

Older Women's Network, Europe [Elizabeth Sclater]

Oral statement to OEWGA 11: Session 2: 30 March 2021 – Covid 19

Madam Chair, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen

As a result of global responses to the pandemic, older women have been particularly affected, as identified by the Secretary General in his policy statement last year.

We have seen evidence of older women being denied access to health and social care, with hospital and general practitioner services curtailed and older women too frightened to seek medical help for non-covid conditions.

We have seen the right to family life disregarded. Older women, who are the majority of nursing home residents, were kept like prisoners in their rooms, with very little human contact, and their carers lacked adequate personal protective equipment.

We have seen an increase of reported violence and abuse when couples remained isolated in their own homes for weeks on end – simply because of their age.

We have seen an increase in the number of widows resulting, for many, in loneliness, isolation and poverty.

Increased reliance on information and access to services on-line has excluded those without broadband coverage, ICT equipment or the skills to use it. As one Scottish older woman commented last year: *“do not assume that just because one part of the island has broadband we all do”*.

A UN convention to protect the rights of older people will ensure age discrimination is prohibited in the law. It will deliver services to uphold our dignity and empower our individual potential. In the light of our experiences prior to and during this last year, **it is time to stop talking and start drafting**.

Claudia Mahler, I ask you: How should member states, civil society and others ensure the voice and contributions of older women are heard, and our skills and experience utilised.

As the majority of older people, we older women must be able to exercise our right to participate in public life and be part of post-pandemic solutions.

Thank you.