

Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

Thirteenth session

3 – 6 April 2023

Tuesday, 4 April

3 p.m. – 6 p.m.

Item 6. Follow-up to

resolution [77/190](#): measures to enhance the promotion and protection of the human rights and dignity of older persons: best practices, lessons learned, possible content for a multilateral legal instrument and identification of areas and issues where further protection and action are needed

Focus Area: Right to health and access to health services.

Your Excellences,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to participate in an Open-ended working group on Ageing today and address you in the capacity of the Deputy Ombudsman of Georgia, which simultaneously functions as an NHRI.

Georgia is a small country in eastern Europe. Similar to other Eastern Partnership Countries of the region Georgia faces the same severe challenges in terms of realizing the rights of older persons, as they are exposed to negative attitudes and age discrimination in access to health care, employment, goods and services, information, and education. C

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine, this dark picture has worsened recently in the region. For example, as specified by [the Amnesty International report](#), Ukraine, where people over 60 years old make up nearly one-fourth of the population, is one of the “oldest” countries in the world. According to HelpAge International, the proportion of older people affected by the war in Ukraine is higher than that of any other ongoing conflict.

Meanwhile, as recognized, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the inequitable health harms and human rights violations faced by older persons, raising a need to support a healthy ageing policy as a human rights imperative. This crisis has taught us how much we need to strengthen healthcare systems and social protections – to advance the well-being and resilience of all, including older people. As UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mrs Michelle Bachelet [pointed out](#), Universal health care and universal social security are not debit items for any society. They are fundamental human rights, with immediate and long-term benefits for everyone.

The pandemic has exposed the gaps in the international legal framework for the full protection of the human rights of older persons on an equal basis with others, and the urgent need to address these issues as a priority of the international community. This working group has a crucial role and is the only body in the UN system, specifically devoted to addressing issues related to the protection of the human rights of older people. This platform gives visibility to the challenges older persons face.

Our institution as NHRI has identified the promotion and protection of human rights as a priority. In this regard, I would like to share some reflections. In Georgia, the universal healthcare program was launched. The program beneficiaries are citizens of Georgia including older persons, who do not have private health insurance. A primary health care program is an approach tailored to public health that aims to ensure the best possible state of health and well-being and the equitable distribution of health resources. However, there are gaps in the health care system, which may not respond properly to the needs of older persons.

Namely, as it is recognized in resolution 77/190, the General Assembly is concerned that many health systems are not sufficiently prepared to respond to the needs of the rapidly ageing population, including the need for preventive, curative, palliative and specialized care. These challenges can be considered a Georgian example indeed.

Based on the results of the program monitoring our institution considers that equal access to health care services for older people is not ensured in both rural and urban areas. Ensuring the geographic availability of medical services is

important for the effective implementation of state medical programs. In this regard, older persons living in mountainous regions (mostly older people make up the population of mountainous regions) face certain challenges. They have limited access to local comprehensive medical services and must refer to distant medical facilities. In addition, in terms of improving the knowledge and skills of healthcare personnel, especially, education about managing the condition of older patients, there are no effective measures taken in the country.

Furthermore, the ombudsman indicates that it is important for the state to increase access to medicines and to provide regular oversight of physical access to medicines. There are also challenges faced by older persons in their enjoyment of the right to health, including the impact of intersectional discrimination and inequality based on age.

In view of this, addressing gaps by an international mechanism would be a valuable lifeline for national legislation, which is the main argument for our support for adopting a new convention.

I thank you.