

Submission to the Call for Inputs to the 2027 Thematic Report on Climate Change and the Rights of Women and Girls

AGE Platform Europe

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www.age-platform.eu

Key questions and types of input/comments sought

I. General: Climate Change as a Women's Rights and Equality Issue

1. Climate change has significant and disproportionate impacts on older women across Europe, particularly when it intersects with existing inequalities based on age, gender, disability, income, health status, ethnicity, migration status, and geographical location, including rural areas. Older women (OW) are not a homogeneous group. Gender inequalities accumulated throughout the life course, combined with ageism and other forms of discrimination, can increase their exposure to climate-related risks and reduce their capacity to prepare, adapt and recover.

Economic insecurity and energy poverty. OW are more likely to experience poverty and financial insecurity as a result of lifelong inequalities in employment, unpaid care responsibilities and pension entitlements. Rising energy and housing costs, alongside the increasing need to cool homes during heatwaves, can therefore disproportionately affect OW, particularly those living alone or in adequate housing. Limited resources can prevent them from accessing cooling, home renovations and other essential adaptation measures.

Social isolation and barriers to information and support. OW may have limited access to informal support networks as they may face isolation and loneliness since they are more likely to live alone as their life expectancy is longer than men's. Digital exclusion can also prevent them from accessing online warnings, emergency information and public support services. During heatwaves, floods, wildfires and other climate emergencies, these barriers can delay assistance, evacuation and access essential services.

2. Climate change and its consequences, including heatwaves, hurricanes, typhoons and floods, have particularly severe impacts on the rights of OW. They affect the rights to health and care, as OW may face heightened risks in these contexts and systematic responses are not always in place. Climate-related events can worsen pre-existing health conditions and increase care need. However, OW may not receive the additional healthcare and support they need, partly due to inadequate distribution of assistance. Second, climate change affects housing and adequate living conditions. It influences the way OW live – especially those living in poverty –

including how they heat and cool their homes, and can result in housing damage, displacement and significant repair costs following extreme weather events. OW experience the cumulative effects of gender-based discrimination throughout their lives. As a result, they often have lower incomes due to carrier interruptions and lower wages than men. This leads to more difficulties to following destruction or damage caused by extreme weather events. Consequently, they face barriers to enjoying their rights to adequate housing and decent living conditions.

3. The intersection of gender discrimination and discrimination based on older age is exacerbated by climate change. The roots of vulnerability in older age often stem from a lack of access to opportunities and the enjoyment of human rights during earlier stages of life. Therefore, OW are more likely than OM to experience economic insecurity due to career breaks and lower pay throughout their working lives. This limits their resources to adapt to climate change. Economic insecurity, combined with ageist and sexist perceptions that OW are no longer valuable contributors to society, creates barriers to accessing insurance, credit and loans impeding them from accessing essential goods and services, including food, water and sanitation, housing, medical supplies and health care.

This increased poverty risk also contributes to social exclusion. For instance, older women living in areas affected by climate-related disasters may be unable to relocate due to a lack of financial resources or may be abandoned by relatives who perceive them as a burden. The climate crisis exacerbates extreme heat exposure, disproportionately affecting the health of older women who already have specific health issues related to their gender and they have been particularly dire for isolated older women living in poorer neighbourhood. Moreover, the stereotypes that OW face, suggesting that their value to society is less than that of older men, become more pronounced with age, and OW are perceived as a burden on society. They are therefore subjected to further violence, abuse and neglect.

4. In the European Commission's Gender Equality Strategy 2026-2030, OW are mentioned in the context of preparedness and are identified as being disproportionately affected by crises and emergencies, notably in heatwaves and health emergencies. The Strategy commits to mainstreaming diversity and inclusion within Union Civil Protection Mechanisms training activities and operations, with a particular focus on promoting gender balance. This is a positive step towards

ensuring that crisis preparedness and emergency responses better take into account the specific needs of OW. However, beyond this recognition, OW remain largely absent from climate policies and programmes, despite facing heightened climate-related risks resulting from the cumulative effects of gender and age discrimination. While the Strategy provides a policy framework, it does not establish binding obligations or concrete measures to ensure that the rights and needs of OW are systematically integrated into climate action. Binding measures are needed to apply an intersectional perspective across climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and resilience-building policies, and to ensure the meaningful participation of OW in their design, implementation and monitoring.

II. Impacts of Climate Change on Women and Girls in Different Circumstances

5. OW can experience particularly severe climate-related impacts due to the intersection of ageism and other forms of discrimination. However, even within OW themselves, further disparities and inequalities exist.

OW living in poverty may be unable to afford adequate housing, cooling systems during heatwaves, energy-efficient home adaptations, insurance or recovery measures following climate-related disasters.

OW with disabilities or chronic health conditions face additional risks, particularly when they depend on medication, assistive devices, healthcare or long-term care services.

OW in rural and remote areas may face additional challenges due to limited access to healthcare, transport, emergency services and support networks.

OW living in residential care settings may be deprioritized in case of evacuation.

OW from ethnic minorities or migrant backgrounds, as well as older lesbian, bisexual and transgender women, may also encounter further barriers arising from discrimination and unequal access to information, including institutional barriers. An intersectional approach is therefore essential.

III. Women's and Girls' Rights in the Context of Climate Change

7. Climate change poses significant risks to OW’s physical and mental health, particularly through increasingly frequent and intense heatwaves, floods and other

extreme weather events. OW, especially those with chronic conditions, disabilities or care needs, may be more exposed to heat-related illness and complications, while disruptions to health services can affect access to medication, treatment and long-term care.

Climate change can significantly affect OW's everyday lives and mental wellbeing, exacerbating loneliness and social isolation. OW, who are more likely to live alone at advanced ages and may have more limited financial resources or support networks, can become particularly isolated during heatwaves, when they cannot leave their homes and thus maintain social connections. It can also reduce their opportunities to participate in society and their communities, reinforcing a sense of loss of belonging.

8. OW may face particular barriers in accessing adequate housing, energy-efficient solutions and the resources needed to adapt to climate change. Lifelong gender inequalities, including lower earnings and pensions, increase their risk of poverty and energy insecurity, limiting their ability to afford home improvements such as insulation, cooling systems or more energy-efficient heating.

Access to information and financial support for green transitions and home adaptations is also challenging. Funding schemes are often complex, digitally based and difficult to navigate, while age limits or restrictions on access to credit may further prevent OW from making necessary housing adaptations or moving to safer and more suitable accommodation. It is essential to ensure that OW, particularly those in vulnerable situations and at risk of exclusion, can access these schemes and participate in the green transition without facing discrimination.

IV. Women's and Girls' Agency and Procedural Rights in a Changing Climate

11. A particularly significant example of OW's leadership in climate action is the association KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz (Senior Women for Climate Protection Switzerland). They (around 2500 OW aged 64 and over) mobilised to demand stronger climate action, highlighting the disproportionate health impacts of climate change on OW, particularly during heatwaves. In 2020, they brought a case against Switzerland before the European Court of Human Rights, challenging Switzerland's insufficient climate action and tis consequences for their health and living conditions. On 9 April 2024, the Grand Chamber of the Court ruled their case that Switzerland is violating the human rights of the older women because the state is not taking the

necessary steps to combat global warming. The organisation European Grandparents for Climate is another great example as they are a coalition of national organisations of seniors citizens.

This example demonstrates that OW can be powerful advocates and agents of change, contributing for climate justice and the protection of human rights for all generations.

12. OW remain insufficiently recognised and represented in climate-related policymaking at European, national and local levels. They face both structural ageism and sexism, which can reinforce stereotypes portraying them exclusively as "vulnerable individuals in need of protection", rather than rights-holders, active citizens and contributors to climate change solutions. Such negative narratives can limit their opportunities to participate meaningfully in policy discussions and decision-making. Not only, is it a loss opportunity for them, but for society as a whole.

Older people are sometimes portrayed as responsible for climate change or as less concerned about tis consequences than younger generations. This risks deepening generational divides and overlooks the systemic causes of climate change. Climate action requires the participation and commitment of all generations, including OW.

The involvement of OW in decision-making is equally important in disaster prevention, emergency preparedness and planning. OW should be empowered not only as individuals, but also as community leaders who can mobilise action and contribute to discussions and initiatives aimed at addressing the negative impacts of climate change. They have valuable knowledge and experience that can benefit all of us. They should therefore be recognised as valuable contributors to their communities.

VII. International Cooperation, Gaps and Priorities

25. A major gap in current responses to climate change is the insufficient recognition of OW and the specific ways in which ageism and sexism intersect to affect their rights. Climate action must adopt an intersectional, life-course and human rights-based approach.

At international level, it is essential to strengthen the human rights framework protecting older people, including OW. The development of a UN Convention on the

Rights of Older Persons via the UN Intergovernmental Working Group on the Human Rights of Older Persons offers an important opportunity to address existing protection gaps and explicitly recognise the rights of OW, including in the context of climate change. OW and their representatives should be meaningfully involved in shaping this legally binding instrument.

About AGE Platform Europe

AGE Platform Europe is the largest European network of non-profit organisations of and for older people. We elevate older people's voice, bringing their experience and aspirations to the table to celebrate ageing and fight for equality at all ages.

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