



## **Economic and Social Council**

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### **Commission on the Status of Women**

#### **Sixty-fifth session**

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**Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and  
to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly  
entitled “Women 2000: gender equality, development and  
peace for the twenty-first century”**

### **Statement submitted by International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council\***

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

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\* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



## Statement

The International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse focuses exclusively on addressing neglect, abuse, and violence against older people.

Older women account for 54 per cent of the global population aged 60 years, and 61 per cent of those aged 80 years and above. We wish to highlight the nexus between gender, ageing, ageism, and their consequent challenges to achieve the full and effective participation in decision-making in public life of older women.

As the world ages at an unprecedented rate, with women living longest in all societies, comprehensive and holistic social policies that include gender and age across the life course are vital in empowering girls and women of all ages and to build sustainable and resilient societies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has spotlighted older persons, persons with disabilities and those with health co-morbidities as those most in need to be hospitalised and to die from the virus. Older age is the most important risk factor, with fatality rates of people 65 plus being much higher than younger age groups. Men are dying in greater numbers than women. Global estimates of death are that those over 80 are five times higher than average, with up to 60 per cent occurring in care homes. There is an unprecedented increase in the number of widows, who are, according to UN-Women: 'largely unseen, unsupported and unmeasured in our societies', with high levels of uncertainty, anxiety and increasing poverty and illness due to lockdown, social isolation, losing a partner and income. A UK study recently highlighted that it is women over 65 who have the highest levels of anxiety due to the virus. Nevertheless, responses across the world have routinely ignored the impact of the virus on older people. COVID-19 infected patients have been discharged to care homes, care home residents and staff have not had proper protection and people have been isolated at home because of their age. In May 2020, the UN Secretary General stated that the pandemic puts older people at greater risk of poverty, discrimination, and isolation and that it causes untold fear and suffering for older people globally.

The virus has compounded what we know – older women are too often ignored, invisible, without voice and subject to stereotypes and ageism, routinely denied their rights to health, decent work, housing, life-long learning, social protection, and the power to make life choices.

## Challenges

Stigma and myths of ageing paint a misleading picture of frailty and dependence, failing to recognize, value and support older women's capacities, competencies, participation and contributions to family, community, and society. Older women are often at the center of their households and communities as uncompensated or acknowledged key providers of care and support to family, friends, and community.

Older women globally suffer due to disadvantages that are cumulative over the life-course. The pandemic has made this worse. They suffer higher than levels of poverty, especially widows and women who live alone, may not have access to appropriate and accessible health care, social protection systems, including floors, and routinely experience age discrimination.

Many older women are denied the right to education and training throughout their life-course. Lifelong education is essential for both less and well-educated older women to ensure currency in the labour force and continued opportunities to fully participate in public life and everyday activities that require reading, writing and technology proficiencies.

Older women suffer in silence due to family and intimate partner violence and abuse. Domestic violence (DV) prevalence surveys routinely fail to include subjects over the age of 49. DV prevalence researchers focusing on older women demonstrate that it is as high as 38 per cent in some EU countries. Methodologies for estimating older women's lifecourse found rates of violence exceed 20 per cent. This also considers the trauma that older women are forced to live with when lifelong violence they experience unacknowledged or dismissed as negligible or of little consequence. In relation to the impact of COVID-19, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons reports that 'data on experiences of violence, abuse, maltreatment and neglect in later life are largely missing during the crisis, with monitoring systems halted because of lockdown measures.' Women's Aid Northern Ireland report a large drop in the number of older women contacting them for support. Due to shielding, victims of abuse have been unable to seek support as they are trapped in their own homes.

HelpAge International and other international organizations have documented sexual and physical violence against older women and how forced homelessness, poverty and hunger, which results from displacement and conflict, affects significant numbers of older women. Tools are needed to recognize and identify risk factors in the population of older women and men affected by a crisis and to ensure that contact and communications between older persons and their social support networks are established and maintained, and that food supply, economic support and shelters are managed in an age and gender sensitive.

Older women's voices are rarely solicited or heard in discourse on national regional and global policy development. Although data collection is supposed to anchor evidence-based and rights-focused policy making, it still ignores older women. This is despite the call of SDG 17 for disaggregated data: 'by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts.' data disaggregated by age, gender and disability beyond age 49 is not routinely collected or available.

Violence against older persons constitutes a human rights violation. There is a clear gap between the existence of legal rights and the effective enjoyment of them by older women. The lack of appropriate recourse mechanisms at national and international levels, and inadequate resources at both levels, compound the problem. Age is not explicitly mentioned as a form of discrimination in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Its General Recommendation 27 on the rights of older women, adopted in 2010 is non-binding, neither is the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) adopted by the United Nations in 2002.

These multiple and intersecting barriers constrain older women's full participation in public and political life. Most importantly policy makers and policy influencers are still not routinely seeking older women's engagement and input into policies that affect them, with the consequence that they are effectively denied full participation and decision making in public life. Creating a more equitable world where no one is left behind is only sustainable if it is age-inclusive and gender sensitive, with a fairer distribution of opportunities and resources.

## **Recommendations**

Governments must:

Show political will – as duty bearers - to promote and protect older women as rights holders, in line with the principles and standards of international human rights bodies, and to inform them about these rights and their entitlements.

Adopt a life-course approach that recognizes intergenerational solidarity for improving the lives and dignity for women of all ages, everywhere, and views older women as rights holders and as full participants for age-inclusive policy planning and service delivery.

Ensure the equal rights of all women and girls across the life course in line with the principles and standards of international human rights bodies.

Align legislation and public policies with human rights principles and standards, a life-course perspective and be age-inclusive.

Make age discrimination, including intersectional discrimination on the basis of age and gender and ageism, illegal together with gender discrimination, as it is a key driver of social and economic discrimination and inequalities in older age, denying older women their rights and restricting the potential of millions of women now and in the future.

End discrimination in education at all levels based on age as well as gender and/or disability and ensure universal access to lifelong learning.

Ensure the full participation of older women in all planning and decision-making processes and give information on their rights and entitlements and ensure they are empowered to claim them.

Remove age barriers to work and extend labour market opportunities to older women.

Statement is endorsed by:

AGE Platform Europe

Association camerounaise pour la prise en charge de la personne âgée  
(ACAMAGE)

Association for Women's Career Development in Hungary

Dave Omokaro Foundation

European Federation for the Welfare of the Elderly (EURAG)

Gray Panthers

HelpAge International

Institute for Multicultural Counseling and Education Services, Inc.

International Federation on Ageing

International Longevity Center Global Alliance, Ltd.

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