



## AGE Platform Europe

168 avenue de Tervueren, box 2, B-1150 Brussels

Tel: +32 2 280 14 70

[www.age-platform.eu](http://www.age-platform.eu)



Ms. Michelle Bachelet  
United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights  
Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR)  
Palais des Nations  
CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

**6 April 2020**

Dear High Commissioner,

We are writing to on behalf of AGE Platform Europe (AGE), the largest EU network of organisations of and for older persons, to express our deepest concern regarding the protection of the human rights of older persons in the context of COVID-19, and to request that the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights makes it clear in its strategic guidance regarding the pandemic, and in the training and capacity building activities of its field offices, that the rights of older persons must be part of the OHCHR's priorities.

Because older persons are at higher risk of serious complications due to COVID-19, their particular health risks and support needs must be taken into account in policy planning and responses to the pandemic. Some older persons – alongside other people in vulnerable situations– will need additional support to access essential goods (e.g. food), services (e.g. social or health care), and to maintain human interaction. Whilst digital social networking is now being widely used to communicate during the current lockdown, many older people do not have equal access to digital media. Government and local support is required to help digitally excluded people have access to available technology. States must take additional social protection measures so that support reaches those who are at most risk of being disproportionately affected by the crisis. Failure to deliver essential support during the crisis amounts to a breach of human rights.

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 we have witnessed an unprecedented amount of ageist comments in the media. Hate speech must not be tolerated on whatever ground. Even though older persons are in a vulnerable situation during the pandemic, stigmatizing them as frail, passive or a burden is a breach of their inherent dignity. Measures taken as a response to COVID-19 must not undermine older people's autonomy, dignity and equal worth as human beings.



AGE work is co-funded by the **Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme** of the European Union.  
The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of AGE Platform Europe and cannot be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.

Older people in residential care facilities are at a higher risk for adverse outcome and for infection due to living in close proximity to others and underlying comorbidities. Reports of abandoned or even dead older persons in care institutions are alarming. People in institutions should have access to medical, social and palliative care on an equal basis with the general population. Personal protective equipment must be available for staff and residents in care homes. Better monitoring of the situation in nursing homes during the COVID-19 pandemic is highly necessary to prevent the risk of isolation, neglect and degrading treatment in institutions.

Everyone, without exception, has the right to life-saving interventions. Triage protocols must be developed to support decision-making of healthcare professionals on the basis of medical needs, scientific evidence and ethical principles. Whereas some older persons will have comorbidities that impact their chance of surviving intensive medical intervention, age alone should never be a criterion for medical triage. Protocols based on non-medical criteria such as age or disability, deny persons their right to health and life on an equal basis with others.

These are some of the key human rights concerns for older people that we have identified with help from our members across the EU. You may read our full report [here](#).

In the global response to COVID-19, it is essential that States and other actors protect the rights of older persons on an equal basis with others without exception and in line with international standards.

We urge therefore that the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights identifies older persons as a group at particular risk in the context of COVID-19 and includes them in its priorities in response to the pandemic.

We remain at your disposal to discuss the impact COVID-19 has on the human rights of older persons.

Sincerely,



Anne-Sophie Parent  
Secretary General  
AGE Platform Europe