



CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS

By the year 2050, it is estimated that there will be 1.5 billion people aged 65 and above, constituting one sixth of the world's population. Climate change effects can impair the realization of older persons' human rights. These effects are aggravated by ageism, poverty, neglect and other factors including gender, disability and race. At the same time, older persons possess enormous knowledge, experience, skills, and resilience that give them the capacity to be key contributors in global efforts to fight the climate crisis. Older persons' participation in climate action is not only their human right, but also a means of ensuring effective solutions for all people and for the planet.

Challenges

Rights to life, health and safety

Adults aged 65 and older are more likely to die during disasters. 75% of those who died during Hurricane Katrina in the United States of America were over the age of 60. Negative health effects linked to air pollution, heat waves and rising infectious diseases disproportionately impact older persons. Disasters and other climate impacts can also significantly impact their mental health. In many countries, the climate risks faced by older persons are exacerbated by ageism, poverty, poor infrastructure and insufficient resources.

Right to food

Climate change is having an effect on food systems, often reducing agricultural productivity and food availability. Because many older persons live in poverty and/or on fixed incomes, they face difficulty in coping with the rising costs of food. When food is scarce, some households allocate it in a way that favours younger family members. Some older persons are physically less able to access food distribution points in emergency situations.

Right to adequate housing

Older persons are more likely to live in homes with insufficient heating and cooling systems to cope with temperature extremes. They often lack access to safe, clean and renewable energy. Older persons can also be more susceptible to property loss due to lack of insurance, limited personal finances, and poor credit-worthiness, and in the aftermath of disasters, exclusion from humanitarian aid can make it difficult for them to rebuild damaged homes.

Rights to water and sanitation

Older persons are disproportionately affected by water insecurity as physical, financial, and design barriers all limit

their access to existing water and sanitation services. This will only be aggravated by climate change. Older persons are also particularly susceptible to dehydration and infectious diseases associated with poor sanitation.

Freedom of movement

Climate change is an increasingly important factor in human mobility around the world and it carries human rights risks for older persons. In emergencies, older persons with disabilities may have difficulty reaching safety, and they may experience discriminatory treatment in disaster response. Older persons may face barriers in their ability to migrate as a climate adaptation strategy, and the migration of younger people out of climate-affected areas may diminish support for older people who remain. Older persons who do migrate, especially those in irregular situations, may face increased difficulties accessing social protection.

Right to livelihoods

Older persons often rely on informal labour, subsistence agriculture, herding, handicrafts, and other livelihoods which are particularly at risk from climate change to sustain themselves and may have limited access to the support needed to adapt.

THE WAY FORWARD

Older persons are increasingly involved in climate activism and have also initiated special climate litigation. Older persons' activism can help subvert social stereotypes around old age and build intergenerational solidarity in the climate movement. Some older persons also possess important knowledge about how to practice more sustainable lifestyles, including relying less on material goods, making them potential leaders in the transition to circular economies. Traditional knowledge, often possessed by older persons, can contribute to climate action by enhancing both scientific and cultural understanding of the climate crisis. It may include understanding of weather patterns and of the signals that warn of coming disasters, methods of reducing the risk of and surviving such disasters, and agriculture and herding methods that create less environmental harm.

Many of the most powerful persons in the world, including heads of state and business leaders, fall within the older age group. This cohort wields vast resources that can be used in seeking climate solutions. Having benefited most from the conditions that caused climate change, they bear a responsibility to address its negative impacts.



Cultural rights

Many older persons feel a particular and long-standing commitment to cultural practices or sites, and many communities, including those of many indigenous peoples, assign elders a role in safeguarding cultural and traditional practices and knowledge. Older persons may thus bear a particular burden when climate change threatens cultural practices or heritage sites.



What can we do?

Research the effects of climate change on older persons and their rights and collect data disaggregated by gender, disability and age.

Take urgent, meaningful and ambitious action against climate change that protects the human rights of all, including older persons. Include the rights of older persons in relevant future international climate change decisions and facilitate their participation in national delegations to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. **Consider the adoption of an international legal instrument** protecting the human rights of older persons.

Ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction measures are age-responsive and disability-inclusive and take into account the requirements and rights of older women and men.

Include older persons in policy and planning in order to create sustainable infrastructure and local spaces and communities that take into account their needs and rights.

Ensure high quality universal health care and other social services for older person, taking into account climate effects.

Preserve cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge that is threatened by climate change. Incorporate this knowledge into climate solutions, with indigenous peoples' free, prior and informed consent, and ensure that the benefits of the use of such knowledge, including financial benefits, are equitably allocated.

Support capacity-building for older persons and provide quality later-in-life learning opportunities to empower them to take climate action.

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Analytical study: undocs.org/en/A/HRC/47/46

Resolution 44/7: undocs.org/A/HRC/RES/44/7