

31 March 2021

## **Written Statement of Age UK to the 11<sup>th</sup> Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing**

I am presenting this written statement on behalf of Age UK, the UK's leading charity for older people.

### **Normative Discussion of the Labour Market and Access to Justice**

The rights to work and access to the labour market, and access to justice for older people are not enshrined in international human rights law. These rights need to be set out within a convention on the rights of older persons to ensure that they have the necessary tools and resources to resolve the legal problems they face, and have access to decent work, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. Age UK and Age International firmly believe that a UN Convention on the rights of older persons would provide a framework and focus to guide policy responses to ageing based on rights, equity and social justice. It also has the potential to create a shift from older people being considered as passive recipients of welfare, to older people as active rights holders and to reduce the level of abuse, neglect and discrimination experienced by many older people.

### **Covid-19**

The Government has called Covid-19 a major public health emergency and the most 'significant threat this country has faced for decades.' It is clear older people are very seriously affected by the virus. Hence, the most immediate issue they face during this pandemic is the risk of severe illness and death. Older people in need of care and support have been rendered acutely vulnerable by virtue of their circumstances, and there have been high numbers of death arising from Covid-19.

In addition to the loss of life, the human rights issues facing older people during this pandemic include:

- The use of 'blanket' policies applied to older people, including DNAR orders for care home residents or policies around hospital transfer and admission.
- Older people not accessing healthcare for chronic or long-term health conditions when they need it for fear of overburdening the NHS or contracting coronavirus.
- Access to the help, care and support that many older people need to sustain their health and wellbeing with specific challenges faced by older people in residential settings, those who live alone and older people who receive care at home.

- With lockdown measures in place, older people are also at increased risk of domestic and institutional abuse, and the use of restrictive measures that deprive them of their liberty.

It is therefore vital that older people are given appropriate consideration in current and future plans, and that we take particular care to balance the desire to safeguard the health of those at greatest risk, the impact of wider risk reduction or containment strategies on the older population and the human rights of older people. In getting that balance right, we must guard against unwarranted age-based policy approaches and direct or indirect age discrimination. The drafting of a convention represents a golden opportunity to safeguard older people's rights in practice.

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