

Amnesty International's submission to the Call for Inputs of the 14th Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing on the focus area of accessibility, infrastructure and habitat (transport, housing and access).

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS OLDER PEOPLE FACE AROUND HOUSING, TRANSPORT AND ACCESSIBILITY

Older people face specific challenges and barriers that prevent them from accessing adequate housing, transportation, infrastructure and other services. This leads to exclusion and marginalisation and negatively impacts other human rights, such as their right to health or sanitation. The lack of physically accessible housing and lack of access to support services and assistive devices can lead to the institutionalisation of older people, further isolating and segregating them from their communities.

This submission draws on evidence from several Amnesty International publications on the rights of older people, including a 2019 report on Myanmar and Bangladesh;¹ a 2020 report on northeast Nigeria;² a 2022 report on Armenia;³ and reports in 2022 and 2023 on Ukraine.⁴

OLDER AGE POVERTY AND THE AFFORDABILITY OF ACCOMMODATION DURING DISPLACEMENT

Many of our reports look at the situation of older people who have been displaced by armed conflict. Older people find it particularly challenging to access adequate housing upon displacement due to increased housing costs and limited work options. Many older people do not have access to pensions or other forms of social protection, particularly in low-income countries.⁵ In other contexts, including Ukraine and Armenia, they have pensions which are inadequate to meet the cost of renting or buying property. In the countries where we conducted our research, older people sometimes faced discrimination when seeking work; many others had lived primarily off their agricultural lands which they have lost due to conflict. As a result, when older people were displaced, they often had no source of income and no choice but to rely on accommodation provided by family, the state or humanitarian organizations.

¹ Amnesty International, *Myanmar: "Fleeing my whole life": Older people's experience of conflict and displacement in Myanmar* (Index: ASA 16/0446/2019), 2019, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa16/0446/2019/en/>

² Amnesty International, *Nigeria: "My heart is in pain" – Older people's experience of conflict, displacement, and detention in northeast Nigeria* (Index: AFR 44/3376/2020), 2020, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/3376/2020/en/>

³ Amnesty International, *Armenia: Last to flee: Older people's experience of war crimes and displacement in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict* (Index: EUR 54/5214/2022), 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur54/5214/2022/en/#:~:text=Older%20ethnic%20Armenians%20were%20invariably,other%20ill%20treatment%20in%20detention.>

⁴ Amnesty International, *"They live in the dark": Older people's isolation and inadequate access to housing amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine* (Index: EUR 50/7385/2023), 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/7385/2023/en/>, Amnesty International, *"I Used to Have a Home": Older People's Experience of War, Displacement, and Access to Housing in Ukraine* (Index: EUR 50/6250/2022), 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur50/6250/2022/en/>

⁵ International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2020–22*, 2018, https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---soc_sec/documents/publication/wcms_817572.pdf, p. 173.

In Ukraine, rent increases of up to 225% in some regions⁶ following Russia's full-scale invasion meant that most older people, 80% of whom receive pensions below the country's real poverty line as calculated by the Ministry of Social Policy,⁷ could not afford to rent housing after being displaced. In addition, older people often struggled to apply for various types of government support and humanitarian aid, which required using an online app or doing in-person visits to various government offices, which was particularly challenging for older people with disabilities. Even when older people did access these payments, they were insufficient to enable them to pay for housing.

In Armenia, older people displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh were overwhelmingly unable to afford rent independently, and so typically lived with relatives or adult children in crowded conditions. In both northeast Nigeria, and Myanmar, losing access to agricultural land due to displacement left older people without a source of income with which to pay for adequate housing, food, and other essential goods and services.

INADEQUATE AND INACCESSIBLE TEMPORARY HOUSING AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Left with few options, older people fleeing armed conflict often live in free housing in temporary shelters or displacement camps. These are typically not designed to be physically accessible for older people or people with disabilities, and camps often have sanitation facilities located at considerable distances from older people's dwellings.

In Ukraine, while disaggregated data was inconsistent, older people appeared to be disproportionately represented in state-run shelters for displaced people, many of which were partially or fully inaccessible. They lacked elevators or ramps that would allow people with limited mobility to enter or move between floors. None of the 24 shelters Amnesty International visited had toilet or sanitation facilities with grab bars, ramps, or other equipment. Most of the sleeping facilities had insufficient room for a person with a disability to easily enter the room or to fully rotate in a wheelchair. As a result, some older people with disabilities were often not admitted to these shelters and were forced to live segregated in institutions for people with disabilities instead.

Among older Rohingya women and men in refugee camps in Bangladesh, healthcare facilities, food distribution centres, and water points were difficult, if not impossible, for many older people with disabilities to reach. In addition, many older people said they lacked easy access to a latrine. The distances to and from latrines amid the camps' hilly terrain made them largely inaccessible, forcing many older refugees, including those with moderate mobility, to use a pan inside their shelter. Those who could sometimes manage the walk or were able to get assistance from a family member still said the distance and terrain made it difficult to reach on all occasions and was seen as a major loss of dignity and well-being.

LACK OF ACCESS TO SUPPORT SERVICES AND ASSISTIVE DEVICES

The inaccessibility of housing and other services older people face is often caused or exacerbated by a lack of access to support services and assistive devices such as wheelchairs, walkers and hearing aids.

In Ukraine, several factors discouraged older people from registering with the state, as having a disability, even though registration would have given them access to life-changing support services and assistive devices. These factors included a highly medicalised registration process that excluded many older people due to limited definitions and perceptions of what counts as a disability. People were often misinformed about the registration process, sometimes by doctors, and the process itself was arduous for many older people to navigate.

In IDP camps in northeast Nigeria, some older people reported not being able to get medications, operations, or assistive devices (such as wheelchairs) that would allow them to leave their shelter and go outside to interact with other people.

⁶ Hmarochos, "Вартість оренди квартир на Закарпатті зросла на 225%. Що відбувається з ринком нерухомості? (Інфографіка)", 23 May 2022, <https://hmarochos.kiev.ua/2022/05/23/vartist-orendy-kvartyr-na-zakarpatti-zrosla-na-225-shho-vidbuvayetsya-zrynkom-neruhomosti-infografika/?fbclid=IwAR1ky5mm0hIeRzytQktJj8aG5CWFZVskAharWtHwyxCDJCNyaM-uDIkdgU>

⁷ Epravda, "80% пенсіонерів в Україні живуть за межею монетарної бідності – омбудсмен", 12 October 2022, <https://www.epravda.com.ua/news/2020/10/12/666153/>