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A study on promoting and protecting the rights of older people from the effects of climate change

Plain English version of:

Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons in the context of climate change (A/HRC/47/46)

Report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

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| Summary |
| This study is in line with Human Rights Council resolution 44/7. It looks at the effects of climate change on the human rights of older people and the related commitments and duties of States, highlights the benefits of climate action by older people, provides examples of promising practice, and offers conclusions and recommendations. |
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**Note:** This is not a United Nations official document.

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I. Introduction

1. We have submitted this study in line with Human Rights Council resolution 44/7, in which the Human Rights Council asked us to carry out a detailed analysis, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, on promoting and protecting the rights of older people relating to climate change. This includes the risks to their physical and mental health, and their contributions to efforts to deal with the negative effects of climate change.

2. On 18 September 2020, we sent a questionnaire to Member States and other stakeholders, including international organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society, for their views. Their responses helped us with this study (see endnote 1 on page 14).

3. In the study, we look at the effects of climate change on the human rights of older people and the related legal and policy commitments and duties of States. The study also highlights the potential of older people’s human rights-based climate action and provides examples of promising practice. It concludes with firm recommendations for meeting human rights obligations relating to older people and climate change.

II. The effect of climate change on older people

4. Around the world, climate change is already causing rising temperatures and sea levels, destruction of coastline, forest fires, and extreme temperatures and weather, including heatwaves, cold snaps, floods, droughts and hurricanes. These events carry significant and often devastating human rights risks for all those affected (endnote 2), but older people may face worse effects than others.

5. By the year 2050, it is estimated that there will be 1.5 billion people aged 65 and over, making up one-sixth of the world’s population (endnote 3). Age does not itself make people vulnerable to climate risks, but brings with it a number of physical, political, economic and social factors that may do so. Older people face a number of challenges to enjoying their human rights, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic (endnote 4).

6. Older people are not all alike or a group that has a clearly agreed definition. There are enormous differences among older people, for example in political and economic power, economic and social class, community involvement, and other factors, including gender, disability, race and ethnic background, sexual orientation and gender identity. These differences have significant effects on their human rights. Also, “the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of the old and the older-old (those 80 years of age and over) are considerably different” (endnote 5). Older people are often excluded, overlooked and neglected in research and when collecting data. People often do not identify as older people, which is complicated. “Old” does not have the same meaning in all societies and depends on the context and circumstances. Data related to older people also tends not to be broken down for the oldest of the old (endnote 6).

7. The effects of climate change on older people are made worse by ageism (discrimination and bias against older people), which can lead to older people being neglected, ignored, and overlooked in laws and policy. “Prejudices about older persons being frail, sick and dependent drive their marginalization and legitimize exclusionary practices” (endnote 7). When it comes to climate action, older people may be stereotyped as “passive, incapable and withdrawn” (endnote 8). To add to these problems, older people do not have a specific agreement guaranteeing their human rights, and are not often mentioned in international environmental agreements.

8. Age discrimination can be significant in older people being excluded from policies and programmes designed to deal with the negative effects of climate change, including during climate-related emergencies. At times in emergencies, relief workers may treat older people unequally and provide inadequate services based on ageism (endnote 9). Ageism and age discrimination, social isolation, neglect, poverty, disability, and whether someone is a migrant are among the many factors that interact with climate change to negatively affect the human rights of older people, as set out in the paragraphs below.

A. Rights to life, health and safety

9. Some climate change effects influence the lives and health of older people more than others, and policies have failed to account for this. Adults aged 65 and older are the most likely to die from heat exposure, during heatwaves and extreme cold weather or winter storms, and in hurricanes and other natural hazards (endnote 10). Older people have higher rates of heart illness and diabetes, which are linked to heat-related disease and death. A study in Finland found a 14% increase in deaths for people over the age of 65 as a result of heatwaves (endnote 11). In France during the 2003 European heatwave, 80% of additional deaths occurred in people older than 75 (endnote 12). 75% of those who died during Hurricane Katrina in the United States of America were over the age of 60. About 40% of those who died during Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 were also over the age of 60 (endnote 13), as were 70% of those who died as a result of floods in La Plata, Argentina in 2013 (endnote 14).

10. The medical journal *The Lancet* has found people aged 65 and older in all parts of the world are becoming more exposed and vulnerable to extremes of heat (endnote 15). Air pollution, which is closely linked to climate change, is a possible cause of dementia (endnote 16) and has more significant health effects for older people, who as a result experience “higher primary care and emer­gency room use, more frequent hospi­tal admissions, restricted activity and an increase in prescription medication use” (endnote 17). Climate change has also been linked to rising levels of several infectious diseases, which particularly affect older people, as shown by the COVID-19 pandemic (endnote 18). In lower-income countries, this vulnerability is increased by poverty and malnutrition, poor infrastructure and the lack of resources to treat the specific needs of older people (endnote 19).

11. Climate-related emergencies such as heatwaves, floods and hurricanes can disrupt necessary health care and services for older people. During heatwaves, older people may be confined indoors, without access to the medical care they need. Evacuating older people, particularly from care facilities, is complicated by the need to transfer medical equipment, supplies and records (endnote 20). Older people who do not have adequate care and support may be cut off from relevant information and services during an emergency (endnote 21). Emergencies have been found to worsen existing health conditions in some older people. They also have negative effects on their mental health and memory (endnote 22), and older people often take longer to recover from the physical effects of disasters (endnote 23).

12. Climate change can also significantly affect older people’s mental health. Some older people who survive disasters experience high rates of survivor’s guilt, especially when they lose children or grandchildren, and older people have been found to have high rates of post-traumatic stress and depression following floods (endnote 24). While other studies have found these rates to be consistent with those of the general population, older people may be affected more because some are more reluctant to get mental-health care (endnote 25). Some older people are also increasingly lonely and isolated as a result of climate change effects (endnote 26), or experience significant mental trauma or depression when confronting the effects of climate change. They can also feel guilty or powerless about the world that they will leave for future generations.

13. In emergencies, some older people are also at higher risk of violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse. Emergency situations increase these risks, “as older persons are separated from community support and familiar services, while their role in the family and the community may be undermined” (endnote 27).

B. Mobility

14. Moving within countries or to other countries is complicated and affected by many different and related factors. However, it is clear that both climate-related emergencies and the gradual effects of climate change are increasingly important factors in how people move from place to place, and can have significant human rights risks for older people.

15. In emergencies, older people with limited mobility may have difficulty reaching safety. Infrastructure and policy that makes sure that older people are aware of evacuation warnings, orders or services may be lacking, especially if new technologies are relied on to spread information and to account for older people’s needs to do with travel, adequate food, shelter, health care and services. Physical challenges that have only minor effects on day-to-day life may seriously restrict older people in an emergency, limiting their mobility and ability to adapt (endnote 28).

16. When older people have to move due to emergencies, some face more difficulties in returning to their homes and getting compensation for damage, due to physical barriers and being excluded from humanitarian aid for rebuilding purposes because of their age (endnote 29). “When older people do move, doing so in later life can be particularly traumatic, due to broken social ties and lack of facilities, rights and protection in unfamiliar new environments” (endnote 30).

17. Older people may also be stateless (not recognised as a citizen of any country) or become stateless if they move, which can have a huge on their wellbeing. Some older people face specific barriers to obtaining nationality, as legislation in some countries sets conditions for naturalization (becoming a citizen of a country) that they may not meet. Naturalization may depend on passing a language test and other exams that can be challenging for older people and people with disabilities.

18. Access to technology is increasingly playing an important role in mobility. Older people over-rely on family connections and non-Internet methods of communication, and often have not received the support that would help them to learn how to use new technologies. As a result, they have reduced access to networks and information that would help make them more resilient and help their mobility (endnote 31).

19. Mobility is becoming a more and more common response to the gradual effects of climate change, but older people are often not able to move. This may be due to physical limitations, unwillingness to ‘burden’ family members during the journey or in a new location, or particularly strong ties to the lands and places where they have been living. Many older people in areas experiencing severe climate effects have strong cultural and spiritual attachments, including not wanting to abandon traditional homes and lands or leave behind ancestral burial grounds (endnote 32).

20. Older people’s mobility within the areas where they are already living can also be affected by climate policy. In some countries, a significant percentage of older people rely more on vehicles, which climate regulations that are intended to discourage driving do not take account of (endnote 33). Other older people rely on public transport, which can face disruptions due to climate events, or there are reduced services as climate change affects budgets and people move out of climate-affected areas (endnote 34).

C. Right to adequate housing

21. Climate change also significantly affects the homes in which older people live. In some areas, older people rely on traditional building materials that are becoming less available (endnote 35). Older people are more likely to live in homes with insufficient heating and cooling systems that do not adapt to new temperature extremes or that are less energy-efficient (endnote 36). They are also more likely to lack access to safe, clean, healthy and sustainable energy sources (endnote 37). Measures that states put in place to promote more energy-efficient or climate-adapted homes sometimes do not include facilities that are necessary to make sure older people want them (endnote 38).

22. Research carried out during multiple disasters in the United States showed that assisted living facilities for older people are often not included in community emergency planning and receive less help after disasters (endnote 39). Evacuations put a strain on facilities that take in evacuees (endnote 40). Shelters are often not designed for the particular needs of older people ─ accessible toilets are too far away, or older people need to stay close to family (endnote 41). “Older adults can also be more susceptible to property damage or loss due to lack of insurance, limited personal finances, and poor creditworthiness” (endnote 42), and in the aftermath of disasters, physical limitations and being excluded from humanitarian aid can make it particularly difficult for older people to rebuild and repair damaged homes.

D. Right to food

23. Climate change is transforming food and agricultural systems all over the world, often reducing agricultural production and the availability of food, with a particular effect on older people. Because older people often live in poverty and on fixed incomes, they face difficulty in coping with the rising costs of food (endnote 43). When food is scarce, some households allocate it in a way that favours younger family members, and some older people are physically less able to access food distribution points or are left out in relief efforts (endnote 44).

24. Climate change is altering not only the amount of food available to many people, but also the quality and types of food. This affects older people, who suffer more from malnutrition and may particularly rely on specialized diets (endnote 45). In small island developing States, loss of farming land means that people rely more and more on industrial and processed food, increasing the rate of non-communicable disease (disease that can’t be transmitted between people, such as diabetes) in older people. Limited access to traditional food can also have a negative effect on the rights to health and cultural life (endnote 46). Emergencies and inadequate responses to them may also worsen the difficulties faced by older people in getting the quantity, quality and variety of food necessary for their health and survival (endnote 47).

E. Rights to water and sanitation

25. Climate change is reducing the quality and quantity of water, and making its availability unpredictable in many parts of the world (endnote 48). Older people are more affected by water insecurity. Physical, financial and design barriers all contribute to inadequate water and sanitation services, and this will only be made worse by climate change (endnote 49). The lack of access to water and sanitation will have significant health effects for older people, who are particularly likely to suffer dehydration and infectious diseases associated with poor sanitation (endnote 50). It is also a reason for older people moving.

F. Rights to social protection, care and support

26. As disasters and extreme weather happen more often, they put a burden on social service resources and capacity to provide services, which may detract from care and support available to older people (endnote 51). Younger people in climate-affected areas moving may mean less care and support for older people who remain (endnote 52), although moving may also be partly due to the need to send back money for the care of older relatives (endnote 53).

27. The Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons drew attention to the pressure on social protection systems, including pension systems, in emergencies. She noted the disruption in access to systems that comes with crossing borders, as well as the difficulties presented by lost or forgotten identity documents and restrictions on mobility or challenges related to different employers and pension systems in different countries (endnote 54). Older movers, especially those in irregular situations (those who have not used official migration channels), may face an increased risk of not having access to a pension or social protection.

G. Rights to decent work and livelihoods

28. While stereotypes might portray older people as being largely out of the workforce, the reality is that many older people cannot afford to retire and continue to work well into old age (endnote 55). Climate change is expected to particularly affect the types of work that older people are likely to do, including subsistence agriculture and informal labour.

29. Older people, particularly older women, rely more than others on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods in many parts of the world (endnote 56). The effects of climate on agricultural production and measures to adapt, prevent or reduce climate change that can disrupt agricultural practices, such as plans to relocate and convert land to biofuels production, have a greater effect on older people (endnote 57).

30. Changes in the possibilities for traditional livelihoods, including farming, herding and handicrafts, also have more of an effect on older people. They often rely more than others on these livelihoods and have limited access to the support they need to adapt to new ones. Losing livelihoods affects not only economic stability, but also health, wellbeing and socio-cultural security (feeling of social and cultural belonging and comfort) (endnote 58).

31. Programmes and funding aimed at dealing with the effect of climate change on livelihoods can leave out older people by mistake, or deliberately, once they reach a certain age. Older people sometimes face significant competition from younger people in these programmes, or may find that their skills and abilities are undervalued (endnote 59).

H. Cultural rights

32. Climate change has a devastating effect on cultural traditions, practices and heritage sites (endnote 60). While older people are not the only ones who keep culture or tradition going, many feel a particular and long-standing commitment to cultural practices or sites, and many communities give them a role in protecting cultural and traditional practices and knowledge.

33. Some older people feel a big loss when cultural heritage sites are lost, when culturally important food or materials become less available, or when traditional ecological knowledge becomes unreliable due to climate change (endnote 61). As a result, some older people have been reluctant to accept climate change adaptation measures that involve moving away from or losing cultural practices or heritage sites (endnote 62).

I. Different forms of discrimination

1. Different effects of gender

34. Both ageing and climate change have different effects when it comes to gender. Because women tend to live longer, there are more older women than older men, and women in heterosexual partnerships tend to outlive their partners, so more older women live alone (endnote 63). Older women are made more vulnerable to climate change due to factors such as physiological and physical differences, social standards and roles, gender discrimination and unequal access to resources and power (endnote 64).

35. Older women experience higher rates of poverty than older men and face other economic hardships that are made worse by climate change. They also face more health risks, including a greater likelihood of experiencing chronic diseases and harm from air pollution (endnote 65), and have higher rates of death and other health complications from extreme heat than any other population group (endnote 66). During typhoons, however, older men have been found to be more at risk of death (endnote 67).

36. Social roles and expectations related to gender have complicated effects on climate risks for older people. In some societies, older men are more socially isolated and so find it more difficult to get help in coping with the negative effects of climate change (endnote 68). However, in emergencies, or due to strained family resources brought on by the effects of climate change, older women are sometimes more likely to be seen as a burden and suffer abuse or neglect (endnote 69). In some countries, older women are blamed for extreme weather through accusations of witchcraft or sorcery, and face violence or exclusion as a result (endnote 70). Transforming traditional livelihoods and cultural and social practices also has varying effects on men and women because of their different social roles (endnote 71). Social standards around gender identity and sexual orientation may also add to the negative human rights effects of climate change for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex older people.

2. Older people with disabilities

37. Climate change can have a more negative effect on the human rights of people with disabilities, affecting their health, food security, livelihood, housing, and access to water and sanitation (endnote 72). People are more likely to have a disability as they age ─ almost half of older people worldwide are living with some form of disability, with older people representing the majority of people with disabilities (endnote 73). So, older people are also more likely to experience the effects of climate change on people with disabilities.

38. Age and disability can increase risks of harm. For example, older people with disabilities are more likely to experience poor housing conditions, which makes them more vulnerable to climate-related emergencies and the effects of temperature (endnote 74). Overlapping forms of bias and discrimination can lead to older people with disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities, feeling invisible and being excluded from climate policies that address their needs (endnote 75).

3. Racial and ethnic minorities

39. In many countries and societies around the world, racial and ethnic minorities are more likely to experience poverty and discrimination and reduced access to human rights. This inequality gets worse with age, making people even more vulnerable to climate effects. For example, non-white older people in the United States were found to be at higher risk of heat-related death (endnote 76).

4. Indigenous peoples

40. Indigenous peoples also experience high rates of poverty and discrimination and some may be particularly affected by climate change because of the deep connections between their way of living and the natural environment. Older people in indigenous communities are sometimes more tied to traditional livelihoods, foods, or cultural practices that are threatened by climate change (endnote 77). They may experience a unique sense of loss related to the disappearance of cultural practices and traditional ways of life (endnote 78).

III. Promoting and protecting the rights of older people from the effects of climate change

A. Legal framework

1. Key international human rights agreements

41. As said above, climate change affects older people’s enjoyment of their human rights, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation, housing, decent work, culture and development. Those rights are described in international agreements, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the Declaration on the Right to Development. Although there is no specific international agreement dedicated to the human rights of older people, and although many of human rights agreements do not specifically list age as forbidden grounds for discrimination, all of them protect older people’s human rights. States also have legal obligations, including under international human rights law, to carry out climate policies that support everybody, including older people, by making sure they take a full and effective part in climate action at all levels.

42. Several human rights agreements contain provisions that are relevant to the rights of older people affected by climate change. Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities protects the equal right to humanitarian relief of people with disabilities in the aftermath of natural disasters. Article 25 contains a specific call for health services to minimize and prevent further disabilities among older people (endnote 79). The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families forbids age discrimination in articles 1.1 and 7. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, in its article 11.1(e), provides for the equal right to social security for older women.

43. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights has explained that States who are part of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights “are obligated to pay particular attention to promoting and protecting the economic, social and cultural rights of older persons” (endnote 80). This includes special emphasis on older people’s rights relating to work, social security, an adequate standard of living, and health, education and culture.

44. In 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women issued its general recommendation No. 27 on older women and the protection of their human rights. Paragraph 25 of the general recommendation draws attention to the more severe effects that climate change may have on older women, and paragraph 35 recommends that States “ensure that climate change and disaster risk-reduction measures are gender-responsive and sensitive to the needs and vulnerabilities of older women” and make it possible for older women to take part in decision-making for climate change mitigation and adaptation. The Committee’s general recommendation No. 37 (2018) on the effects on gender of reducing the risk of climate-change disasters also includes references to the need to take into account different effects on older women (endnote 81). The Committee also referred to the rights of older women regarding the human rights effects of climate change and disasters in other documents (endnote 82).

45. Special procedure mandate holders, including the Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons (endnote 83) and the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (endnote 84) have begun to pay attention to the human rights effects of climate change on older people in their country visits, and States are also beginning to raise these issues in their recommendations under the universal periodic review. In 2019 and 2020, five recommendations suggested that States include the rights of older people in their climate policies (endnote 85).

46. Two regional agreements specifically protect the human rights of older people. Seven states have so far joined the 2015 Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons (endnote 86). Article 25 of the Convention protects older people’s right to a healthy environment, while article 29 provides for older people’s safety, needs, and taking part in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. The Independent Expert on the human rights of older people has praised the Convention as an example of good practice (endnote 87).

47. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa (endnote 88) was adopted in 2016. Article 14 provides for protection of older people in conflict and disaster situations. It says States must make sure that in emergencies older people are among those to enjoy access, as a priority, to assistance, and that they receive humane treatment, necessary medical care, protection and respect at all times (endnote 89). Also, article 9 (2) of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa says States must provide special protection and assistance to older people who have moved within the country.

2. Other relevant law and policy frameworks

48. While many international agreements do not refer specifically to older people and their human rights, there are several international law and policy agreements that do commit to responding to the opportunities and challenges of an ageing population. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing is the main global document that looks at the concerns of older people. The Independent Expert on the human rights of older people has explained that the Plan of Action is not sufficient to make sure older people fully enjoy their human rights (endnote 90). However, it does adopt “a conceptual approach that is in accordance with human rights principles” and reasserts the protection of certain rights (endnote 91), including the rights to take part in climate action, and the right to work, health, independence and accessibility. The Plan of Action does not refer to climate change, but does identify emergencies as an issue, and calls on States to recognize both the vulnerabilities and the capabilities of older people in emergency situations (endnote 92). It also looks at the needs of older people regarding rural development, migration, and moving to cities (endnote 93), and refers to the added health burden that environmental pollution presents for older people (endnote 94).

49. The United Nations has declared 2021 to 2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing. This initiative is designed to encourage “concerted, catalytic and collaborative action to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live” (endnote 95). The decade provides opportunities to focus on older people’s human rights and for policies on how to protect those rights relating to climate change align. This includes the priorities of looking at ageism and encouraging an age-friendly environment.

50. While the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and other global climate (including climate finance ─ funding for climate projects) frameworks do not specifically refer to older people, there are certain international legal and policy frameworks relevant to climate change that include provisions for older people. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals refer to older people, particularly in Goal 3, although none of the targets or indicators of that goal specifically refer to older people. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction recognizes the importance of including older people and their knowledge, wisdom and skills (endnote 96). The global compacts for refugees and for safe, orderly and regular migration both highlight older people’s needs and that they should take part in climate action (endnote 97). The compacts both look at the links between migration, disasters, climate change and environmental degeneration (endnote 98). The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement emphasize that older people are entitled to specific protection and assistance and to treatment that takes into account their special needs (endnote 99). Finally, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees gives special attention to older people in its policy frameworks (endnote 100).

B. Older people’s power in dealing with the negative effects of climate change

51. Under international human rights law, all affected communities and groups must take part for climate action to be meaningful and effective. It is essential to respect, protect and fulfil older people’s rights to take part, and to give them opportunities to be involved in climate action, including by providing them with relevant climate information and to overcome barriers to including them.

52. Older people bring unique and important contributions to climate action. They often support their families and communities financially and through informal care work, and contribute to decision-making and settling conflicts. Older people often have important knowledge of science, history, tradition and culture that can inspire and support climate action by current and future generations (endnote 101). They also have significant voting and economic power that can be used for effective climate policy.

1. Older people as advisers and custodians of knowledge

53. It is important to avoid falling into the traps of stereotypes, including those that characterize all older people, and especially older indigenous people, as having natural wisdom or knowledge. However, it is also true that many older people have built up years of knowledge, and that in certain communities they are sometimes given a specific role as keepers of traditional knowledge about the environment. Some older people also have important knowledge about how to practice more sustainable lifestyles, including relying less on material goods and using and reusing materials sustainably. This makes them important participants and possible leaders in the move to circular economies (economies that aim at not creating any waste or pollution and to restore nature) (endnote 102).

54. Traditional environmental knowledge can play a crucial role in reducing and adapting to climate change. Traditional knowledge is useful for many things. This includes defining earlier environmental baselines (the state of the environment in the past), identifying effects that need to be managed, and providing observational evidence for weather and climate models and technologies for adapting. It is also useful for identifying which culturally appropriate values need protection from direct climate effects or from the effects of climate adaptation measures (endnote 103). It may include understanding weather patterns and warnings of coming disasters, methods of reducing the risk of and surviving such disasters (endnote 104), and agriculture and herding methods that create less environmental harm while maintaining production levels (endnote 105). It can also include a fundamental understanding of human beings as a part of the natural ecosystem that makes both environmental changes and human responsibility for them clearer (endnote 106). Traditional knowledge about the environment that incorporates a longer timescale may also help to make people more adaptable to climate change, by recognizing that they are used to living in a changing environment (endnote 107).

2. Expertise and leadership

55. As well as knowledge, many older people have experience, skills and capabilities that allow them to make significant contributions to climate action. Many of the most powerful and wealthy people in the world, including Heads of State and business and community leaders, fall within the older age group. This group has enormous resources that can be invaluable in finding climate solutions and dealing with the negative human rights effects of climate change. Being among those who have benefitted significantly from the conditions that caused climate change, they have a human rights responsibility to deal with its negative consequences.

56. While young activists have deservedly received a good deal of attention and praise for their innovative and courageous climate action, growing movements of older people are also involved in climate action, often because of concerns about their legacy (endnote 108). Older people have begun legal action, relying on the fact that heat-related effects of climate change are already affecting them more than it affects other people (endnote 109). They also take part in protests and other political action, and come up with new forms of action (endnote 110). Older people’s action can be effective because they can overturn social stereotypes around old age, including both those that lead to greater respect and those that cause older people to be underestimated (endnote 111). They may be able to build solidarity between the generations in the climate movement, because young people appreciate their advice and want their support (endnote 112). Those older people who are in positions of power can use this to add to the voices of younger people and other voices that are often neglected in climate action (endnote 113).

57. A number of social and psychological factors also make older people well-placed to contribute to solutions to climate change. Older adults who are retired may have time to devote to fully educating themselves on climate issues and becoming involved in climate action (endnote 114). Some have developed significant problem-solving and care-giving skills, including the ability to manage negative emotions (endnote 115), to change their mind in the light of new information and adopt new points of view, to help settle disputes fairly (endnote 116), and to use long-term thinking and planning (endnote 117).

58. Older people’s contributions help communities recover and become more resilient when under threat of or in the aftermath of climate-related disasters (endnote 118). They may be able to build on previous experiences of disasters or other threats (endnote 119). One study found that older people living in areas likely to flood “were 4.49 times more likely to have an emergency evacuation plan and have a three-day supply of medications compared to their younger counterparts” (endnote 120).

IV. Promising practices

59. Stakeholders who responded to a call for feedback identified a number of practices by States and others (for example, civil society organizations, cities and national human rights institutions) that take into account the different effects of climate change on the human rights of older people, while also largely recognizing that this is a policy area that deserves greater study and attention.

60. A number of stakeholders identified efforts to consider older people in environmental and sustainability planning. The national climate change adaptation plans of Finland and Slovakia asks for consideration of the viewpoints of groups at risk, including older people (endnote 121). Switzerland’s plan includes measures for reducing the effects of heatwaves for older people (endnote 122). Bangladesh has included older people in the provisions of a number of climate and disaster laws and policies (endnote 123). Mexico has included respect for the rights of older people when putting in place its nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement, in its plans on forests and deforestation (endnote 124) and in a programme providing support specifically to older farmers using sustainable agricultural practices (endnote 125). The city of Cologne in Germany has developed a “heat plan of action for older persons,” while Manchester in the United Kingdom has included climate action in its “Age-Friendly Strategy” (endnote 126).

61. Other stakeholders have included older people in activities to reduce disaster risk and to respond to disasters. Cambodia prioritizes older people when evacuating people after disasters (endnote 127), and the Philippines’ National Economic and Development Authority authorizes collecting age-separated data in its Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery Planning Guide (endnote 128). Civil society initiatives in Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and the Philippines aim to take older people into account when responding to disasters and reducing risk (endnote 129). In Bangladesh, the non-governmental organization Young Power in Social Action, which provides housing assistance to people who move due to climate change, includes older people within a family when prioritizing who receives aid (endnote 130).

62. Stakeholders identified promising practices to do with access to climate information. For example, Iraq has launched media campaigns to tell older people about risks related to infectious and communicable diseases (endnote 131), and Mexico’s Social Security Institute has produced information on environmental matters for older people (endnote 132).

63. Older people have taken part in a wide variety of climate action, and have formed bonds of solidarity with other generations. Some States have promoted or helped with this. For example, Cambodia has older persons’ associations for community action, including around climate change (endnote 133), while the ”My Experience” counselling program in Iraq aims to build on the experience of older people and encourage links with other generations (endnote 134).

V. Conclusions and recommendations

A. Conclusions

**64. While older people are a diverse group and not necessarily always vulnerable, a number of things can increase their risk of experiencing negative effects of climate change on their human rights. Climate change can affect older people’s rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation, housing, freedom of movement, livelihoods, social protection, development and culture, among others. These effects can be increased by many connected forms of discrimination, including discrimination based on gender, race and ethnic origin, disability, and whether people are migrants.**

**65. The effects of climate change can also be increased by ageism, poverty and social exclusion. Too many older people are vulnerable as a result of neglect and abuse and lack of access to resources. The lack of a binding international agreement specifically protecting the human rights of older people, and few references to older people in key international climate agreements, show that, in national and international law, older people lack attention and are invisible.**

**66. Older people have enormous knowledge, experience, skills and resilience that help them to be key contributors in global efforts to adapt to and reduce the negative effects of climate change. Encouraging older people to take part in climate action is not only a vital human right, but also a way of finding effective solutions for all people and for the planet.**

B. Recommendations for States and other stakeholders

**67. Strengthen the international legal system and action to protect older people, through the following actions.**

**(a) Carry out specific research on the effects of climate change on older people and their human rights and collect data separated by gender, disability and age (and which is further separated in the over-60 age category).**

**(b) Include the rights of older people in future decisions of the Conference of the Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and other climate policy agreements, including climate financing agreements in line with commitments under the Paris Agreement and international human rights law.**

**(c) Consider adopting an international legal agreement protecting the human rights of older people and, to achieve this, make quicker progress under the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing, as requested by General Assembly resolution 67/139. This needs to pay specific attention to the effects of climate change on older people and make sure they have a right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.**

**(d) Make sure environmental and sustainability commitments and initiatives aimed at dealing with the needs of older people, such as the World Health Organization’s age-friendly cities initiative and the United Nations Decade for Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), are aligned.**

**68. Take urgent, meaningful and ambitious action to reduce and adapt to climate change in a way that protects the human rights of everyone, including those of older people, through the following actions.**

**(a) Prepare and put in place ambitious climate action plans that commit to limiting global warming to no more than 1.5°C, including by taking immediate action to reduce dependency on fossil fuels (such as coal and oil) and dealing with the negative human rights effects that are already happening.**

**(b) Make sure measures to reduce climate change and the risk of disasters consider age and gender, include people with disabilities, and take into account the needs and rights of older women and men.**

**(c) Make sure that efforts to deal with the effects of climate change on health include consulting older people and organizations working on their rights. Make public health messaging that considers gender and is relevant and accessible to older people.**

**(d) Include older people in policy making and planning in order to create sustainable infrastructure, local spaces, and communities that take into account the needs and rights of older people.**

**(e) Make sure there is high-quality health care and other social services for all older people, and social protection systems that take into account the effects of climate change and build resilience.**

**(f) Help older people to take part in a fair move to sustainable livelihoods, including through job training and skills-building programmes and access to relevant credit and resources.**

**(g) With community elders, take firm action to preserve cultural heritage and traditional and indigenous knowledge that is threatened by climate change.**

**69. Support older people to take part in climate action through the following actions.**

**(a) Investing in communication and education about climate for older people, including specifically about extreme weather or emergencies, and making sure that these are accessible to older people with disabilities.**

**(b) Supporting diversity and including older people in national delegations to meetings under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.**

**(c) Finding and establishing new and creative ways to include older people in environmental volunteering and efforts to take action to reduce or prevent climate change, including by dealing with possible barriers to taking part, such as compulsory retirement ages.**

**(d) Supporting older people to make the most of their voice, confidence and negotiation skills, and giving them good-quality, later-in-life learning opportunities that encourage greater understanding among those who are concerned for their communities in the face of climate change.**

**(e) Helping make discussions between generations around climate change and the environment easier.**

**(f) Including traditional knowledge in climate solutions, with indigenous peoples’ permission (given beforehand), and making sure that the benefits of using this knowledge, including financial benefits, are allocated fairly to communities and older people.**

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All contributions received are available at: https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HRAndClimateChange/Pages/RightsOlderPersons.aspx.

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