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Follow-up to the International Year of Older Persons: Second World Assembly on Ageing

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [73/143](#) on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing. It provides an analysis of ageing-related policies and priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as reported in the voluntary national reviews presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development in the period 2016–2018. The report highlights key issues and existing normative frameworks, as well as challenges and opportunities in responding to the rights and needs of older persons in emergency crises. It also presents updates on advances in issues related to ageing and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within the United Nations system. The report concludes with key recommendations for consideration by the Assembly.

* [A/74/50](#).



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution [73/143](#), the General Assembly took note of the report of the Secretary-General on the follow-up to the Second World Assembly on Ageing ([A/73/213](#)) and stressed the need to ensure that issues of relevance to older persons were taken into account in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with the promise of leaving no one behind. The General Assembly called upon Member States to take concrete measures to further protect and assist older persons in emergency situations and requested the Secretary-General to report on the implementation of the resolution at its seventy-fourth session.

2. Four years into the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and recognizing that issues on ageing cut across the Sustainable Development Goals, section II of the report presents an analysis of ageing-related policies and priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as reported in the voluntary national reviews presented in the period 2016–2018 at the high-level political forum on sustainable development.

3. Section III of the report highlights key issues and existing normative frameworks, as well as challenges and opportunities in responding to the rights and needs of older persons in emergency crises.

4. Section IV provides an update on advances made in issues related to ageing and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within the United Nations system. Section V sets out key recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly.

5. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, as the focal point in the United Nations system on ageing, continues to promote understanding of interlinkages on issues related to ageing between the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and the 2030 Agenda.

II. Analysis of voluntary national reviews in the period 2016–2018

6. In the period 2016–2018, 111 voluntary national reviews were presented at the high-level political forum on sustainable development by 102 countries, over two thirds of which included references to ageing.¹ The relevant information included highlights of demographic changes and trends, as well as details of policies and programmes that addressed issues on ageing within the context of specific Sustainable Development Goals and the corresponding targets. An overview of ageing-related policies and priorities is presented in paragraphs 7 to 25 below.

A. The trend of population ageing and its challenges

7. Many voluntary national reviews acknowledged that ageing populations would have important implications for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. For example, Norway highlighted challenges related to increased demand for basic services from local authorities and the need for physical environments to be adapted to the needs of older persons. Slovakia noted the increased pressure on funding of social services, especially in the health-care and retirement sectors. Latvia indicated that ensuring decent lives for older people in an ageing society was one of

¹ Pytrik Dieuwke Oosterhof, “Ageing-related policies and priorities in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, background paper prepared for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (December 2018).

the main challenges in reducing inequality. Other countries reported on initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges of rapidly ageing societies. Japan reported that it was striving to provide a “Japan model” for a sustainable economy and society ahead of other developed countries. Singapore referred to its long-term plan to build a “Nation for All Ages”, which entailed leveraging technology and redesigning the workplace to encourage people to remain economically active into old age.

B. National policies, strategies and legislation

8. Some Member States reported on national policies that specifically address ageing-related issues. In Costa Rica, the national policy for seniors for the period 2011–2021 is aimed at, inter alia, drawing the attention of public and private entities to the needs of older persons and ensuring the implementation of relevant programmes and provision of basic services. In Malta, the national strategic policy for active ageing for the period 2014–2020 is aimed at providing a holistic response to the multidisciplinary needs of older persons and improving health-care and social services. Jamaica reported that its 2018 national policy for senior citizens constituted the main framework for delivery of services to older persons, including health, education, intergenerational transfers and income security. Romania reported on its national strategy and action plan on active ageing, promotion and protection of older persons for the period 2015–2020, which included a range of measures related to, inter alia, employment, education, long-term care and prevention of abuse and neglect.

9. Few countries reported the inclusion of ageing-related priorities in their national sustainable development strategies. Jordan developed a national plan for older persons for the period 2016–2020 as part of its strategic approach to put in place a strong policy environment for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. In Hungary, the national framework strategy on sustainable development for the period 2012–2024 focuses on, inter alia, a stable and healthy population that meets the needs of older persons. The national sustainable development strategy of Qatar for the period 2018–2022 is aimed at improving the lives of all social groups, including older persons, by directly translating economic growth into quality of life in areas such as education, employment, health, housing and transport.

10. Some Member States reported on relevant legislative frameworks. In 2014, Panama amended a 2010 law to extend social assistance to include people aged 65 and older who lacked retirement coverage. The Republic of Korea established a series of laws to respond to population ageing, in particular in addressing the social and economic insecurity of people throughout their lives. The legislation included the 2013 law for promoting industries that were more inclusive of the needs of older persons, as well as the 2014 framework act on low fertility and population ageing.

C. Stakeholder engagement and consultations

11. A number of Member States, such as Jamaica and Nigeria, emphasized the importance of engaging with older persons as a stakeholder group in the process of preparing their voluntary national reviews. Others reported on the holding of preparatory workshops and consultations with the participation of older persons. For example, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic held a workshop to discuss the draft review, which resulted in recommendations to promote access of older persons to free health-care services. The consultations organized under the name “the Montenegro We Want” gave special attention to the inclusion of marginalized groups, including older persons.

D. Discrimination

12. Some reviews drew attention to discrimination against older people. Australia noted the efforts of the Australian Human Rights Commission in aligning its work with the Sustainable Development Goals. The review also highlighted a national inquiry into employment discrimination against older workers, which resulted in the issuance of a guide that provided evidence-based solutions to help attract, motivate and retain older workers. The national sustainable development strategy of Montenegro identified the elimination of discrimination against older persons as one of its priority areas. The strategy was aimed at, inter alia, eliminating discrimination against older persons, fostering cultural diversities through the strengthening of social inclusion of marginalized groups of older persons, and fostering social cohesion and tolerance. Sweden also made reference to age discrimination, highlighting that it had expanded the protection against age discrimination in 2013.

E. Violence, neglect and abuse

13. The issue of violence, neglect and abuse of older persons was acknowledged as a growing concern by some countries. The Bahamas reported an increase in incidents of verbal, physical and financial abuse of older persons. It noted the establishment of a national zero-tolerance strategy for violent crimes, including murder, sex-related violence, crimes against older persons and home invasion as a priority for its justice administration. Romania expressed concern over the lack of information and awareness on issues of violence and abuse of older persons in the country. Saudi Arabia referred to a memorandum of cooperation between the Saudi Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Labour and Social Development to promote partnerships, follow-up to mandated tasks and cooperation in various areas, including the rights of older persons and protection from abuse.

F. Science, technology and innovation

14. In order to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, some reviews noted the importance of science, technology and innovation. Andorra highlighted an initiative by the Crèdit Andorrà Foundation, which had created a space for older persons by offering free training and other activities on new technologies, including computer training and memory stimulation programmes. Slovenia stressed that the nexus of institutional, social and technological innovations should be harnessed to meet the challenges caused by pressing social challenges, such as the rapidly ageing population. In Costa Rica, the intelligent community centres programme was aimed at closing the digital gap by offering digital skills training to older persons. Romania highlighted the importance of new technologies in ensuring the safety of older persons, especially in severe weather conditions.

G. Incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level

15. Some Member States outlined policies and activities to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local level. Latvia highlighted the important role that local governments play in providing support for housing and health care to older persons with low incomes. Spain raised concern over the ageing populations of many municipalities, noting that the demographic change would affect territorial cohesion, give rise to severe inequalities and exacerbate the loss of culture and heritage. Argentina highlighted its initiative to emphasize that achieving the Goals required

local action in synergy with policies, as well as action at the national level, including steps towards incorporating an analysis of cross-cutting issues that takes into account the participation of older persons. Thailand showcased a good practice of advancing sustainable development for older persons from the Umong municipality in Lamphun Province. The municipality supported local residents through a community welfare fund, which targeted older persons, among others, with a view to reducing poverty, promoting dignity and enhancing resilience.

H. Leaving no one behind

16. Many Member States, including Australia, Azerbaijan, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Cabo Verde, Canada, Finland, Jamaica, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mexico, Montenegro, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Tajikistan, referred to older persons in the context of their pledge to leave no one behind. Some Member States reported on targeted measures to mainstream that commitment into policies and programmes. Australia highlighted efforts undertaken with the private sector and civil society to address gaps in workforce participation. It also drew attention to the vulnerability of older women to homelessness as a result of income insecurity and violence. Bangladesh established union digital centres in local governments as one-stop information and service delivery outlets that provided older persons with free and fee-based access to public and private services. In order to ensure that no older person was left behind, Tajikistan underlined the importance of monitoring and evaluation of disaggregated data and the incorporation at the local level of activities aimed at the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

17. A number of Member States highlighted challenges presented by population ageing in the context of leaving no one behind. In its national review, Finland noted that population ageing and a decline in the dependency ratio were holding back the country's economy and competitiveness. The review also identified the need to take into account, inter alia, the ageing workforce when preparing for, and responding to, national and international challenges. Sri Lanka detailed challenges posed by population ageing and reported on the development of a new model for elder care, which was aimed at ensuring the protection of vulnerable older persons as a part of its public investment programme for the period 2017–2020, which detailed the midterm investment plan of the country.

I. Data collection and monitoring

18. In their voluntary national reviews, some Member States highlighted the need for disaggregation of data by age. Others included specific age-related indicators or statistical annexes that exhibited those indicators. Thailand, for example, included ageing in the context of data development and formulation of indicators, highlighting the need for quality and up-to-date statistical information that supported policy planning and decision-making, and monitored outcomes. The Philippines identified a need for technical support to conduct poverty-related studies on determining the thresholds for older persons. Specific indicators that related to data collection regarding older persons were addressed by Guinea and the Republic of Korea.

J. International and regional cooperation

19. International and regional cooperation are central to implementing the 2030 Agenda and play a significant role in promoting issues related to older persons. The international development aid programme of Ireland, for example, invested in the social cash transfer programme of Malawi, which targets vulnerable households, including those of older people. Italy emphasized the protection of older persons in the process of aligning the strategic guidelines of Italian development cooperation and humanitarian aid. In view of the ageing population in Asia, Japan highlighted its intention to share lessons and expertise gained from its own experience. The first meeting between Japan and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations health ministers on universal health coverage and ageing was convened in 2017. Japan also launched the Asia health and well-being initiative, which provides knowledge and expertise on long-term care and social welfare systems.

K. Reporting on ageing under specific Sustainable Development Goals

20. A number of Member States reported on their ageing-related policies and priorities in their national voluntary reviews under specific Sustainable Development Goals (see annex). Most efforts were reported under Goal 1 (no poverty), and highlighted the importance of social protection measures, which encompassed a wide range of policies and measures designed to address the risks and vulnerabilities of older persons. Some Member States reported on the progress made in reducing the risk of poverty among older persons, while others noted that reducing poverty among older persons remained a challenge. In a few national reviews, Member States highlighted the need for national indicators to ensure that Governments could track and report progress on Goal 1 with regard to older persons.

21. Measures undertaken to ensure appropriate and adequate provision of accessible nutrition and food for older persons, in particular in the context of institutionalized care, were addressed by some Member States in relation to Goal 2 (zero hunger). Some Member States explicitly referred to older persons under Goal 3 (good health and well-being), examining issues related to access to appropriate and affordable health care, preventive care and long-term care. The effects of a rapidly ageing population on the sustainable financing of health-care systems was underscored in several national reviews. Under Goal 4 (quality education), several Member States highlighted ageing-related measures, in particular in the context of lifelong learning.

22. Older women often face multiple forms of discrimination resulting from gender inequality. However, only three voluntary national reviews addressed issues related to ageing under Goal 5 (gender equality). The references explored income security in old age and access by older family members to care services. In the context of Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth), some Member States stressed the importance of enhancing the participation of older persons in the labour market. Others referred to population ageing as a factor that limited long-term economic and income growth and emphasized the need for structural reforms.

23. Some Member States highlighted policies and plans targeted at older persons for reducing inequalities under Goal 10 (reduced inequalities). Measures reported included social protection strategies and programmes, vulnerability baseline assessments to identify causes of vulnerability and opportunities for further improvement, and measures to address urban-rural inequality. Progress within the scope of Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) was reported by a few Member States in terms of providing safe, affordable and sustainable transport for all, as well as universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces.

24. Many Member States identified the adverse impacts of climate change in their national voluntary reviews; however, only one reported on ageing-related efforts in that regard. Under Goal 13 (climate action), Andorra referred to its energy and climate change agency, which was aimed at building resilience to climate change by means of research, systematic observation and training. In collaboration with other national partners, the agency provided basic relief assistance and natural risk management training targeted at older persons.

25. Furthermore, the voluntary national reviews showed that a few Goals of relevance to ageing-related issues had been left unaddressed. Among those are Goal 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure), in particular with regard to increasing access to financial services, and Goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions), which is relevant in terms of reducing violence and related death rates, as well as ensuring responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Furthermore, no ageing-related actions had been reported in the scope of Goal 17 (partnerships for the Goals) on enhancing capacity-building to increase the availability of data disaggregated by age.

III. Older persons in emergency crises

26. The occurrence, duration and impact of humanitarian crises have increased in recent years. Humanitarian crises include human-made emergencies, including situations of armed conflict and natural disasters, such as hurricanes, storms or droughts. In 2019, around 132 million people were in need of humanitarian assistance and protection. Between 2008 and 2018, the number of crises receiving an international response grew from 12 to 22, and the average duration increased from 6 to 9 years.² Among current humanitarian crises, the overwhelming majority are the result of the interaction of several factors or events, including natural hazards, armed conflict and human vulnerability. Indeed, natural hazards and conflict are often intertwined. Climate-related disasters, including floods, storms and droughts, affect the greatest number of people and account for over 90 per cent of natural disasters worldwide.³ There is growing evidence that points to an increase in the frequency and severity of disasters related to climate change, which threaten and destroy lives and weaken resilience.⁴ Approximately 68 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide in 2017 owing to conflicts and human rights violations; 85 per cent of those displaced were hosted in developing regions.⁵

27. The vulnerability of people in situations of humanitarian crises is largely determined by social, economic and demographic factors, such as poverty, inequality, population growth and urbanization, but place of residence is also a factor. Poverty is key in determining the impact of a humanitarian crisis on a given group or individual.⁶ People in low-income countries are seven times more likely to die as a result of a natural hazard than those residing in high-income nations.⁷ As the world's population grows older, large numbers of older persons will correspondingly be affected by

² Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019* (New York, 2018).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Pascaline Wallemacq and Rowena House, "Economic losses, poverty and disasters, 1998–2017" (Geneva, United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction and Brussels, Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters, 2018).

⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2017* (Geneva, 2018).

⁶ International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2018: Leaving No One Behind* (Geneva, 2018).

⁷ Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2019*.

humanitarian crises, especially in developing regions, which is where the pace of population ageing is advancing fastest.⁸

28. An inclusive response takes into consideration a person's individual characteristics such as age, sex, disability, ethnicity, marital or health status, legal status (e.g., refugee or stateless person) and other socioeconomic factors. A humanitarian response that addresses the specific needs and risks faced by the most vulnerable, including older persons, requires attention to these individual and systemic determinants, so that by 2030, no one is left behind in humanitarian contexts.

A. Challenges and risks

29. While noting that older persons are not a homogenous group, many are at risk in emergencies and their specific circumstances and needs are not always fully recognized and considered at all phases of humanitarian action. There is growing evidence that the specific needs as well as the contributions of older persons are often overlooked in emergency relief systems, which aggravates the risks they face and diminishes their capacity to respond and adapt to disasters. As a result, older persons are disproportionately impacted by humanitarian crises. During the 2012 refugee crisis in South Sudan, for example, the mortality rate among people aged 50 and older was reported to be more than four times that of persons aged 5 to 49.⁹ A national survey conducted on preparedness for natural disasters among older persons revealed that around 75 per cent of persons who died in the United States of America as a result of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were aged 60 and above.¹⁰ Available data indicate that 56 per cent of those reported to have died during the earthquake and tsunami in eastern Japan in 2011 were persons aged 65 and above.¹¹

30. Although older persons may require targeted actions to incorporate their needs and circumstances into humanitarian response, research shows that between 2010 and 2014, less than 1 per cent of implemented humanitarian projects included any activity targeted at older persons.¹² Furthermore, there is often a lack of necessary skills among first and second responders and volunteers to understand, identify and address the specific needs of older persons.¹³ This marginalization in humanitarian action is often aggravated by a limited understanding by donors of how programmes and projects affect older persons, which translates into a lack of explicit requirements on addressing the needs and situation of older persons in the programmes and projects they fund. Actions that do not take into account the needs and contributions of older persons often worsen the outcomes for them, their families and the community at

⁸ [A/73/213](#).

⁹ Laëtitia Atlani-Duault, Lawrence Brown and Linda Fried, "The elderly: an invisible population in humanitarian aid", *The Lancet Public Health*, vol. 3, No. 1 (January 2018).

¹⁰ Tala M. Al-rousan, Linda M. Rubenstein and Robert B. Wallace, "Preparedness for natural disasters among older US adults: a nationwide survey", *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 104, No. 3 (March 2014).

¹¹ April Pham, Senior Gender Adviser, Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Humanitarian architecture: responding to the needs of older men and women in emergencies", presentation at the expert group meeting organized by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs on the theme "Older persons in emergency crises", New York, May 2019.

¹² Emma Massey, James Smith and Bayard Roberts, "Health needs of older populations affected by humanitarian crises in low- and middle-income countries: a systematic review", *Conflict and Health*, vol. 11, No. 29 (December 2017).

¹³ Rawle Andrews Jr., Regional Vice-President, American Association of Retired Persons, "Navigating the new normal: key considerations for older adults, family caregivers and US-based NGO second responders when a natural disaster strikes", paper presented at the expert group meeting on "Older persons in emergency crises".

large, and also exacerbate their likelihood of being exposed to protection risks, which render them more vulnerable to, and disproportionately affected by, emergency crises.

31. Older persons report significant barriers in gaining access to humanitarian assistance. In 2015, interviews with approximately 300 women and men aged 60 and over in cities, towns and camps in Lebanon, South Sudan and Ukraine revealed inadequate access of older persons to medical services, including mental and psychosocial programmes.¹⁴ The disruption of health services, which often follows an emergency, affects older persons disproportionately because they are more likely than persons in other age groups to suffer from health conditions such as impaired physical mobility, diminished sensory awareness or long-term chronic illness. Mild declines in intrinsic capacity, which are generally associated with ageing, can quickly become debilitating and severely affect older persons, while untreated chronic illnesses can lead to serious complications.

32. Older persons are often discriminated against in terms of access to medical services owing to: (a) a lack of appropriately trained health personnel, (b) inadequate health-care services that are age-appropriate and physically accessible, and (c) the absence of essential medicines for common conditions in older age, such as chronic disease management medications. Health conditions that are more prevalent among older persons, such as restricted mobility, can hinder the ability of individuals to evacuate an area during an emergency and may severely limit access to aid distribution when humanitarian actors do not integrate accessibility needs into their planning. In 2018, a rapid needs assessment conducted in Indonesia, following a 7.4-magnitude earthquake that hit the Central Sulawesi Province, showed that policies to ensure access by older persons with mobility limitations to health-care services were not in place.¹⁵ Older persons with impaired mobility may be deprived of critical life-saving resources when recipients of aid have to walk and queue for hours to receive food, water and other goods. Furthermore, permanent or temporary shelter may not be accessible for older persons with mobility restrictions. Nutrition needs assessments and programmes that do not include or consider older persons may result in food aid packages that do not cater for the nutritional requirements of older persons, making them more vulnerable than persons in other age groups to disruptions in food security during emergencies.¹⁶

33. Delivery systems may discriminate against older persons, inter alia, by establishing age caps that discontinue support at a particular age, thereby excluding older persons from participating in programmes and receiving support. Such discrimination is particularly prevalent in income-generating activities and cash-for-work programmes, which tend to target younger adults, overlook the needs and capacities of older persons, or include age caps that preclude access by older persons.¹⁷ In humanitarian contexts, where the income of many older persons is disrupted by the loss of access to their work, land or property, the exclusion of older persons from income-generating programmes can prevent them from recovering their livelihoods, with dire consequences for them and their families. Such programmes should consider that where women are economically dependent, the death,

¹⁴ Anna Ridout and others, *Older Voices in Humanitarian Crises: Calling for Change* (London, HelpAge International, 2016).

¹⁵ Sari Mutia Timur, "Left behind, access to rights and basic needs for older persons (Indonesian context)", presentation at the expert group meeting on "Older persons in emergency crises".

¹⁶ William Ngabonziza, Executive Director, Humanitarian and Development Consortium, "Beneficiaries identification and targeting criteria with older persons", presentation at the expert group meeting on "Older persons in emergency crises".

¹⁷ Age Action Ireland, *Guidelines for Including Ageing and Older People in Development and Humanitarian Policy and Practice* (Dublin, 2014).

disappearance or incapacitation of their husbands in a crisis can exacerbate their economic vulnerability.

34. The stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination against older people on the basis of their age is often exacerbated during a crisis. Ageism may manifest itself in the prioritization of particular vulnerable groups – which results in older persons as a group being overlooked – or in the negative attitudes of humanitarian actors. This can result in the lack of focus on the specific needs of older persons and/or committed resources to relevant policies and actions. Programmes on sexual and gender-based violence in emergency settings may exclude older women based on the assumption that they are not victims of these crimes. However, an investigation on the prevalence of gender-based violence among women and men aged 49 and over in select situations of protracted displacement revealed that 11 per cent of those interviewed stated having experienced sexual violence during displacement.¹⁸ Additional assumptions, for example, that older persons are cared for by family members, or that all older persons experience frailty and have no contributions to make during emergencies, may also permeate the humanitarian system and result in a biased response that is neither age-sensitive nor inclusive of older persons or their capacities, contributions and, frequently, their standing in the community.¹⁹

35. In situations of forced displacement, older persons may stay behind as families and communities move away for various reasons. Older persons may choose to remain because of strong ties to the land and home, or as a result of fatigue due to repeated displacement.²⁰ In some cases, older persons are tasked by younger family members with guarding the family property, livestock and belongings, or they are left behind in the evacuation owing to mobility or sensory impairments, or because of a perception that older persons will be unharmed by opposition fighters. On the other hand, social isolation as a result of displacement, aggravated by the erosion of social and support networks, can affect older persons acutely. Access to national systems in host countries, including social protection benefits, is often challenging for older persons owing to their refugee status and the fact that they lack the documentation necessary to access national systems. Practical difficulties encountered during registration processes can be considerable for older refugees with mobility impairments.

36. Identified as a key determinant of vulnerability in contexts of humanitarian crises, poverty puts older persons at greater risk than other age groups because older persons are more vulnerable to economic insecurity and poverty in general.²¹ Economic risks are exacerbated in humanitarian crises for older persons, as they may be deprived of their livelihood and lose access to their land or property. Abuse related to land grabbing from widows, predominantly older women, including by extended family members, is likely to increase in contexts of emergency crises. Prevalence of elder abuse is defined as a single or repeated act, or lack of appropriate action, that

¹⁸ American Association for the Advancement of Science, Scientific Responsibility, Human Rights and Law Program, *Age is No Protection: Prevalence of Gender-based Violence Among Men and Women over 49 Years of Age in Five Situations of Protracted Displacement* (Washington, D.C., 2017).

¹⁹ Silvia Perel-Levin, Chair, NGO Committee on Ageing-Geneva, “Abuse, neglect and violence against older persons”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

²⁰ Matthew Wells, Senior Crisis Adviser, Amnesty International, “Impact of conflict and displacement in Myanmar”, presentation at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

²¹ Department of Economic and Social Affairs, “Income poverty in old age: an emerging development priority”, Briefing Series (2017).

can occur in any relationship where there is an expectation of trust and that causes harm or distress to an older person. Such abuse may increase in humanitarian settings.

37. Communication barriers, whereby older persons may not be able to gain access to relevant information about their rights and entitlements and about relevant services, can aggravate the sense of exclusion or marginalization felt by some older persons. Such barriers include language barriers, especially among speakers of minority languages or older persons with high levels of illiteracy, or lack of access or knowledge of the technologies used by humanitarian actors, such as mobile telephones. In a context where technology is increasingly used in humanitarian action, ensuring that older persons have adequate access to such technology would transform digital challenges into opportunities for inclusion.

38. Older women can be at greater risk of protection threats than their male counterparts during emergencies. The multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination often experienced by older women can be intensified during emergencies and aggravate their vulnerabilities. Where traditional support structures no longer exist owing to forced displacement, older women may face increased risks, which manifest in many forms. Gender economic inequalities that women experience throughout their lives are exacerbated during crises, where older women may lose access to their source of income, property and land. In emergencies, older women can be at risk of physical and sexual violence, for example, when residing in communal shelters and in collection centres. In Ukraine, a study found that out of the 20.5 per cent of older persons who reported experiencing some form of violence or abuse, 75.8 per cent were women.²² Older women may also face additional barriers to accessing information during a crisis owing to higher levels of illiteracy, cultural practices that confine women to their home or gendered expectations regarding their social role in their communities.

B. Opportunities for and contributions of older persons

39. It is important to underline the important roles that older persons, in particular older women, play during emergencies. Often, older persons become heads of households and are caregivers of separated or unaccompanied children and other dependent family members, especially in situations of forced displacement. For example, at the height of the conflict in Darfur in 2005, two thirds of older women were raising at least two children.²³ According to recent research, 74 per cent of older people in the cyclone-affected districts of Malawi reported supporting other people.²⁴ Such new roles should be recognized by humanitarian actors and donors so that older persons and their families receive appropriate, tailored support.

40. The knowledge and skills of older persons can be invaluable in understanding and predicting local environmental events. For example, in rural Peru, older indigenous people have supported farmers in taking prevention and adaptation measures to safeguard their crops by observing early warning signals and predicting weather accordingly.²⁵ In situations of forced displacement, older persons can

²² Kirstin Lange, Protection Officer, UNHCR, “Older persons in forced displacement-intersecting risks”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

²³ Boris Aristín González, *Ensuring Inclusion of Older People in Initial Emergency Needs Assessments* (London, HelpAge International, 2012).

²⁴ Verity McGivern, “What older people say about their experiences in humanitarian situations: findings from rapid needs assessments and interviews with older people”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

²⁵ Ann Pawliczko, Demographic Consultant, and Rene Desiderio, “Demographics of ageing and the implications for humanitarian crises”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

contribute to the community by preserving their cultural heritage. Older persons can use their knowledge and experience to support peacebuilding and conflict resolution efforts. In South Sudan, older women with knowledge of community dynamics, as well as the grievances and drivers of local conflict, played a key role in discouraging young men from joining the recent conflict.²⁶ Such examples demonstrate the status, power and authority that older persons may wield within families and communities as agents of peaceful change, peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

41. The consistent collection, processing, dissemination, analysis and use of data disaggregated by age (including older age), sex and disability in all phases of humanitarian crises, is essential to bringing visibility, voice and inclusion to older persons and fully understanding and addressing their needs. However, multiple studies have identified the lack of data and research on older persons in emergencies as one of the reasons behind the continuing lack of understanding by humanitarian actors and the overall humanitarian system of the needs of older persons and the inadequate response to their needs. The effective inclusion of older persons in the analysis, design, programming and monitoring of humanitarian actions requires a solid evidence base that both sheds light upon the specific needs and capacities of older persons and brings the discrimination and multiple barriers faced by older persons in emergencies to the forefront of humanitarian debate and response.

42. Promoting active consultation and engagement with, and the participation of, older persons in needs assessments, humanitarian programmes and related decision-making processes is important to ensure that their experiences, perspectives, rights and needs are reflected in programme design, implementation and monitoring, and that their skills, capacities and knowledge are given full consideration.²⁷ Older persons should also participate in developing monitoring frameworks in order to increase the accountability of national and international humanitarian systems to meet their needs. Creating strong alliances between national and international humanitarian actors and organizations representing older persons in the field can serve to promote such participation.

43. While engaging with older persons, it is crucial that humanitarian actors seek out those who are at greatest risk within the older population, including women and persons with disabilities, in order to avoid deliberately or inadvertently excluding the most disadvantaged groups in crisis situations. Humanitarian actors should ensure that information about available humanitarian assistance is distributed through a range of communication channels and in different formats and languages, and in a way that is accessible to all older persons, including those who are isolated, those with low literacy levels and those with disabilities. Raising awareness among the local community about the right of older persons to participate in decision-making processes can also promote their meaningful participation.²⁸

44. In addition, age-inclusive humanitarian programming often requires increased awareness-raising and capacity development, including information exchange and the training of skilled staff at all levels, from local partners to humanitarian agencies. Such efforts can promote the integration of issues relevant to older persons in the humanitarian response and provide the necessary skills to identify and address the rights and needs of older persons, including in preparedness efforts. Continuous support in building the capacities of older persons and their communities can also increase their resilience and leadership and enable them to better cope and contribute

²⁶ Bela Kapur, "Older women in emergency crises: vulnerabilities, capacities and opportunities", paper presented at the expert group meeting on "Older persons in emergency crises".

²⁷ Age Action Ireland, *Guidelines for Including Ageing and Older People*.

²⁸ Celia Till, ed., *Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities* (London, Age and Disability Consortium, 2018).

during an emergency. Sustained funding and technical support are required to implement inclusive approaches, collect disaggregated data and promote the participation of older persons in all stages of the humanitarian programme cycle.

C. Normative frameworks

45. The tenets underpinning the 2030 Agenda as well as international and national human rights commitments emphasize the importance of promoting inclusiveness, empowering individuals and groups in vulnerable situations and leaving no one behind. Humanitarian principles demand the impartial provision of assistance and protection to those most in need without discrimination.²⁹ When humanitarian action does not meet such standards, it risks adversely affecting the safety, dignity and human rights of older persons.

46. Several normative frameworks engage directly or indirectly with the situation of older persons in emergencies.³⁰ The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing acknowledges the particular vulnerabilities faced by older persons in emergency situations. It identifies the specific actions needed to ensure equal access of older persons to services during and after humanitarian emergencies. Furthermore, it calls upon Member States to enhance the positive contributions of older persons in reconstruction and rebuilding efforts. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 echoes the Madrid Plan of Action and adopts a rights-based approach calling for engagement with and the inclusion of older persons, among other vulnerable groups, in designing disaster reduction policies, plans and mechanisms. The Sendai Framework also advocates data disaggregation by disability and age.³¹

47. The outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit,³² held in 2016, and the Inclusion Charter initiative³³ launched at the Summit, both contain a recognition of the vulnerabilities of older persons and the importance of fully taking them into account in preparedness and response actions through specific initiatives, funds and coalitions.

48. Normative frameworks devoted to refugees and migrants, such as the recently adopted global compact on refugees³⁴ and the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration,³⁵ explicitly identify older persons as a distinct group in a situation of vulnerability. While earlier instruments, such as the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and the Protocol thereto, did not allude to older persons as a distinct group, the Global Compact on Refugees identifies older persons as having specific needs that must be addressed in any humanitarian response and calls for a strong partnership and participatory approach with regard to refugees, including those who are older persons. It further specifies the need to address the situation of older persons in specific areas, including economic development, access to work and access to national health-care services.

49. In 2010, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, recognizing that age was one of the grounds on which women suffered discrimination,

²⁹ Khaled Hassine, “Older persons in humanitarian emergencies: the human rights imperative”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

³⁰ Supriya Akerkar, Senior Lecturer, “Mapping of existing normative frameworks and guidelines relevant to older people in conflict and disasters: implications for policy and practice”, paper presented at the expert group meeting on “Older persons in emergency crises”.

³¹ General Assembly resolution 69/283, annex II.

³² [A/71/353](#).

³³ Available at www.inclusioncharter.org.

³⁴ [A/73/12 \(Part II\)](#).

³⁵ General Assembly resolution 73/195, annex.

adopted its general recommendation No. 27 on older women and protection of their human rights. Among other issues, the impact of violence on older women and the contribution of older women in reconstruction and peaceful settlements is discussed in the recommendation. In addition, the situation of older widows in emergencies and the need to protect their inheritance rights are both highlighted.³⁶

50. Several regional frameworks are relevant to the situation of older persons in emergencies, including the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, the Organization of African Unity Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa,³⁷ as well as Directive 2013/33/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down standards for the reception of applicants for international protection.³⁸ Whereas the Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa does not address the specific needs of older persons, the Inter-American Convention calls for the establishment of mechanisms to protect the rights of older people in emergencies and devotes an article to providing specific recommendations.

51. Multiple international humanitarian institutions have developed policies, tools and guidelines to better address the barriers faced by older persons in humanitarian response, as well as to provide recommendations on how to integrate the differential circumstances and needs of older persons in emergencies.

52. Some Member States have integrated these concerns and guidance into their policy and humanitarian responses. For example, Chile has developed minimum standards for age and disability inclusion in humanitarian action to be used by humanitarian organizations and national agencies in charge of emergency response. The standards seek to ensure the inclusion of older persons and persons with disabilities by guiding the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of humanitarian programmes and policies, strengthening accountability to older persons and persons with disabilities and supporting advocacy, capacity-building and preparedness measures across the humanitarian system.³⁹ In Malaysia, where floods are experienced almost annually, social support for older persons is provided during disasters to ensure that their specific needs are met. For example, with regard to preparedness activities, the Government seeks to identify premises that can be turned into barrier-free relief centres for older persons and persons with disabilities. In the management of relief centres when disasters strike, special attention is paid to older persons in order to ease the process of registration and distribution of goods and food.⁴⁰

53. In order to deliver on the pledge of leaving no one behind, concerted leadership is needed to mainstream inclusive approaches and operationalize guidelines and tools. National leadership plays a critical role in ensuring that marginalized people and groups are considered in data collection, disaster risk reduction, emergency planning and response frameworks.

³⁶ General recommendation No. 27 (2010) on older women and protection of their human rights.

³⁷ United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1001, No. 14691.

³⁸ *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 180/96, 29 June 2013.

³⁹ Sofia Rivas Rufin, "Minimum standards for age and disability inclusion in humanitarian action", paper presented at the expert group meeting on "Older persons in emergency crises".

⁴⁰ Fatimah Zuraidah Bt. Salleh and Sharifah Norazizan Syed Abd Rashid, "Social support for older persons in emergencies: Malaysia perspective", paper presented at the expert group meeting on "Older persons in emergency crises".

IV. Updates on advances made on issues related to ageing and the implementation of the 2030 Agenda within the United Nations system

54. The informal inter-agency Open-ended Working Group on Ageing has welcomed the following new members: Economic Commission for Africa; Economic Commission for Europe; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean; Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific; International Telecommunication Union; Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs; Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees; and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The tenth session of the Working Group, the expert group meeting on the theme “Older persons in emergency crises”, and the observance of the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day all benefited from presentations and the participation of subject experts from various members of the Group. A special consultation session of the Group was held by the World Health Organization to discuss the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020–2030.

55. The regional commissions have undertaken various activities to advance issues related to ageing and to implement the 2030 Agenda within their respective regions. In 2018, for example, the Stakeholder Group on Ageing in Africa was established and was recognized as a member of the Economic Commission for Africa regional civil society engagement mechanism group to achieve the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want of the African Union. In Europe, the ad hoc working group on ageing – which is an intergovernmental body established in 2008, and which is subsidiary to the Executive Committee of the Economic Commission for Europe – was upgraded to the Standing Working Group on Ageing. In 2019, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean published a book entitled *Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A Regional and Human Rights Perspective*. The Commission continues to develop efforts towards the ratification of the Inter-American Convention on the Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific continues to support the secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in drafting an action plan to implement the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Ageing. The Commission has also undertaken research to highlight financing options for long-term care for older persons in the region and has implemented training courses aimed at designing and reforming pension systems. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia published a report on the prospects of ageing with dignity in the Arab region, which provided a situation analysis of the socioeconomic conditions of older persons and their prospects in the region in the period 2030–2050.

56. Statistics Korea hosted the second technical meeting of the Titchfield City Group in Daejeon, Republic of Korea, on 11 and 12 June 2019. The City Group, endorsed by the Statistical Commission in 2018, is aimed at developing standardized tools and methods for producing ageing-related statistics and age-disaggregated data.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

57. Whereas ageing-related policies and priorities are still absent in many national plans and sustainable development strategies, the issue of ageing was identified by Member States in their implementation of the 2030 Agenda, as reported in the voluntary national reviews. A significant number of Member States addressed the concerns of older persons in their reviews in the context of leaving no one behind. In those reports, older persons were predominantly addressed as a vulnerable group. Reviews often portray ageing-related issues as a challenge, including by focusing on

concerns over the sustainability of social services, pensions and health-care systems, and as a factor that limits long-term economic and income growth. This highlights the importance of drawing attention to the positive contributions made by older persons and the need to re-examine our approach to ageing-related issues.

58. Emergency crises are increasing worldwide, and older persons remain one of the most affected groups. The multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination experienced by older women can be exacerbated during emergencies and aggravate their vulnerabilities. Despite some progress in this regard, consideration of, and a focus on, the specific needs and challenges faced by older persons, as well as their capacities and contributions in emergency crises, are often lacking.

59. Member States may wish to:

(a) **Intensify efforts towards a paradigm shift that leverages ageing as an opportunity and recognizes older persons as active agents who already make substantial contributions to development efforts;**

(b) **Call for concerted leadership to operationalize the inclusion of older persons in disaster risk reduction and national and local emergency planning and response frameworks;**

(c) **Advocate the use of existing tools and guidelines on the effective inclusion of older persons to assist in developing humanitarian programmes that respond to all aspects of diversity;**

(d) **Strengthen and call for the collection, processing, dissemination, analysis and use of data disaggregated by age, sex and disability in all phases of humanitarian crises, including analysis, policy strategy, programme design, implementation and monitoring;**

(e) **Support the development of capacities among humanitarian actors and policymakers on the rights and needs of older persons in emergency settings to ensure that older persons and issues that are relevant to them receive adequate attention and support in all types of humanitarian contexts;**

(f) **Call upon humanitarian actors to carry out risk and vulnerabilities analyses of older women in crises to ensure that interventions do not worsen the invisibility, marginalization or exclusion of older women, and to ensure that their specific perspectives, priorities and needs are appropriately addressed.**

Annex

Voluntary national reviews that reported on ageing-related measures under specific Sustainable Development Goals, 2016–2018

Goal 1 (no poverty)

Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Belgium, Benin, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, Egypt, Estonia, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Latvia, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Nigeria, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Thailand and State of Palestine

Goal 2 (zero hunger)

Albania, Argentina, Jamaica, Lebanon, Malta, Portugal, Senegal, Slovenia and Sweden

Goal 3 (good health and well-being)

Australia, Belgium, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Ecuador, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, Lithuania, Malaysia, Malta, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden and Thailand

Goal 4 (quality education)

Greece, Netherlands and Romania

Goal 5 (gender equality)

Canada, Latvia and Singapore

Goal 8 (decent work and economic growth)

Australia, Belgium, Czechia, Ecuador, Estonia, France, Greece, Japan, Lithuania, Romania, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland and Thailand

Goal 10 (reduced inequalities)

Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Canada, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Latvia, Namibia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sweden and Thailand

Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities)

Andorra, Bhutan, Jamaica, Japan and Singapore

Goal 13 (climate action)

Andorra