

Questions by the Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons

The report of the Independent Expert, Ms. Claudia Mahler, will focus her report to the General Assembly on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the enjoyment of the human rights of older persons. The report aims to highlight the challenges for the rights of older persons in the current national and international legal framework. It will analyse different risks to older persons human rights which were exacerbated and heightened and made more apparent during the pandemic. Ageism and age discrimination have continued, together with violations to older persons' right to health and care service support, including their right to life, their right to information, their right to live free from violence, abuse and neglect, and their right to participate and to social inclusion. The report will provide best practices and case studies.

1. Please provide more information on the situation and measures taken in state run or financed facilities with a focus on the needs of older persons with underlying health conditions. Please provide any information concerning shelters for older women to protect them from abuse or from homelessness.

The Korean government (Central Disaster Management Headquarters and Central Disease Control Headquarters) offers COVID-19 diagnostic testing and operates designated care facilities and public relief hospitals (separated areas for respiratory disease patients). Older COVID-19 patients are isolated for treatment and treatment costs are entirely covered by the government.

For victims of elder abuse, there are Korea Elder Protection Agency, elder abuse centers. For homeless elders, there are Welfare centers for homeless people - temporary shelters, counseling centers for jjokbangchon (subdivided housing) residents.

2. Please provide information how and how many older persons called for assistance, help or made official complaints during the pandemic.

There was one complaint counselling case regarding restriction to visit a patient in the geriatric hospital due to COVID-19 from a family member of older persons.

As of 10 June, there is no COVID-19-related complaint submitted by older persons at the age of 60 or above to the NHRCK.

3. Please provide information on reports, speeches and measures which had a special focus on older persons during the pandemic. Please include best and bad practices.

The National Human Rights Commission of Korea issued Chairperson's statement on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day (June 15) titled 'COVID-19 crisis aggravates vulnerabilities of older persons and highlights the need for protection of their rights'.

The National Assembly Research Service published a comprehensive report on COVID-19 response (April 2020) titled 'Current situation and future challenges regarding older persons and other groups at higher risk for COVID-19'.

Lastly, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea translated the UN Secretary General's Policy Briefing on the Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons into Korean language and distributed the report to the Presidential Office, Ministry of Health and Welfare, and the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

4. Please provide examples how older persons have participated in decision-making processes during the pandemic. Please describe how their perspective and needs have been integrated in national policies and programmes on the way to recovery from COVID-19 to make it a more inclusive and age friendly society.

Older people can submit a complaint to the NHRCK.

At the national level, the President's Office has launched an online petition system to allow the public to submit their petitions directly to the President.

These systems enable older persons to voice their opinions in the policy-making processes, but we have not found any example of older persons participating in the process.