



Zagreb, 22 Feb 2022

**Formal input for the 12th Session of the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing -
Contribution of older persons to sustainable development**

National Legal and Policy Framework

Given the complexity of the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and its impact on the overall social and economic development, the Government of the Republic of Croatia established the National Council for Sustainable Development in January 2018. Even though there is a possibility for civil society organizations representing voices of older persons to be included in its work, this has yet not been done, as the Council met only once in 2019.

Furthermore, taking into account the integrated approach to sustainable development, Croatia adopted the 2030 National Development Strategy, which sets „dignified aging“ as one of the priority areas within the „healthy, active and quality life“ strategic goal, noting that one of the biggest challenges relates to the risk of poverty for older persons. With that, the document focuses on what each individual can do for their economic wellbeing in old age, however, without explicitly recognizing the right of older persons to contribute to sustainable development or even their potential of doing so.

From our perspective as an NHRI which protects human rights of older persons as well as national equality body which fights ageism and age discrimination, the potential for leading a healthy and active life is heavily reliant on the quality of healthcare, the availability of local services, as well as on employment options and infrastructure. A lack of organized public transport, long waiting lists for healthcare services, and a lack of local support systems can make older persons less involved and isolated but also forced to consider institutionalization.

Furthermore, among civil society organizations representing older persons there is a low level of awareness on SDGs, and in their work they are more focused on specific rights such as the right to retirement, without linking them to SDGs. Additionally, the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) has not been widely recognized nationally, and there is little information nationally on how civil society organizations, including those representing older persons, can get involved and contribute to the realization of sustainable development goals.

CSOs representing older persons also rarely take part in public discussions in regards to broader issues – such as environmental issues, judiciary reform, and long-term planning.

When it comes to civic space in Croatia in general, the Ombudswoman has been highlighting the lack of the key strategic document in this respect (the National Plan for the Creation of Enabling Environment for Civil Society) for the past few years, as the last strategic document expired in 2015. In relation to the access that CSOs have to financial resources, a number of CSOs have reported that there is a lack of funding opportunities for those working on issues of human rights and anti-discrimination, particularly in relation to monitoring and advocacy initiatives and to a lack of partnership with state administration bodies. In the context of the legislative processes,



there is a possibility for CSOs to take part in consultation through E-Counselling platform. However, CSO representatives point to the fact that the comments are often rejected and answers provided by relevant bodies regarding their suggestions and amendments are only formalistic. Additionally, there is a lack of other forms of consultations, such as public discussions and meetings. This is even more important in the context of older persons, who might not all be sufficiently aware of how to use this platform or might not have access to the Internet.

Equality and non-discrimination

The Croatian Anti-discrimination Act guarantees protection from discrimination on 17 grounds, including age, and about 6% of all discrimination complaints submitted to the Ombudswoman are age-related. Most of them refer to work and employment, others at different areas of social life, such as access to goods and services, healthcare, health and social protection. Often these cases refer to intersectional discrimination, a combination of age and other grounds such as gender, national minority background, disability, health status or low-income/property status. Older persons on low income, living in underdeveloped, rural areas, faced with almost no public transport, lack of access to electricity/water, cannot easily access social and health service and are more exposed to discrimination. This was further exacerbated by earthquakes in Sisačka-Moslavina County and Zagreb in 2020, which left many people without their homes.

Remedies and Redress

Older persons can submit complaints to the Ombudswoman in regards to human rights violations and age discrimination. In the context of age discrimination, the Ombudswoman can intervene in courts proceedings on the side of a plaintiff and may bring a joint legal action for the protection against discrimination.