



# General Assembly

Distr.: General  
30 April 2021

Original: English

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## Human Rights Council

Forty-seventh session

21 June–9 July 2021

Agenda items 2 and 3

**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development**

### **Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons in the context of climate change**

#### **Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights**

##### *Summary*

The present study is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 44/7. It examines the human rights impacts of climate change on older persons and the related commitments and obligations of States, highlights the benefits of climate action by older persons, provides examples of promising practice, and offers conclusions and recommendations.



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## I. Introduction

1. The present study is submitted pursuant to Human Rights Council resolution 44/7, in which the Council requested the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) to conduct a study, in consultation with relevant stakeholders, on the promotion and protection of the rights of older persons in the context of climate change, including their particular vulnerabilities, such as physical and mental health risks, and their contributions to efforts to address the adverse impact of climate change.

2. On 18 September 2020, OHCHR circulated a questionnaire to Member States and other stakeholders, including international organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society, for their inputs. The contributions received informed the present study.<sup>1</sup>

3. In the study, OHCHR examines the human rights impacts of climate change on older persons and the related legal and policy commitments and obligations of States. It also highlights the potential of older persons' human rights-based climate action and provides examples of promising practice. The study concludes with concrete recommendations for fulfilling human rights obligations related to the human rights of older persons in the context of climate change.

## II. Climate change impacts on older persons

4. Around the world, the climate change emergency is already causing rising temperatures, sea level rise and coastal erosion, forest fires, and extreme temperature and weather events including heatwaves, cold snaps, floods, droughts and hurricanes. Such events carry significant and often devastating human rights risks for all those affected,<sup>2</sup> but older persons face disproportionate impacts.

5. 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.<sup>3</sup> Age does not in itself make individuals more vulnerable to climate risks, but age is accompanied by a number of physical, political, economic and social factors that may do so. Older persons face a number of challenges in the enjoyment of their human rights, as has been evidenced during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

6. Older persons do not constitute a homogenous group, or one that has a clearly agreed definition. There is enormous variance among older persons in political and economic power, economic and social class, community integration, and other factors including gender, disability, race and ethnicity, indigeneity, and sexual orientation and gender identity, which has significant impacts on their enjoyment of human rights. Furthermore, "the needs, vulnerabilities and capacities of the old and the older old (those 80 years of age and over) are considerably different".<sup>5</sup> Older persons are often excluded, overlooked and neglected in research and data collection. Individuals often do not self-identify within the category of older persons, which is complex, socially constructed and context-specific, and data tend not to be disaggregated within higher age brackets.<sup>6</sup>

7. The human rights impacts of climate change on older persons are aggravated by ageism, which can lead to older persons being neglected, ignored and marginalized in laws

<sup>1</sup> All contributions received are available at [www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HRAndClimateChange/Pages/RightsOlderPersons.aspx](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HRAndClimateChange/Pages/RightsOlderPersons.aspx).

<sup>2</sup> See A/74/161.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Ageing 2019: Highlights* (United Nations publication, 2019), p. 5, available at [www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2019-Highlights.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/publications/pdf/ageing/WorldPopulationAgeing2019-Highlights.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> See A/75/205; and the Secretary-General's policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons, available at [www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_covid-19\\_and\\_older\\_persons\\_1\\_may\\_2020.pdf](http://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_covid-19_and_older_persons_1_may_2020.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 45.

<sup>6</sup> See, generally, A/HRC/45/14.

and policy. “Prejudices about older persons being frail, sick and dependent drive their marginalization and legitimize exclusionary practices.”<sup>7</sup> When it comes to climate action, stereotypes may paint older persons as “passive, incapable and withdrawn”.<sup>8</sup> Compounding these problems, older persons do not have a specific instrument guaranteeing their human rights, and are not often mentioned in international environmental agreements.

8. Age discrimination can be a significant factor in older persons’ exclusion from policies and programmes designed to address the negative effects of climate change, including during climate-related emergencies. At times in emergency settings ageism on the part of relief workers can lead to unequal or otherwise inadequate services and treatment.<sup>9</sup> Ageism and age discrimination, social isolation, neglect, poverty, migration status and disability are among the many factors that interact with climate change to adversely affect the human rights of older persons, as detailed in the paragraphs below.

## A. Rights to life, health and safety

9. A number of climate change impacts disproportionately affect the lives and health of older persons, and policy responses have failed to account for these effects. Adults aged 65 and older are the most likely to die from heat exposure or during heatwaves, in extreme cold weather or winter storms, and in hurricanes and other natural hazards.<sup>10</sup> Older persons experience higher rates of cardiovascular illness and diabetes, which are linked to heat-related morbidity and mortality. A study in Finland found a 14 per cent increase in mortality for persons over the age of 65 as a result of heatwaves,<sup>11</sup> and in France during the 2003 European heatwave, 80 per cent of additional deaths occurred in persons aged over 75.<sup>12</sup> Seventy-five per cent of those who died during Hurricane Katrina in the United States of America were over the age of 60, as were about 40 per cent of those who died during Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013<sup>13</sup> and 70 per cent of those who died as a result of floods in La Plata, Argentina, in the same year.<sup>14</sup>

10. *The Lancet* has found rising exposure and vulnerability to extremes of heat for people aged 65 and over in all parts of the world.<sup>15</sup> Air pollution, which is intimately linked to climate change, is a potential cause of dementia<sup>16</sup> and has disproportionate health effects for older persons, 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”.<sup>17</sup> Climate change has also been linked to rising levels of a number of infectious diseases, which particularly impact older persons, as illustrated by the COVID-19

<sup>7</sup> A/HRC/39/50, para. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Gary Haq, Dave Brown and Sarah Hards, *Older People and Climate Change: The Case for Better Engagement* (Stockholm Environmental Institute, 2010), p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 44.

<sup>10</sup> G. Adriana Perez, “The impacts of climate change take a heavier toll on older women”, *Aging Today*, (March–April 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Submission by Finland, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> K.R. Smith et al., “2014: Human health: impacts, adaptation, and co-benefits”, *Climate Change 2014: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability. Part A: Global and Sectoral Aspects. Contribution of Working Group II to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*, C.B. Field et al., eds. (Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 721.

<sup>13</sup> HelpAge International, Climate change in an ageing world, 2015, p. 4, available from [www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/cop21-helpage-releases-position-paper-on-adapting-to-climate-change-in-an-ageing-world/?keywords=COP21](http://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/cop21-helpage-releases-position-paper-on-adapting-to-climate-change-in-an-ageing-world/?keywords=COP21).

<sup>14</sup> Silvia Gascon, HelpAge International, “Older people main victims of recent Argentina floods”, 9 May 2013, available at [www.helpage.org/blogs/silvia-gascon-19407/older-people-main-victims-of-recent-argentina-floods-557](http://www.helpage.org/blogs/silvia-gascon-19407/older-people-main-victims-of-recent-argentina-floods-557).

<sup>15</sup> Nick Watts and others, “The 2019 report of *The Lancet* Countdown on health and climate change: ensuring that the health of a child born today is not defined by a changing climate”, *The Lancet*, vol. 394 (16 November 2019), pp. 1836–1878, see pp. 1837 and 1841.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth Peters and others, “Air pollution and dementia: a systematic review”, *Journal of Alzheimer’s Disease*, vol. 70 (2019), pp. 145–163, available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30775976>.

<sup>17</sup> G. Adriana Perez, “The impacts of climate change take a heavier toll on older women”.

pandemic.<sup>18</sup> In lower-income countries, “this susceptibility is exacerbated by poverty and malnutrition, poor infrastructure and the lack of resources to treat their specific needs”.<sup>19</sup>

11. Climate-related emergencies such as heatwaves, floods and hurricanes can create disruptions to necessary health care and services for older persons. During heatwaves, older persons may be confined, without access to necessary medical care. Evacuations of older persons, particularly from care facilities, are complicated by the need to transfer medical equipment, supplies and records.<sup>20</sup> Older persons who do not have adequate existing structures of care and support may be cut off from relevant information and services during an emergency.<sup>21</sup> Emergencies have been found to worsen pre-existing health conditions in some older persons and to have negative cognitive and memory effects,<sup>22</sup> and older persons often take longer to recover from the physical effects of disasters.<sup>23</sup>

12. Climate change can also significantly impact older persons’ mental health. Some older persons who survive disasters experience high rates of survivor’s guilt, especially when they lose children or grandchildren, and older persons have been found to have high rates of post-traumatic stress and depression following floods.<sup>24</sup> While other studies have found these rates to be consistent with those of the general population, older persons may nevertheless be disproportionately impacted because some are more reluctant to seek mental health care.<sup>25</sup> Some older persons also experience increased loneliness and isolation as a result of climate effects,<sup>26</sup> or significant mental trauma or depression when confronting climate change impacts and feelings of guilt or powerlessness regarding the world that they will leave for future generations.

13. In emergencies, some older persons are also at higher risk of experiencing violence, exploitation, neglect and abuse. Emergency situations aggravate these risks, “as older persons are separated from community support and familiar service structures, while their role in the family and the community may be undermined”.<sup>27</sup>

## B. Human mobility

14. Migration and displacement are complex phenomena which are affected by multiple and interrelated dynamics. However, it is clear that both climate-related emergencies and the slow-onset effects of climate change are increasingly important factors in human mobility around the world, and that these phenomena can carry significant human rights risks for older persons.

15. In emergencies, older persons with limited mobility may have difficulty reaching safety. Infrastructure and policy may be lacking to ensure that they are aware of evacuation warnings, orders or services, especially if new technologies are relied on to disseminate such information, and to account for older persons’ needs with regard to travel, adequate food, shelter, health care and services. Physical challenges that have only minor effects on day-to-day life may become serious impediments in an emergency, limiting older persons’ mobility and adaptive capacity.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See, generally, A/75/205.

<sup>19</sup> HelpAge International, Climate change in an ageing world.

<sup>20</sup> Janet L. Gamble and others, “Climate change and older Americans: state of the science”, *Environmental Health Perspectives*, vol. 121, No. 1 (1 January 2013), p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Submission by AGE Platform Europe, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Janet L. Gamble and others, “Climate change and older Americans: state of the science”, p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Vukosava Pekovic, Laura Seff and Max B. Rothman, “Planning for and responding to special needs of elders in natural disasters”, *Generations*, vol. 31, No. 4 (Winter 2007/2008), p. 38.

<sup>24</sup> Earwin William A. Leyva, A. Beaman and P.M. Davidson, “Health impact of climate change in older people: an integrative review and implications for nursing”, *Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, vol. 49, No. 6 (2017), p. 673.

<sup>25</sup> Vukosava Pekovic, Laura Seff and Max B. Rothman, “Planning for and responding to special needs of elders in natural disasters”, p. 38.

<sup>26</sup> Submission by AGE Platform Europe, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 70.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 26.

16. When older persons are displaced in emergencies, some face disproportionate difficulties in returning to their homes and in accessing restitution for damage, both because of physical factors and because of ageist exclusion from humanitarian aid for rebuilding purposes.<sup>29</sup> When older people do move, migration and displacement in later life can be particularly traumatic, due to severed social ties and lack of facilities, rights and protection in unfamiliar new environments.<sup>30</sup>

17. Older persons may also be stateless or become stateless during displacement, which can have enormous implications for well-being. Some older persons face specific barriers to obtaining nationality, as legislation in some countries imposes conditions for naturalization that they may not meet. Naturalization may be dependent on passing language and other tests that pose challenges for some persons with disabilities and/or older persons.

18. Access to technology is increasingly playing an important role in human mobility. Older persons disproportionately rely on family connections and non-Internet communication sources, and often have not received the support that would enable them to adopt new technologies. They therefore have reduced access to networks and information that contribute to resilience and facilitate mobility.<sup>31</sup>

19. Mobility is an increasingly common response to the slow-onset effects of climate change, but older persons often have less access to this strategy. 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 persons in areas experiencing severe climate effects have emphasized cultural and spiritual attachments, including unwillingness to abandon traditional homes and lands and unwillingness to leave behind ancestral burial grounds.<sup>32</sup>

20. Older persons’ mobility within the areas where they are already living can also be affected by climate policy. In some countries, a significant percentage of older persons are more reliant on automobiles, which is not taken into account by climate regulations intended to discourage driving.<sup>33</sup> Other older persons rely on public transportation, which can face disruptions due to climate events or because of reduced availability of services as climate change burdens budgets and people move out of climate-affected areas.<sup>34</sup>

### C. Right to adequate housing

21. Climate change also significantly impacts the spaces in which older persons live. In some areas, older persons rely on traditional building materials that are becoming less available.<sup>35</sup> Older persons are more likely to live in homes with insufficient heating and cooling systems to adapt to new temperature extremes or that are less energy-efficient,<sup>36</sup> and they disproportionately lack access to safe, clean, healthy and sustainable energy sources.<sup>37</sup> Measures that States put into place to promote more energy-efficient or climate-adapted homes sometimes do not include provisions necessary to ensure uptake by older persons.<sup>38</sup>

22. Research conducted during a number of disasters in the United States has shown that assisted living facilities for older persons are often excluded from community emergency

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., para. 33.

<sup>30</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ingrid Boas, “Environmental change and human mobility in the digital age”, *Geoforum*, vol. 84 (October 2017).

<sup>32</sup> Caroline Zickgraf, “Keeping people in place: political factors of (im)mobility and climate change”, *Social Sciences*, vol. 8, No. 8 (2019), p. 9, available at [www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/8/8/228](http://www.mdpi.com/2076-0760/8/8/228).

<sup>33</sup> Gary Haq, John Whitelegg and Mervyn Kohler, *Growing Old in a Changing Climate* (Stockholm Environmental Institute, 2008), pp. 5–6.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>35</sup> Mirjam Macchi and others, *Indigenous and Traditional Peoples and Climate Change* (International Union for Conservation of Nature, March 2008), p. 21, available at [www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/climatechange/docs/IUCN.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/climatechange/docs/IUCN.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Gary Haq, John Whitelegg and Mervyn Kohler, *Growing Old in a Changing Climate*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 10.

<sup>38</sup> Submission by AGE Platform Europe, pp. 2–3.

preparedness planning and receive less assistance in the wake of disasters.<sup>39</sup> Evacuations strain the resources of facilities that take in evacuees.<sup>40</sup> Shelters are often not designed to accommodate the particular needs of older persons, including proximity to accessible toilet facilities or a need to stay close to family.<sup>41</sup> “Older adults can also be more susceptible to property damage or loss due to lack of insurance, limited personal finances, and poor creditworthiness”,<sup>42</sup> and in the aftermath of disasters, physical limitations and exclusion from humanitarian aid can make it particularly difficult for them to rebuild and repair damaged homes.

#### **D. Right to food**

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

24. Climate change is altering not only the amount of food available to many people, but also the quality and types of foodstuffs available, which has impacts for older persons, who disproportionately suffer from malnutrition and may be particularly reliant on specialized diets.<sup>45</sup> In small island developing States, loss of agricultural land is leading to increased reliance on industrial and processed foodstuffs, which increases rates of non-communicable diseases such as diabetes in older persons. Limited access to traditional foodstuffs can also create negative impacts on the rights to health and to cultural life.<sup>46</sup> Emergencies and inadequate emergency responses may also aggravate the difficulties faced by older persons in obtaining the quantity, quality and variety of food necessary for their health and survival.<sup>47</sup>

#### **E. Rights to water and sanitation**

25. Climate change is diminishing water quality and quantity and the predictability of availability in many parts of the world.<sup>48</sup> Older persons are disproportionately affected by water insecurity; physical, financial and design barriers all contribute to their being underserved by existing water and sanitation services, and this will only be aggravated by climate change.<sup>49</sup> This will have significant health effects for older persons, who are particularly susceptible to dehydration and infectious diseases associated with poor sanitation,<sup>50</sup> and is also a driver of displacement.

<sup>39</sup> Sarah B. Laditka and others, “Providing shelter to nursing home evacuees in disasters: lessons from Hurricane Katrina”, *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 98, No. 7 (July 2008), pp. 1288 and 1290.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1290.

<sup>41</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 51.

<sup>42</sup> Janet L. Gamble and others, “Climate change and older Americans: state of the science”, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6–7.

<sup>46</sup> Human Rights Watch, “Canada: climate crisis toll on First Nations’ food supply”, 21 October 2020, available at [www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/21/canada-climate-crisis-toll-first-nations-food-supply](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/10/21/canada-climate-crisis-toll-first-nations-food-supply).

<sup>47</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Special report on the ocean and cryosphere in a changing climate*, available at [www.ipcc.ch/srocc](http://www.ipcc.ch/srocc).

<sup>49</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 5.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

## F. Rights to social protection, care and support

26. Rising frequency of disasters and extreme weather events strain social service resources and capacity, potentially detracting from care and support available to older persons.<sup>51</sup> Outmigration of younger people in climate-affected areas may diminish care and support for older people who remain,<sup>52</sup> although such migration may also in part be motivated by a desire to send back remittances for the care of older relatives.<sup>53</sup>

27. The Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons has drawn attention to strains on social protection systems, including pension systems for older persons, in the context of emergencies, noting the disruption in access 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 regimes of pension portability.<sup>54</sup> Older migrants, especially those in irregular situations, may face an increased risk of not having access to their right to a pension or social protection.

## G. Rights to decent work and livelihoods

28. While stereotypes might imagine older persons 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.<sup>55</sup> The types of labour that older persons are likely to do, including subsistence agriculture and informal labour, are particularly susceptible to climate change impacts.

29. Older persons, and particularly older women, are disproportionately reliant on subsistence agriculture for their livelihoods in many parts of the world.<sup>56</sup> This creates a disproportionate effect on older persons from climate impacts on agricultural productivity, and from climate change adaptation and mitigation measures that can disrupt agricultural practices, such as planned relocation and the conversion of land for biofuels production.<sup>57</sup>

30. Changes in the possibilities for traditional livelihoods, including cultivation, herding and handicrafts, also disproportionately affect older persons, who are often more reliant on such livelihoods and have limited access to the support needed to adapt to new ones. Losing such livelihoods affects not only economic stability, but also health, well-being and sociocultural security.<sup>58</sup>

31. Programmes and funding intended to address the effects of climate change on livelihoods can leave out older persons through unintentional omissions or deliberate age cut-offs. Older persons sometimes face significant competition from younger persons in such programmes, or may find that their skills and abilities are undervalued.<sup>59</sup>

## H. Cultural rights

32. Climate change has devastating impacts on cultural traditions, practices and heritage sites.<sup>60</sup> While older persons are not exclusive or inherent arbiters of culture or tradition, many feel a particular and long-standing commitment to cultural practices or sites, and many communities assign a role to elders in safeguarding cultural and traditional practices and knowledge.

<sup>51</sup> Gary Haq, John Whitelegg and Mervyn Kohler, *Growing Old in a Changing Climate*, p. 11.

<sup>52</sup> Shahnaj Begum, "Effects of livelihood transformation on older persons in the Nordic Arctic: a gender-based analysis", *Polar Record*, vol. 52 (2016), pp. 164–165.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Ingrid Boas, Wageningen University, 13 November 2020.

<sup>54</sup> A/HRC/42/43, paras. 56–57.

<sup>55</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Shahnaj Begum, "Effects of livelihood transformation on older persons in the Nordic Arctic: a gender-based analysis", pp. 159 and 164.

<sup>59</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 60.

<sup>60</sup> See, generally, A/75/298.

33. Accordingly, some older persons feel a significant loss when cultural heritage sites are lost, when culturally important foodstuffs or materials become less available, or when traditional ecological knowledge becomes unreliable due to climate change.<sup>61</sup> Some older persons have thus been reluctant to accept climate change adaptation measures that involve distancing from, or loss of, cultural practices or heritage sites.<sup>62</sup>

## I. Multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination

### 1. Differential effects of gender

34. Both ageing and climate change have differential 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.<sup>63</sup> Physiological and physical differences, social norms and roles, and gender discrimination and inequities in access to resources and power all play a role in making older women face particular risk of vulnerability to climate impacts.<sup>64</sup>

35. Older women experience higher rates of poverty than older men and face other economic hardships that are aggravated by climate change. They also face disproportionate health risks, including a greater likelihood of experiencing chronic diseases and air pollution harms,<sup>65</sup> and have higher rates of mortality and other health complications from extreme heat events than any other demographic group.<sup>66</sup> Conversely, during typhoons, older men have been found to be more at risk of death.<sup>67</sup>

36. Gendered social roles and expectations have complex effects on climate risks for older people. In some societies, older men are more socially isolated and thus have more difficulty in accessing assistance to cope with the negative effects of climate change.<sup>68</sup> However, in situations of emergency or strained family resources brought on by climate impacts, older women are sometimes more likely to be viewed as a burden and to suffer abuse or neglect.<sup>69</sup> In some countries, older women are blamed for extreme weather through accusations of witchcraft or sorcery, and face violence or exclusion as a result.<sup>70</sup> Transformation of traditional livelihoods and of cultural and social practices also has varying effects on men and women because of their different social roles.<sup>71</sup> Social norms around gender orientation

<sup>61</sup> Karletta Chief and others, “Indigenous experiences in the U.S. with climate change and environmental stewardship in the Anthropocene”, *Forest Conservation and Management in the Anthropocene: Conference Proceedings* (United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 2014), p. 165; and Samantha Chisholm Hatfield and others, “Indian time: time, seasonality and culture in Traditional Ecological Knowledge of climate change”, *Ecological Processes*, vol. 7 (2018), p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Caroline Zickgraf, “Keeping people in place: political factors of (im)mobility and climate change”.

<sup>63</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, general recommendation No. 27 (2010), para. 5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 25.

<sup>65</sup> G. Adriana Perez, “The impacts of climate change take a heavier toll on older women”.

<sup>66</sup> *Senior Women for Climate Protection et al. v. Swiss Federal Council et al.*, complaint (2016), paras. 88–95, available at [https://klimaseniorinnen.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/request\\_Klima\\_Seniorinnen.pdf](https://klimaseniorinnen.ch/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/request_Klima_Seniorinnen.pdf).

<sup>67</sup> Earwin William A. Leyva, A. Beaman and P.M. Davidson, “Health impact of climate change in older people: an integrative review and implications for nursing”, p. 674.

<sup>68</sup> Kirsten Vinyeta and others, *Climate Change Through an Intersectional Lens: Gendered Vulnerability and Resilience in Indigenous Communities in the United States* (United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, December 2015), p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Guidance on Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement* (2013), p. 12, available at <https://cms.emergency.unhcr.org/documents/11982/43853/Working+with+Older+Persons+in+Forced+Displacement+2013/679812f8-c119-444b-9081-40ca66c08782>.

<sup>70</sup> Evan Fraser and others, “Toil and trouble: how conflict and climate change are triggering witch hunts”, *Foreign Affairs* (16 August 2015).

<sup>71</sup> Shahnaj Begum, “Effects of livelihood transformation on older persons in the Nordic Arctic: a gender-based analysis”, pp. 159–160.

and sexual identity may also compound the negative human rights effects of climate change for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex older persons.

## 2. Older persons with disabilities

37. Climate change has a disproportionate impact on the human rights of persons with disabilities, including negatively impacting their health, food security, livelihoods, housing, and access to water and sanitation.<sup>72</sup> The incidence of disability rises with age: almost half of older persons worldwide are living with some form of disability, a proportion that increases as people age within the “older” age group, and older persons represent a majority of persons with disabilities.<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, climate change impacts on persons with disabilities are more likely to be borne by older persons.

38. There are also areas where age and disability have compounding effects. For example, older persons with disabilities disproportionately experience poor housing conditions, which aggravates their vulnerability to climate-related emergencies and temperature effects.<sup>74</sup> Intersecting forms of bias and discrimination can lead to invisibility of older persons with disabilities, particularly those with cognitive disabilities, and to their exclusion from policy responses.<sup>75</sup>

## 3. Racial and ethnic minorities

39. In many countries and societies around the world, racial and ethnic minorities experience disproportionate rates of poverty and discrimination and reduced access to human rights. These inequities can compound with age to multiply vulnerabilities to climate effects. For example, non-white older persons in the United States have been found to be at higher risk of heat-related mortality.<sup>76</sup>

## 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 interconnections between their ways of living and the natural environment. Older persons in indigenous communities are sometimes more tied to traditional livelihoods, foods or cultural practices that are threatened by climate change.<sup>77</sup> They may experience a unique sense of loss related to the disappearance of cultural practices and traditional ways of life.<sup>78</sup>

# III. Promoting and protecting the rights of older persons in the context of climate change

## A. Legal framework

### 1. Key international human rights instruments

41. As detailed above, climate change has an impact on the effective enjoyment of the human rights of older persons, including the rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation, housing, decent work, culture, and development. Those rights are enshrined in international instruments including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Convention on the

<sup>72</sup> See, generally, A/HRC/44/30.

<sup>73</sup> A/74/186, para. 4.

<sup>74</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 51.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Caitlin Littleton, HelpAge Asia, 18 November 2020.

<sup>76</sup> Earwin William A. Leyva, A. Beaman and P.M. Davidson, “Health impact of climate change in older people: an integrative review and implications for nursing”, p. 674.

<sup>77</sup> Shahnaj Begum, “Effects of livelihood transformation on older persons in the Nordic Arctic: a gender-based analysis”, pp. 159–160.

<sup>78</sup> William Nikolakis, Quentin Grafton and Aimee Nygaardand, “Indigenous communities and climate change: a Recognition, Empowerment and Devolution (RED) framework in the Murray-Darling Basin, Australia”, *Journal of Water and Climate Change*, vol. 7, No. 1 (March 2016), p. 174.

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 treaty dedicated to the human rights of older persons, and although many of these instruments do not specifically list age as a forbidden ground of discrimination, all of these instruments protect older persons' human rights. States also have legal obligations, including under international human rights law, to implement climate policies that empower all people, including older persons, by ensuring their full and effective participation in climate action at all levels.

42. Several human rights instruments contain provisions relevant to the rights of older persons affected by climate change. Article 11 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities protects the equal right to humanitarian relief of persons with disabilities in the aftermath of natural disasters, while article 25 contains a specific call for health services that are designed to minimize and prevent further disabilities among older persons.<sup>79</sup> The International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families includes prohibitions against age discrimination in its articles 1 (1) and 7. Article 11 (1) (e) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women provides for the equal right to social security for older women.

43. It is explained in general comment No. 6 (1995) of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that States parties to 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".<sup>80</sup> This includes special emphasis on older persons' rights in relation to work, social security, an adequate standard of living, health, education and culture.

44. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in paragraph 25 of its general recommendation No. 27 (2010), draws attention to the disproportionate impacts of climate change on older women, and in 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 "facilitate the participation of older women in decision-making for climate change mitigation and adaptation". The same Committee's general recommendation No. 37 (2018) also contains a number of references to the need to take into account differential effects of climate change on older women.<sup>81</sup> The Committee has also referred to the rights of older women in its concluding observations, in regard to the human rights effects of climate change and disasters.<sup>82</sup>

45. Special procedure mandate holders, including the Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons<sup>83</sup> and the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights<sup>84</sup> have begun to pay attention to the human rights impacts of climate change on older persons 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 incorporate the rights of older persons in their climate policies.<sup>85</sup>

46. Two regional agreements specifically protect the human rights of older persons. Seven States have so far ratified the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons, of 2015.<sup>86</sup> Article 25 of the Convention protects older persons' right to a

<sup>79</sup> See also A/HRC/42/43, para. 37.

<sup>80</sup> See para. 13.

<sup>81</sup> See paras. 2, 6, 26, 54 and 68.

<sup>82</sup> CEDAW/C/ATG/CO/4-7, paras. 10 and 51.

<sup>83</sup> A/HRC/42/43/Add.2, paras. 35 and 89; A/HRC/39/50/Add.2, para. 98; A/HRC/36/48/Add.2, para. 99; and A/HRC/33/44/Add.1, para. 97.

<sup>84</sup> A/HRC/44/40/Add.1, paras. 83, 85 and 86.

<sup>85</sup> A/HRC/44/13, para. 94.68; A/HRC/42/9, para. 104.63; A/HRC/42/12, para. 11.46; A/HRC/42/4, para. 95.29; and A/HRC/42/13, para. 122.52.

<sup>86</sup> Available at [www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter\\_american\\_treaties\\_a-70\\_human\\_rights\\_older\\_persons.asp#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20this%20Convention,integration%2C%20and%20participation%20in%20society.](http://www.oas.org/en/sla/dil/inter_american_treaties_a-70_human_rights_older_persons.asp#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20this%20Convention,integration%2C%20and%20participation%20in%20society.)

healthy environment, while article 29 provides for older persons' safety, needs and participation, in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies. The Independent Expert on the human rights of older persons has hailed the Convention as an example of good practice.<sup>87</sup>

47. The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa<sup>88</sup> was adopted in 2016. Article 14 provides for protection of older persons in conflict and disaster situations, obliging States to ensure that in emergencies older persons are among those to enjoy access, on a priority basis, to assistance, and that they receive humane treatment, needed medical care, protection and respect at all times.<sup>89</sup> Further, article 9 (2) of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa requires States to provide special protection and assistance to internally displaced older persons.

## 2. Other relevant legal and policy frameworks

48. While many international instruments do not make specific reference to older persons and their human rights, there are several international legal and policy documents that do express a commitment to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing is the primary global document addressing the concerns of older persons. The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons has explained that the Plan of Action is not sufficient to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by older persons.<sup>90</sup> However, it does adopt "a conceptual approach that is in accordance with human rights principles", and reaffirms the protection of certain rights,<sup>91</sup> including the rights to participation, work, health, independence, and accessibility. The Plan of Action does not include explicit reference to climate change, but it does identify emergencies as an issue area, and calls upon States to recognize both the vulnerabilities and the capabilities of older persons in emergency situations.<sup>92</sup> It also addresses the needs of older persons with regard to rural development, migration and urbanization<sup>93</sup> and references the disproportionate health burden that environmental pollution presents for older people.<sup>94</sup>

49. In December 2020, the decade from 2021 to 2030 was proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing, an initiative designed to foster concerted, catalytic and collaborative action to improve the lives of older people, their families, and the communities in which they live.<sup>95</sup> The United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing presents opportunities to ensure global attention to older persons' human rights as well as to policy coherence on actions to realize those rights in the context of climate change, including through the Decade's priority areas on addressing ageism and fostering an age-friendly environment.

50. While specific reference to older persons is absent from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement and other global climate (including climate finance) frameworks, there do exist certain international legal and policy frameworks relevant to climate change that include specific provisions for older persons. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals reference older persons, notably in Goal 3, although none of the targets or indicators for Goal 3 specifically refer to older persons. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction recognizes the importance of including older persons and utilizing their knowledge, wisdom

<sup>87</sup> A/HRC/33/44, para. 22.

<sup>88</sup> Available at <https://au.int/en/treaties/protocol-african-charter-human-and-peoples-rights-rights-older-persons>.

<sup>89</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 39.

<sup>90</sup> A/HRC/33/44, para. 123.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 96.

<sup>92</sup> Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, para. 54 ff., available at [www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/MIPAA/political-declaration-en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ageing/MIPAA/political-declaration-en.pdf).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 29 ff.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 65.

<sup>95</sup> World Health Organization, "Decade of Healthy Ageing", available at [www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Decade%20of,of%20older%20people%2C%20their%20families%2C](http://www.who.int/initiatives/decade-of-healthy-ageing#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Decade%20of,of%20older%20people%2C%20their%20families%2C).

and skills.<sup>96</sup> The global compacts on refugees and for safe, orderly and regular migration both highlight older persons' particular needs and their participation,<sup>97</sup> and address the links between migration, disasters, climate change and environmental degradation.<sup>98</sup> The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement emphasize that older persons are entitled to specific protection and assistance and to treatment that takes into account their special needs.<sup>99</sup> Finally, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has also incorporated special attention to older persons into its policy frameworks.<sup>100</sup>

## **B. Older persons' power in addressing the adverse impacts of climate change**

51. Meaningful and effective climate action requires the participation of all affected communities and groups, as guaranteed by international human rights law. It is essential to respect, protect and fulfil older persons' participation rights, and to create meaningful opportunities for their involvement in climate action, including by taking the necessary steps to provide them with relevant climate information and to overcome barriers to their inclusion.

52. Older persons 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 conflict resolution. Older persons possess important knowledge of science, history, tradition and culture that can inspire and support climate actions by current and future generations.<sup>101</sup> They also wield significant voting and economic power that can be mobilized for effective climate policy.

### **1. Older persons as advisers and custodians of knowledge**

53. It is important to avoid falling into the traps of stereotypes, including those that characterize all older persons, and especially older indigenous persons, as holding innate wisdom or knowledge. However, it is also true that many older persons have accumulated years of knowledge, and that in certain communities older persons are sometimes assigned a specific role as keepers of traditional knowledge related to the environment. Some older persons also possess important knowledge about how to practise more sustainable lifestyles, including relying less on material goods and using and reusing materials sustainably, making them important participants and potential leaders in the transition to circular economies.<sup>102</sup>

54. Traditional environmental knowledge has the potential to play a crucial role in mitigating and adapting to climate change. "Traditional knowledge is useful in: defining earlier environmental baselines, identifying impacts that need to be mitigated, providing observational evidence for modelling, providing technologies for adapting, and for identifying culturally appropriate values for protection from direct impacts or from the impacts of adaptation measures themselves."<sup>103</sup> It may include understanding of weather patterns and of the signals that presage coming disasters, methods of reducing the risk of and surviving such disasters,<sup>104</sup> and agriculture and herding methods that create less environmental harm while maintaining production levels.<sup>105</sup> Traditional environmental knowledge can also include a holistic understanding of the natural ecosystem, giving greater

<sup>96</sup> Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, para. 36, available at [www.preventionweb.net/files/43291\\_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf](http://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf).

<sup>97</sup> See [www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html](http://www.unhcr.org/the-global-compact-on-refugees.html) and General Assembly resolution 73/195.

<sup>98</sup> See General Assembly resolution 73/195.

<sup>99</sup> A/HRC/42/43, para. 43.

<sup>100</sup> UNHCR, Policy on older refugees, available from [www.unhcr.org/older-persons](http://www.unhcr.org/older-persons).

<sup>101</sup> UNHCR, *Guidance on Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement* (2013), p. 3; see also A/HRC/42/43, para. 35.

<sup>102</sup> Submission by AGE Platform Europe, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> Terry Williams and Preston Hardison, "Culture, law, risk and governance: contexts of traditional knowledge in climate change adaptation", *Climatic Change*, vol. 120 (2013), p. 532.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph U. Almazan and others, "Coping strategies of older adult survivors following a disaster", *Ageing International*, vol. 44 (2019), p. 148.

<sup>105</sup> HelpAge International, *Climate change in an ageing world*, p. 6.

visibility to environmental changes and to human responsibility for them.<sup>106</sup> Traditional knowledge that incorporates a longer time scale may also help to generate adaptability to climate change, by recognizing that people are accustomed to living in a shifting environment.<sup>107</sup>

## 2. Expertise and leadership

55. In addition to knowledge, many older persons have acquired experience, skills and capabilities that allow them to make significant contributions to climate action. Many of the most powerful and wealthy persons in the world, including Heads of State and business and community leaders, fall within the older age group. This cohort wields enormous resources that can be invaluable when seeking climate solutions and addressing the negative human rights impacts of climate change. Being among those who have benefited significantly from the conditions that caused climate change, they bear a human rights responsibility to address its negative consequences.

56. While young activists have deservedly received a good deal of attention and accolades for their innovative and courageous climate action, growing movements of older persons are also involved in climate activism, often motivated by concerns regarding the legacy they might leave behind.<sup>108</sup> Older persons have initiated climate litigation, relying on the fact that heat-related effects of climate change are already disproportionately impacting them.<sup>109</sup> They also participate in protests and other forms of political action, and generate innovative forms of activism.<sup>110</sup> Older persons' activism can be effective because they can subvert social stereotypes around old age, including both those that lead to greater respect and those that cause older persons to be underestimated.<sup>111</sup> They may be able to build intergenerational solidarity in the climate movement, because young people appreciate their counsel and seek their validation.<sup>112</sup> Older persons who are in positions of power can use those positions to amplify the voices of younger people and other voices that are often neglected in climate action.<sup>113</sup>

57. A number of social and psychological factors also make older persons well placed to contribute to climate solutions. Older adults who are retired may have time to devote to fully educating themselves on climate issues and becoming involved in climate action.<sup>114</sup> Some have developed significant problem-solving and caregiving skills, including the ability to mitigate negative emotions,<sup>115</sup> to change their mind in the light of new information and adopt new perspectives, to fairly mediate disputes,<sup>116</sup> and to employ long-term thinking and planning.<sup>117</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Samantha Chisholm Hatfield and others, "Indian time: time, seasonality and culture in Traditional Ecological Knowledge of climate change", p. 8.

<sup>107</sup> Frank Duerden, "Translating climate change impacts at the community level", *Arctic*, vol. 57, No. 2 (June 2004), p. 208.

<sup>108</sup> Howard Frumkin, Linda Fried and Rick Moody, "Aging, climate change, and legacy thinking", *American Journal of Public Health*, vol. 102, No. 8 (August 2012).

<sup>109</sup> Cordelia Christiane Bahr and others, "KlimaSeniorinnen: lessons from the Swiss senior women's case for future climate litigation", *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* (September 2018), p. 203, available at [www.elgaronline.com/view/journals/jhre/9-2/jhre.2018.02.04.xml](http://www.elgaronline.com/view/journals/jhre/9-2/jhre.2018.02.04.xml).

<sup>110</sup> Lorraine Larri and Hilary Whitehouse, "Nannagogy: social movement learning for older women's activism in the gas fields of Australia", *Australian Journal of Adult Learning*, vol. 59, No. 1 (April 2019), pp. 36–37.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Judi Summers and Cherry Hardacker, Knitting Nannas against gas and greed, 11 November 2020; and see Lorraine Larri and Hilary Whitehouse, "Nannagogy: social movement learning for older women's activism in the gas fields of Australia", p. 32.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Judi Summers and Cherry Hardacker, Knitting Nannas against gas and greed.

<sup>113</sup> See [www.theelders.org/news/it-will-take-all-us-never-too-young-lead-climate-crisis](http://www.theelders.org/news/it-will-take-all-us-never-too-young-lead-climate-crisis).

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Judi Summers and Cherry Hardacker, Knitting Nannas against gas and greed.

<sup>115</sup> Odeya Cohen and others, "Community resilience throughout the lifespan: the potential contribution of healthy elders", *PLoS ONE*, vol. 11, No. 2 (4 February 2016), p. 11.

<sup>116</sup> Howard Frumkin, Linda Fried and Rick Moody, "Aging, climate change, and legacy thinking", p. 1435.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

58. Older persons' contributions help communities recover and develop resilience when under threat of or in the aftermath of climate-related disasters.<sup>118</sup> They may be able to build on previous experiences of disasters or other threats.<sup>119</sup> One study found that older persons in flood-prone areas 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".<sup>120</sup>

#### IV. Promising practices

59. Stakeholders who responded to the call by OHCHR for inputs identified a number of practices by States and other actors that take into account the differential effects of climate change on the human rights of older persons, while also largely recognizing that this is a policy area that is deserving of greater study and attention.

60. A number of stakeholders identified efforts to integrate consideration of older persons in environmental and sustainability planning. The national climate change adaptation plans of Finland and Slovakia require consideration of the perspective of groups at risk, including older persons,<sup>121</sup> and the plan of Switzerland includes measures for reducing the impacts of heatwaves for older persons.<sup>122</sup> Bangladesh has included attention to older persons in the provisions of a number of climate and disaster laws and policies.<sup>123</sup> Mexico has incorporated respect for the rights of older persons in the implementation of its nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement, in its strategies relating to forests and deforestation<sup>124</sup> and in a programme providing support specifically to older farmers engaged in sustainable agricultural practices.<sup>125</sup> The city of Cologne, in Germany, has developed a "heat plan of action for older persons", while Manchester, in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, has included climate action in its "Age-Friendly Strategy".<sup>126</sup>

61. Other stakeholders have integrated older persons in disaster risk reduction and disaster response. Cambodia prioritizes older persons in disaster evacuation,<sup>127</sup> and in the Philippines, the National Economic and Development Authority mandates the collection of age-disaggregated data in its Disaster Rehabilitation and Recovery Planning Guide.<sup>128</sup> Civil society initiatives in Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua and the Philippines seek to take older persons into account in disaster response and risk reduction.<sup>129</sup> In Bangladesh, the non-governmental organization Young Power in Social Action, which provides housing assistance to climate-displaced persons, includes presence of older persons within a family in its criteria for prioritizing aid recipients.<sup>130</sup>

62. Stakeholders identified promising practices with regard to access to climate information. For example, Iraq has launched media campaigns to inform older persons of risks related to infectious and communicable diseases,<sup>131</sup> and in Mexico, the Social Security Institute has developed information materials on environmental matters for older persons.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>118</sup> See, generally, Odeya Cohen and others, "Community resilience throughout the lifespan: the potential contribution of healthy elders".

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2; and Joseph U. Almazan and others, "Coping strategies of older adult survivors following a disaster".

<sup>120</sup> Earwin William A. Leyva, A. Beaman and P.M. Davidson, "Health impact of climate change in older people: an integrative review and implications for nursing", p. 673.

<sup>121</sup> Submission by Finland, p. 3; and submission by the Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, p. 3.

<sup>122</sup> Submission by Switzerland, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Submission by Young Power in Social Action, p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Submission by Mexico, pp. 6 and 8.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22–28.

<sup>126</sup> Submission by AGE Platform Europe, pp. 4–5.

<sup>127</sup> Submission by the Ministry of Social Affairs, Veterans and Youth Rehabilitation of Cambodia, p. 3.

<sup>128</sup> Submission by the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, p. 3.

<sup>129</sup> Submission by the Office for the Defence of Human Rights of El Salvador, pp. 5–6; submission by the Ministry of the Environment of Cambodia, pp. 2–3; and submission by the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines, p. 5.

<sup>130</sup> Submission by Young Power in Social Action, pp. 3–5.

<sup>131</sup> Submission by Iraq, p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> Submission by Mexico, p. 29.

63. Older persons have engaged in a wide variety of climate action, and have formed bonds of intergenerational solidarity with others. Some States have promoted or facilitated such participation and solidarity. For example, Cambodia has facilitated older persons' associations for community-level action, including around climate change,<sup>133</sup> while the "My Experience" counselling programme in Iraq aims to build on the experience of older persons and foster intergenerational connections.<sup>134</sup>

## V. Conclusions and recommendations

### A. Conclusions

64. While older persons are heterogeneous and not inherently vulnerable, a number of factors can increase their risk related to the negative human rights impacts of climate change. Climate change effects can impair the realization of older persons' rights to life, health, food, water and sanitation, housing, freedom of movement, livelihoods, social protection, development and culture, among others. These impacts can be magnified by multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, including on the basis of gender, race and ethnicity, disability, and migration status.

65. Climate change impacts can also be magnified by ageism, poverty and social exclusion. Too many older persons live in situations of vulnerability as a result of lack of access to resources, neglect, and abuse. Absence of a binding international instrument specifically protecting the human rights of older persons and minimal references to older persons in key international climate instruments attest to the lack of attention to and visibility of older persons in national and international law.

66. Older persons possess enormous knowledge, experience, skills and resilience that give them the capacity to be key contributors in global efforts to mitigate and adapt to the negative impacts of climate change. Cultivating and enabling older persons' participation in climate action is not only a human rights imperative, but also a means of ensuring effective solutions for all people and for the planet.

### B. Recommendations for States and other stakeholders

67. Strengthen the international legal system and action for the protection of older persons, through the following actions:

(a) Engage in systematic, specific, empirical research on the effects of climate change on older persons and their human rights and use age-inclusive indicators to collect data disaggregated by gender, disability and age, including further disaggregation within the over-60 age category;

(b) Include the rights of older persons in future decisions of the Conference of the Parties to 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 the adoption of an international legal instrument protecting the human rights of older persons and, towards this end, accelerate progress under the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing as mandated by General Assembly resolution 67/139, paying specific attention to the impact of climate change on older persons and ensuring their right to a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment;

(d) Ensure policy coherence and integration between environmental and sustainability commitments and initiatives aimed at addressing the needs of older

<sup>133</sup> Submission by the Ministry of the Environment of Cambodia, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Submission by Iraq, p. 3.

persons, such as the World Health Organization's age-friendly cities initiative and the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030).

68. Take urgent, meaningful and ambitious action to mitigate and adapt to climate change that protects the human rights of all, including the human rights of older persons, through the following actions:

(a) Prepare, commit to and implement ambitious climate action plans to limit global warming to no more than 1.5°C, including by taking immediate action to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, and to address the negative human rights impacts that are already occurring;

(b) Ensure that climate change and disaster risk reduction measures are age- and gender-responsive and disability-inclusive and take into account the needs and rights of older women and men;

(c) Ensure that efforts to address the human health impacts of climate change include consultation with older persons and organizations working on their rights. Engage in public health messaging that is gender-responsive, relevant and accessible to older persons;

(d) Include older persons in policymaking and planning in order to create sustainable infrastructure, local spaces, and communities that take into account the needs and rights of older persons;

(e) Ensure high-quality universal health care and other social services for older persons and social protection systems that take into account climate effects and build resilience;

(f) Enable older persons' participation in a just transition to sustainable livelihoods, including by facilitating their participation in job training and skills-building programmes, and their access to relevant credit and resources;

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

69. Enable and support older persons' participation in climate action, through the following actions:

(a) Invest in climate communication and education for older persons, including via targeted communications around extreme weather events and emergencies, and ensure that such efforts are accessible to older persons with disabilities;

(b) Support diversity and the inclusion of older persons in the composition of national delegations to processes under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change;

(c) Find and institutionalize new and creative ways to include older persons in environmental volunteerism and efforts to combat climate change, including by addressing potential participation barriers such as mandatory retirement ages;

(d) Support capacity-building for older persons to maximize their voice, confidence and negotiation skills, and provide quality later-in-life learning opportunities that foster greater understanding among older persons who are concerned for the sustainability of their communities in the face of climate change;

(e) Facilitate intergenerational dialogue around climate change and the environment;

(f) Incorporate traditional knowledge into climate solutions, with indigenous peoples' free, prior and informed consent, and ensuring that benefits of the use of such knowledge, including financial benefits, are equitably allocated to communities and older persons.