

## Older persons remain chronically invisible despite pandemic spotlight, says UN expert

GENEVA (30 September 2020) – *The UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, calls to prioritize older persons in the recovery phase and beyond on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> global UN Day of Older Persons. She issues the following statement:*

“Tragically, the COVID-19 pandemic is shining a spotlight on older persons. It has a disproportionate impact on older persons and has magnified existing violations of their rights. Existing inequalities that older persons face in terms of access to health, employment and livelihood are exacerbated.

This involuntary focus on older persons should not conceal the fact that they are chronically invisible. In most countries, information about the lived realities of older persons is at best fragmented, at worst, non-existent, and many countries lack adequate legislation at the national level to protect the rights of the older persons and to prevent ageism, discrimination, exclusion, marginalization, violence and abuse.

It is imperative to shed light on structural and systematic ways in which older persons are left behind. Data is a prerequisite for informed and successful public policy making as well as for normative action to close existing gaps. It also allows to highlight the contributions of older persons to society. It is needed to bear in mind the diversity of older persons and to change perceptions of later life, especially for it to be more than an inevitable stage of deficit and decline.

Older persons play multiple roles in society, including as caregivers, volunteers and community leaders. The important contribution of older people to the crisis response, including as health workers and caregivers is often overlooked and must be recognized.

Our efforts to protect older persons need to expand beyond these times of crises. The devastating social and economic impact of COVID-19 on older people needs to be addressed as a matter of priority. It is essential to ensure the income security of older persons, in particular older women. Universal old age pensions and adequate entitlement levels are needed to ensure inclusive long-term recovery.

Socioeconomic relief measures and social safety nets for older persons affected by economic hardship, need to be adopted immediately. It is crucial that older persons are included among the beneficiaries of economic recovery initiatives, livelihood and job rehabilitation programmes as well as other income-generating activities. We

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need to invest in care and support services to ensure that they are adapted to older people's individual needs, promote their well-being and maintain their autonomy and independence.

In the absence of a dedicated internationally-agreed legal framework, we must ensure that responses to this crisis specifically identify and prioritize older persons, who may be at particular risk of being left behind or excluded, during the pandemic response and recovery phases."

ENDS

**Ms. Claudia Mahler** (Austria) was appointed by the UN Human Rights Council as [\*Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons\*](#) in May 2020. She has been working for the German Institute for Human Rights as a senior researcher in the field of economic, social and cultural rights since 2010. She is also a visiting professor at the Alice Salomon Hochschule. From 2001 to 2009, Ms. Mahler conducted research at the Human Rights Centre of the University of Potsdam where her main fields were in human rights education, minority rights and the law of asylum. In 2000, she was appointed as Vice President of the Human Rights Commission for Tyrol and Vorarlberg. She has also worked as a lecturer in the field of human rights law and as a consultant to OHCHR in Geneva. From 1997-2001, she held the position of an assistant at the Leopold-Franzens-University Innsbruck, Austria in the field of Criminal Law and Criminal Procedures. Ms. Mahler received her doctoral degree in 2000.

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Read more on the [\*human rights of older persons\*](#)

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