

14th session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Guiding questions for the focus area on “accessibility, infrastructure and habitat (transport, housing and access)”

Inputs by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

National legal and policy framework

1. What are the national legal provisions and policy frameworks that recognize older persons’ rights to accessibility, infrastructure and habitat (transport, housing and access)?

States should consider the opportunities associated with modifying and promoting public policies which lead to universal designs for urban infrastructure, increasing accessibility for all people, and especially older persons. They should also promote independence and autonomy of older persons through an adequate environment; include the gradual adaptation of existing infrastructure; and contain mechanisms to promote the comprehensive development of people as they age. In this regard, some countries in the region have adopted concrete measures based on their incorporation into the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, which seeks to work progressively “to improve the fit between people’s needs and the environments in which they live”. In some countries, such measures have resulted in cities or communities being registered in the network; and, in other cases, national programmes on age-friendly environments have been promoted.

a) the right of older persons to adequate housing, including land, property and inheritance.

Older persons’ housing and the environment in which they live are particularly important, both for the accessibility and emotional and psychological security they provide, as well as for the financial burden of maintaining them. However, achieving these objectives in a region characterized by large unsatisfied demand for housing is a complex task. The situation may be even more complex for certain particularly vulnerable population groups. In Central America and the Andean countries, only 20% of older persons in a situation of human mobility have a house or apartment of their own and only 36% have their own room.

As detailed in ECLAC’s 2022 report “Ageing in Latin America and the Caribbean: inclusion and rights of older persons”,¹ a number of initiatives to improve the housing conditions of older persons have been implemented in Latin America and the Caribbean. First, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Mexico have granted subsidies, for both home improvement and housebuilding. Second, Argentina and Chile report major investments in housing provided for older persons under commodatum (loan) arrangements. Third, measures have been adopted that focus on construction regulations, including specific signage to enhance accessibility and provide preferential attention for older persons: Argentina reports the construction of housing complexes based on criteria of comfort, safety and elimination of architectural barriers; and Paraguay mentions the installation of signage in public spaces. Fourth, reference is made to the creation of new government processes to help the older adult population obtain affordable housing. The Plurinational State of Bolivia includes an age-related parameter among the eligibility criteria for older adults to receive housing loans; and the Dominican Republic has created a programme to restore housing for older persons living in extreme poverty.

¹ See [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/48568-ageing-latin-america-and-caribbean-inclusion-and-rights-older-persons>.

b) the right of older persons to access and enjoy, on an equal basis with others, the physical environment, transportation, information and communications (including ICTs), and other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas (e.g. buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities, schools, housing, green spaces, medical facilities and workplaces; information, communications and other services, including electronic services and emergency services).

Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have taken actions aimed at improving the public space, framed by the objective of promoting active and healthy ageing, since they foster the participation, health and safety of older persons. Of particular note are the friendly communities programme implemented in Chile and the older adults and community development programme promoted by the Government of Paraguay. Improvement of the public environment includes the creation of spaces for care and participation, but also the adaptation of signage and street furniture and the creation of community service networks.

Countries have also adopted measures to guarantee access to public transportation for older persons and persons with disabilities, prioritizing affordability. However, progress is also needed in the design of new infrastructure, the direct regulation and supervision of the service providers, while also taking account of the needs of different user groups.

Although increasing numbers of older persons in the region live in households with Internet access, and Internet use has increased in this population group, the disparities with respect to younger age groups remain very wide. Older persons —especially women, Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendants and those living in rural areas— face major challenges in accessing information and communication technologies (ICTs), owing both to the lack of infrastructure and connectivity and to the cost of devices and Internet connection services. Some countries have put specific measures in place to reduce the age digital divide. Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru all have national digital agendas that include older persons; as do Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, where legislation has also been passed recognizing the right of older persons to have access to ICTs.

c) policies/programmes that enable older persons to live independently and to be included in their communities as they age.

As a result of the regional evaluation process of the Madrid Plan of Action,² the ECLAC recommends:

- Ensuring enabling and supportive environments and to enable older persons to lead daily lives with autonomy and independence is crucial to guarantee quality basic services, promote mobility and safe accessibility of physical environments, as well encouraging positive intergenerational relations in social, community and family environments.
- In the area of urban and rural planning, there is an urgent need to apply a life-course perspective that fosters equitable and affordable access to basic physical and social infrastructure that is sustainable and available to all, without discrimination. This encompasses access to affordable serviced housing and land, drinking water, sanitation, waste disposal, modern renewable energy, Internet and other ICT, sustainable mobility, health, healthy, nutritious and appropriate diets, education and culture.

² Ibidem.

- Efforts must be made to strengthen specific measures to guarantee older persons' access to affordable, accessible, safe and sustainable public transport and urban and rural infrastructure that enables independence in the event of a decline in intrinsic capacity or of disability. Home adaptation programmes are crucial to ensure that people can age in their own communities.
- Older persons need safe spaces to live and move around in, as well as institutions that address and support this right, taking into account all aspects of the violence they experience and producing specific indicators and data on it, including on feminicides or femicides in old age.