty the rights of older people have been underway since 2011. There is, therefore, material from this process to consult in a desk review, alongside

other sources, that address aspects of human rights and belonging in older age.

- **Engagement with relevant teams across HRW:** HRW teams have expertise on a wide range of human rights issues relevant to older people, such as gender, conflict and disability.
- **Key stakeholder interviews:** Interviews with academics, civil society representatives, older people and others working on the rights of older people. This could provide an opportunity to explore experiences of belonging, exclusion, participation, and dignity in greater depth.
- **Participation in the UN Working Group:** Attending the third session of the Intergovernmental Working Group established to draft the treaty would enable direct observation of and participation in discussions on the draft elements of the treaty presented at that meeting. The third session will be held at the UN in Geneva in July 2027. This will present the fellow with a space for learning and relationship-building.

Section 5: Key Deliverables

- **Work plan** to serve as a preliminary blueprint for the project, including a budget plan which predicts and plans potential research costs to ensure responsible allocation of bursary funds.
- **1 Opinion Piece** (500 – 1,000 words) related to the project the Fellows are working on, posted to the Belonging Forum's website. Partners are welcome/encouraged to post the article as well.
- **A Final Output** based on the research approach chosen, to be agreed at the beginning of the program.
- **A Final Presentation with the Cohort**

APPLICANT INFORMATION

About the Program/What the Program Offers

The Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program empowers young people, recent graduates, and people with lived experience to engage in meaningful research and community action. At the Belonging Forum, our mission is to build connectedness within and between communities through partnerships, research, programming, learning initiatives, and advocacy. At the Belonging Forum, fostering belonging is central to our work. The Belonging Forum approaches the definition of belonging as connection to the 4 Ps: people, place, power, and purpose. This is to say that belonging comes through our relationships with other people as well as through our rootedness in nature, our ability to influence social, political and economic decision-making, and our capacity to find shared meaning and purpose in our lives. The program offers a unique opportunity to apply the lens of belonging to issues that matter, to think intersectionally, and holistically about the problems of the 21st century – while working alongside experts and community leaders.

This is a paid opportunity from February 8th – October 29th 2027. Fellows will carry out the research part-time on a schedule agreed between the Fellow, the partner, and the Belonging Forum. The Fellow will receive a bursary to support their work.

The Program offers:

- A flexible, part-time research opportunity.
- A bursary to support your research calculated based on cost of living where the Fellow is based and number of hours committed.
- Work with national and international community partners.
- Capacity building, skills development, & mentorship.
- Network and team building opportunities.
- All works produced by the Fellows are published on the Belonging Forum website and promoted on our social media channels.

Equity Statement:

We encourage all equity-seeking groups such as immigrants, Black and Indigenous communities, people of color, women, young and older people, 2SLGBTQ+ community members, and people with disabilities to apply. Please let us know if you need any accommodation throughout the application and interview process and we will be happy to support you.

Key Attributes and Skills in the Applicant:

- Experience of conducting desk- and interview-based research
- An understanding of human rights
- Lived experience or an interest in older people's rights
- Good time management skills & ability to be self-directed

We strongly encourage older applicants to apply but welcome applications from everyone with the skills required.

Thank you for your interest in the Samuel Fellows in Belonging Program. Due to a high volume of applications, only those selected for an interview will be contacted.