

ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons: Present and Future

"Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons in Emergency Situations"

26th – 27th October 2021, Seoul, Republic of Korea

Introduction

While accelerating population ageing is a global phenomenon that most societies are currently facing, the occurrence and duration of emergencies have increased in the past years – for instance, between 2005 and 2017 the number of crises receiving an international response grew from 16 to 30, and their average duration rose from four to seven years. These two phenomena raise the question how the increasing frequency and length of emergency situations impact on older persons. It is well known that one's socio-economic positionings and identities such as age, sex, economic and health status influence, if not determine, one's access to resources and services related to mitigation, adaptation and relief in emergency situations. It is not difficult to imagine that older persons are particularly at risk of exclusion and tend to bear the brunt in emergency situations, whether in a health crisis, a humanitarian crisis caused by war and conflicts, or in natural disasters. In fact, many reports show that discrimination against older persons and elder abuse have been on the rise even in 'normal' situations. Emergencies exacerbate the existing forms of elder discrimination and abuse. This is most vividly shown during the COVID-19 pandemic, one of the major global health crises in recent years, where most victims are older persons: according to the World Health Organization (WHO), 95% of the total deaths caused by COVID-19 in Europe were people aged above 60 and over 50% of deaths were of people aged over 80. Furthermore, older persons are not only overlooked in emergency relief systems, which aggravates their vulnerabilities, but their positive contributions during emergency crises are often unacknowledged. Older persons will inevitably and increasingly be exposed to higher risks unless the *status quo* is challenged, as older persons make up a rapidly increasing share of most societies and natural and man-made disasters occur ever more frequently.

Against this backdrop, the ASEM Global Ageing Center (AGAC) organizes its first forum on **The Human Rights of Older Persons: Present and Future** on the theme of *Protection of the Human Rights of Older Persons in Emergency Situations*. While the issue of older persons in emergency situations has been brought into the light more pressingly by the COVID-19 pandemic, the AGAC takes this as an opportunity to reassess how older persons are the first group to be victimized and the last one to be considered in general emergency crisis responses, and to explore various ways to move forward. The AGAC aims, through this Forum, to bring together various stakeholders, from international organizations, national government officials and academic researchers to civil society groups (activists) to discuss 1) how older persons are discriminated against, neglected and prejudiced in a magnified form

in emergency situations, particularly when the intersections of age with social identities such as sex and socio-economic situatedness is taken into account, 2) what regional, national and global endeavors have been made to resolve these problems and 3) what additional efforts should be made at all levels and sectors to protect the human rights of older persons including the adoption of a UN Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons.

Sessional Topics for Discussion

The Forum consists of five sessions: 1) older persons in health crises, 2) civil society talk concert, 3) older persons in humanitarian crises, 4) older persons in climate change/natural disasters and 5) a session with the World Health Organization (WHO) on its Global Report on Ageism, marking the AGAC's publication of its Korean translation. Each session is led by a moderator and consists of four presentations (15-20 minutes each) and Questions & Answers. Session 4 will consist of a presentation by WHO staff and lead author of the Global Report on Ageism, Dr Vânia de la Fuente-Núñez, as well as contributions from three discussants.

Session 1: Older Persons in Health Crises
Special Session: Civil Society Talk Concert
Session 2: Older Persons in Humanitarian Crises
Session 3: Older Persons in Climate Change/Natural Disasters
Session 4 (with the World Health Organization): Global Report on Ageism, Older Persons in Emergencies and Ageism

As population ageing proceeds rapidly across the globe, and emergencies occur increasingly frequently and with greater intensity, there has been a growing awareness in the international community that currently existing mechanisms are inadequate to the tasks of preventing and responding to the specific needs and vulnerabilities of older persons in emergency situations. Moreover, there has been a rising demand for national governments and international (development) agencies to recognize and reflect older persons as a relevant and distinctive group of its own. Accordingly, there has been a growing consensus, among various local, national and international actors, on the need to adopt a human rights-based approach to population ageing in general and to older persons in emergency situations in particular.

There have been notable attempts that have been made to alter and correct the *status quo* and to put forward a human rights-based approach as the only sustainable way of

addressing the various challenges that the protection of older persons poses particularly in the context of emergencies. The UN's Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights of Older Persons dedicated its 2019 report's theme to *the human rights protection of older persons in situations of risk and humanitarian emergencies*. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) published a Policy Brief on *older persons in emergency situations* in 2020, in which it assessed specific risks, vulnerabilities and capacities of older persons and showcased examples of good practice seen in some countries in the UNECE region. The Policy Brief also proposed several strategies to be adopted in order for the needs of older persons to be given full attention across different stages of emergency prevention and management, from preparedness, disaster risk reduction and emergency response to recovery. Alongside UN institutions, international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) have been active in shedding light on how the care for older persons has been sidelined in most emergency situations, as seen in HelpAge International's 2020 report *If not now, when? Keeping promises to older people affected by humanitarian crises* and in Amnesty International's reports on older persons in post-military atrocities in the cases of Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nigeria, which were published in 2019-2020. Similarly, the WHO published the *Global Report on Ageism* in 2021, addressing how ageism (stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination directed towards others or ourselves on the basis of age) has serious consequences for people's health, well-being and human rights. It demonstrates with solid evidence that ageism reduces older persons' quality of life, increases their social isolation and loneliness as well as their risks to be exposed to violence and abuse.

Despite these visible and notable accomplishments that national and international agencies have made in recent years, the protection of the human rights of older persons still falls short of what is needed. The AGAC joins these global endeavors and aims to contribute, by hosting the ASEM Forum on the Human Rights of Older Persons: Present and Future, to protecting and promoting the human rights of older persons in two ways. First, it creates an important forum where national government officials, UN agencies, INGOs and academics share their respective experiences and perspectives, and seek common ground and collective solutions to protect older persons in emergency situations. Second, it invites actors and representatives from Europe and Asia as well as from high-income and low/mid-income countries, so that agencies of different regions and countries enhance their understanding of other countries' and regions' economic, social and cultural conditions, thereby finding better solutions to protect older persons beyond regional and economic disparities.

Session 1: Older Persons in Health Crises

Older men and women are most adversely and disproportionately impacted by the globally unprecedented health crisis of the Covid-19 Pandemic. In Session 1, speakers from government, INGO and academic backgrounds will address issues related to older persons

in health crises. Ms. Silvia Perel-Levin, Chair of the NGO Committee on Ageing will talk about how the prevalence of violence, abuse and neglect has increased exponentially during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Matthias von Schwanenflügel, Director-General at the Division of Demographic Change, Older People and Welfare, the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, Germany, will introduce Germany's response to protect older persons in health crises. Mr. Quyen Tran, Portfolio Development and Quality Manager at HelpAge International, will introduce various measures and activities adopted at the community level in Vietnam and other ASEAN countries to respond to health crises for older persons. Dr. Soonman Kwon, President of the Korea Health Industry Development Institute, will discuss what elements a sustainable Covid-19 response policy can and should entail with reference to the case of Korea.

Special Session: Civil Society Talk Concert

The Civil Society Talk Concert is organized to provide an opportunity for various agencies of the INGOs to share their experiences gained from their activities on the ground and augment the synergy effect that the cooperation between the INGOs will create for the human rights of older persons. The Civil Society Talk Concert will consist of two sub-programs: a speech by Ms. Margaret Young, Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (Steering Group) and an informal discussion joined by the representatives of six INGOs, Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People, HelpAge Korea, Geneva NGO Committee on Ageing, HelpAge International, AGE Europe Platform (OKRA) and Coalition of Services of Older People. This Special Session will look into the concrete realities that older persons face in the COVID-19 era and discuss what role civil society can play to protect and promote the human rights of older persons .

Session 2: Older Persons in Humanitarian Crises

Humanitarian crises refer to events that threaten the health, safety or wellbeing of a large group of people. Humanitarian crises can be caused by war, natural disasters, famine, or outbreak of disease. Session 2 will assess various aspects of older persons in humanitarian crises, particularly in the context of population mobility (migration) and displacement caused by (political) conflicts. In this session, Mr. Matthew Wells, Deputy-Director of Crisis Response Program, Amnesty International, will share his research findings on the conditions that older persons are forced to be in in post-conflict (military atrocities) situations. Mr. Ken Bluestone, Head of Policy and Influencing at Age International, a co-author of HelpAge International's recent report *If not now, when? Keeping promises to older people affected by humanitarian crises*, will discuss the key findings of the report. Dr. Eun Ha Chang, Director at the Center for International Development and Cooperation, Korean Women's Development Institute, will talk about Older People in Humanitarian Assistance from a Gender and Intersectionality Perspective. Dr. Supriya Akerkar, Senior Lecturer in Disaster Risk Reduction at Oxford Brookes University, UK, will address the existing normative frameworks and guidelines in the international humanitarian crisis response

mechanisms and discuss the implications for policy and practice for older persons in emergencies.

Session 3: Older Persons in Climate Change/Natural Disasters

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and prolonged heatwaves have increased in recent years. Climate change and natural disasters have caused immense damage to many communities and societies and resulted in human suffering, particularly among the most vulnerable such as older persons. In Session 3, Dr. Sarah Harper, Professor at the Oxford Institute for Population Ageing, will discuss how population ageing interacts with the environment. Ms. Fatimah Zuraidah Bt.Salleh, Director of Federal Territory Kuala Lumpur of the Department of Social Welfare of Malaysia, will talk about how Malaysia responded to mitigate the adverse impact of natural disasters (emergencies) on older persons by providing them with social support. Dr. Sari Mutia Timur, Director of Yakkum Emergency Unit in Indonesia, will address the rights and basic needs for older persons in relation to the 2018 Earthquake in Central Sulawesi. Dr. Hongsoo Kim, Professor of Public Health, Seoul National University, will discuss how to protect health and wellbeing of older persons in the era of climate change with reference to the case of Korea.

Session 4 (with WHO): the UN Global Report on Ageism, Older Persons in Emergencies and Ageism

The first ever *Global Report on Ageism* was developed by the World Health Organization in collaboration with other UN agencies and published in March 2021. This report not only provides a conceptual framework for ageism, but also summarizes in an accessible way the best evidence about the scale, the impacts and the determinants of ageism and the most effective strategies to reduce it. The *Global report on ageism* highlights the serious impacts that ageism has for people's health, well-being and human rights. As an endeavor to disseminate this important report widely, and especially to make it more accessible to Korean readers, the AGAC is publishing its Korean translation. Session 4 is to mark the publication of the Korean translation of the report and to create an opportunity to discuss ageism in connection to older persons in emergencies, particularly regarding how ageism manifests itself in emergencies and how emergency situations in turn can augment and exacerbate existing ageism. In Session 4, Dr Vânia de la Fuente-Núñez, lead author of the *Global Report on Ageism* will discuss the key findings of the report, including relevant information about the manifestation of ageism in emergencies. She will also present future research directions. Her presentation will be followed by comments by three discussants, Ms. Amal Abou Rafeh, Chief, Programme on Ageing Unit, UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Ms. Jemma Stovell, Global Voice Adviser, HelpAge International and Dr. Soon-Dool Chung, Professor of Social Welfare, Ehwa Womans University.

Timetable

	Day 1 (October 26)	Day 2 (October 27)
Morning	Registration (09:30-10:30)	Registration (09:30-10:00)
	Opening Ceremony & Keynote Speech (10:30-12:00)	Session 2 (10:00-12:00)
	Lunch (12:00-14:00)	Lunch (12:00-14:00)
Afternoon	Session 1 (14:00-16:00)	Session 3 (14:00-16:00)
	Civil Society Talk Concert (16:30-18:30)	Session 4 with WHO (16:30-18:15)
		Closing (18:15-19:00)

Parallel Event: Online Exhibition of Global Campaigns for the Human Rights of Older Persons

The AGAC also hosts, as a parallel event of the Forum, an Online Exhibition of Global Campaigns for the Human Rights of Older Persons, which collects and displays the work of campaigners from international organizations, civil society, governments, and the private sector as well as individuals from around the world.

In the exhibition, campaigners address various issues related to the human rights of older persons, such as ageism, the UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, women in old age, workplace age discrimination, the wellbeing of older persons, and changes in the narrative around age and ageing. Audiences are encouraged to share their thoughts in the comment sections on the website, to visit the campaign sites for more information on key issues of the human rights of older persons, and, finally, to join the AGAC's efforts to protect and promote the human rights of older persons.

The AGAC offers two interface options — [the 2D exhibition website](#) and [the virtual reality exhibition](#).