

International Association of Gerontology and Geriatrics Response to The Call by the Chair of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing for Substantive Input to its 14th session

Focus Area 1: Accessibility, infrastructure, and habitat (transport, housing, and access).

This submission will address human rights to adequate housing.

National legal and policy framework. Article 25 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares that all persons have a right to an adequate standard of living, with general comment No. 4 (1991) from the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights delineating criteria necessary to fulfill this right, including infrastructure, habitability, and accessibility. The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons highlights numerous Conventions that affirm housing as a human right but fail to include specific reference to older persons: the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Rights of the Child, and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The lone exception currently is the regional Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons which guarantees adequate housing for older persons according to need and preferences.

The 2021 Global Report on Ageism issued by the World Health Organization provided a sobering look at the incidence of ageism throughout the world, with fully 50% of global citizens harboring ageist beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors. Yet the numerous and varied contributions and abilities of older persons are frequently overlooked, dismissed, or ignored in national policies.

Challenges and barriers. Stable housing becomes reality when political will ensures that it is available and affordable. Creation of climate-sustainable infrastructure dictates that many opinions are heard as housing is built and electricity, water, sanitation, and community services --including markets, hospitals, and playgrounds-- are installed. Where are the voices of older persons who are directly impacted by the housing stock, its location and transportation options?

Lack of adequate income leaves many vulnerable persons unable to participate in the housing economy. Social protections through pensions or other guaranteed income sources are central to the quality of life, yet opportunity and ability for many elders to secure or increase their monthly income may be limited by ageism, workplace bias or cultural prohibitions.

Culture can also play a role in housing instability for older women. In some regions of the world, widows may lose their homes to their adult children who assume ownership without permission. Physical changes in the ageing body and/or dementia can also result in expulsion of older women from their homes and communities on suspicion of witchcraft.

Data. The 2022 UN Population Division Report provided information on household composition and living arrangements of older persons; little appears available elsewhere on their rights to housing (or transport and access). The 2023 questionnaire requested by the OEWGA Co-

Facilitators sought important feedback from the global community regarding identified gaps in human rights.

Equality and non-discrimination. Member States' responses to the questionnaire indicated that sections of their respective Constitutions or Laws addressed citizen rights, but very few specifically mentioned older persons as rights holders. Some acknowledged that redress for bias or discrimination could be challenging. NGOs resoundingly supported this observation in their responses.

A community of supporters for the rights of older persons is growing globally, although glaringly absent are the corporate and financial sectors, both central to creating inclusive and affordable housing. Increasing recognition of youth as the 'elders of the future' is leading toward targeted advocacy efforts for a life course approach to policy development and guidelines for the built environment. Ageing Champions across the lifespan can advocate at local and regional levels; key is region-specific approaches to identification and mobilization of Champions.

Educational campaigns are effective in understanding ageism, as is coalition-building which can work to counter prejudiced and ageist behaviors. Government can play a role in launching culturally relevant public education campaigns to promote the human rights of older persons. Age-Friendly communities provide greater opportunity for natural interaction, with parks and community venues designed for young and old. Renewed interest in inter/multigenerational housing aids in reducing misunderstanding and false narratives for all ages.

Remedies and redress. Mechanisms necessary for redress spring from governments. It is in their ability to legislate, mandate and regulate that issues raised in this statement can be addressed.

For example, there is a gap between housing that is profitable to builders and affordable for most older persons. Government subsidies and other incentives can help fill this gap. Additionally, regulations could mandate that builders receiving government funding must include the voice and perspective of older persons in the planning, design, and management of subsidized housing.

When the right to housing is denied, even in developed countries where generally strong civil protections are in place, housing courts will hear the complaints, but the process is long and arduous. Once petitioners come before the judge, it is critical that linguistically and culturally competent advocates be available within the court system to assist the older person through this daunting ordeal. As this critical resource is most often funded by cash-strapped local NGO's, a strong commitment to government funding for ombudsmen is vital.