

**Statement for the 11th Session of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing
on behalf of the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of Poland (A Status NHRI)
30th of March 2021.**

Madam Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Experts,

first let me thank you for the opportunity to address you on behalf of the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights of Poland on the Normative Content for the Development of a possible International standard on the focus area “Education, Training, Lifelong learning and Capacity building”.

I’d also like to begin with congratulations to the UN DESA and Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the Working document prepared on the basis of inputs submitted by all stakeholders last year in response to the Call of the Chair of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing on this topic¹.

There are two issues I’d like to highlight today. First is the need to shift the perception of the right to education from social rights to human rights and the need of introducing normative content of the right as we still observe the lack of implementing the right in practice.

In Poland educational opportunities for older persons are described more in terms of social rights aimed at fighting against poverty but not as a universal right that should be fulfilled. Currently, the state’s activity regarding education of older persons is still presented in the Polish SDG’s reports as a part of the goal 1 on reducing poverty. This gives the false impression that educational opportunities are addressed to older persons vulnerable to social exclusion only or that the whole population of senior citizens is vulnerable in this regard, which is also not true. This kind of approach doesn’t embrace the diversity among older persons. There is nothing about education of older persons under goal 4, which refers to quality education for all. This issue is also elaborated in a broader scope in the new OHCHR Update Analysis which was already mentioned earlier at this Session² as well as in Report of the Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons, A/HRC/39/50, para 31 (2018).

¹ Substantive Inputs in the form of Normative Content for the Development of a Possible International Standard on the Focus Areas “Education, Training, Lifelong learning and Capacity Building” and “Social Protection and Social Security (including social protections floors)” (A/AC.278/2021/CRP.2) - [Working document submitted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\) in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#)

² Working paper prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights – [“Update to the 2012 Analytical Outcome Study on the normative standards in international human rights law in relation to older persons”](#). p. 50.

At this stage we must therefore talk about a necessary shift in perception of this right, which would result in building a systemic approach to that will make education in older age accessible in every local community.

This should be achieved after introducing the rights based approach to education in older age. As in the previous century our societies built an educational system for children and youth, now it is time to develop accessible educational opportunities also for people in older age.

Moreover we need to assure availability, accessibility, acceptability, adaptability of education in older age³. Those key elements of the right to education address the needs of older persons in a broader context than it is fulfilled now. Providing legal protection in those aspects is necessary in order to make education in older age happen on a broader scale. In Poland in 2018 the number of older persons participating in educational activities was extremely low - about 1.6% among persons aged between 55 and 74. This number shows that taking part in education at an older age in Poland is an exception. The reasons are not only hidden in the lack of state's systemic approach but we should assume that it is also a result of a general perception or even a stereotype of poor learning capabilities and lack of will to learn in older age.

Therefore, we need to combine the right to education with states' broader obligations to eliminate discrimination, which should cover not only the innovative ways of providing older persons with educational opportunities but also with fighting against the harmful stereotypes preventing older persons from taking advantage of the benefits of education.

Therefore, introducing education in older age as a human right in the new possible Convention would be a game changer - also in Poland.

Thank you.

-//-

³ Substantive Inputs in the form of Normative Content for the Development of a Possible International Standard on the Focus Areas "Education, Training, Lifelong learning and Capacity Building" and "Social Protection and Social Security (including social protections floors)" (A/AC.278/2021/CRP.2) - [Working document submitted by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs \(DESA\) in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) p. 8-10.