

Submission
to the 11th session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Members of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing,

We, the AgeNet International network of gerontological organizations, together with the HelpAge network of the Eurasia and the Middle East region, would like to draw your attention to the fact that today the COVID-19 pandemic has had and continues to have a severe impact on older people around the world.

The virus particularly affects older people, and the mortality rate is high. At the same time, access to health services has become more difficult for many older people, especially those with disabilities or chronic diseases.

Older people suffer from the negative effects of isolation or dependence on others, limited physical mobility, lack of economic resources.

Many older people report that the quarantine has increased the incidence of violence, abuse and neglect of older people by family members.

The stigma associated with the virus and the higher levels of severe illness and mortality experienced by older people increase the risk of their further isolation.

In light of these issues, we call on governments to:

1. **Support the initiative to develop a UN convention on the rights of older people** as a key and comprehensive international mechanism to protect our rights in older age and build effective national laws to improve access to services and change attitudes and behavior towards older people.
2. **Prioritize the protection of the rights of older people as part of the COVID-19 response.** In order to mitigate the impact of the crisis, ensure continuity of services, support caregivers for older people, apply digital technology to reach those in isolation.
3. **Consult older people.** As we respond to the crisis and strategize for the future, we must listen to and take into account the voices of older people.
4. **Fight ageism and age discrimination in public health measures, public discourse and in practice.** Manifestations of age discrimination and negative stereotypes, which have been even more pronounced during the crisis, should not be tolerated.
5. **Promote equality and non-discrimination.** Older people have a right to health, including access to information, care and health services on an equal basis with everyone else. The risk of discrimination in access to health care should be monitored for all high-risk groups, including older people.
6. **Improve preparation and planning.** Preparation and planning must consider the additional risks for older people. It is recommended to act in accordance with the global WHO Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan, which outlines how to implement public health measures to manage COVID-19.
7. **Improve public awareness and reach of older people.** Regular communication with the public and risk groups is one of the most important steps to prevent infection, save lives and minimize adverse effects. Information should be provided in different formats and in local languages to address barriers related to literacy (including digital literacy), language and disabilities that older people often face.
8. **Improve support services.** Concrete measures to support older people include access to alcohol-based hand sanitizers in areas where access to water is limited; access to social support and essentials for older people in quarantine or self-isolation; a

proportionate and non-discriminatory approach to restricting freedom of movement. Communities must work together to ensure the well-being of all when implementing responses.

9. **Increase funding for development and humanitarian action.** Older people are often overlooked when formulating strategies and financing for development and humanitarian action. Older people are most at risk and must be explicitly mentioned and factored into funding applications and decisions at all levels and in all situations.
10. **Review regulatory and policy frameworks and budgets** to respect the rights and meet the needs of older people.

COVID-19 disproportionately affected older people. The response to the pandemic has resulted in unnecessary deaths, increased poverty and discrimination. This crisis has shown how important it is to protect our rights in old age so that we have equal opportunities to survive, live a dignified life and contribute to society. This pandemic can be defeated, but only if people act in solidarity with each other and take action to protect and care for those most at risk.

Signed:

Resource Center for Elderly (RCE), Kyrgyzstan

HelpAge International, Eurasia and Middle East

Albanian Association of Geriatrics and Gerontology

General Union of Albanian Pensioners, Albania

Association of Pensioners for Integrations, Albania

Union of Elderly Pensioners, Albania

Mission Armenia, Armenia

Solidarity Is Global Institute, Jordan

Alzheimer's Association Lebanon

Amel Association International, Lebanon

Centre for Studies on Ageing, Lebanon

El Wedad Society for Community Rehabilitation, Palestine

Dobroe Delo, Russia

House of Projects, Russia

Red Cross of Serbia

Central Asia Gerontology Centre, Tajikistan

Turbota pro Litnix v Ukraini, Ukraine

Center "Third Sector", Belarus

Center for Continuing Education for Adults "Studio of Useful Competencies", Belarus

ADRA Kyrgyzstan

People's Harmonious Development Society, Georgia

Ardager, Kazakhstan

Public Association for Social Protection of the Population named after Lydia Fomova, Kyrgyzstan