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United Nations
Department for Economic and Social Affairs
Statistics Division

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AGE Platform Europe's Contribution to the First UN Word Data Forum:
There is no justification to continue to exclude some groups of older people from data collection!

Dear Sir or Madam,

Next week, the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs, the UN Statistical Commission and Statistics, South Africa, will organise the first UN World Data Forum in Cape Town.

As the largest network of older people's organisations in Europe, we would like to congratulate the organisers for this important conference. The discussions around the indicators underpinning the Sustainable Development Goals and other policy processes such as the Beijing Platform for Action show just how important statistics are, but also how political they are. They have the power to put urgent issues on the agenda, such as poverty and inequality, violence against women and health conditions. However, when phenomena are not properly covered by data and statistics, these become invisible and are often ignored.

On behalf of older people, we would like to highlight a certain number of issues concerning the impact of the world's population ageing on data collection, and that might lead to gaps and misrepresentations in public debates on older people; other indicators are selected but are not sufficiently taken into account in the formulation and implementation of policies.

Action on the following points is urgent, UN DESA has projected in 2015 that life expectancy of new-borns will increase from 72 years in 2015 to 83 years in 2100, the proportion of people over 65 years will increase from 8.3% in 2015 to 22.7% of the world population, the proportion of people over 75 from 3.3% to 12.7%.

Many states stop collecting data for people over 74, while ageing leads to a significant increase in the numbers of people beyond that age, and large differences exist between the living conditions of 65-74 year olds, the 75-84 year olds and those older than 85. **Statistics**

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should cover all these sub-groups of older people in order to better capture their socio-economic realities and enable policy-makers to address the ageing of the world's population more adequately. A breakdown in statistics by age groups among populations aged 65 years old and over would make visible the specific problems faced by the fastest growing population groups, i.e. the oldest generations in our societies, in particular the 'oldest old'. **Vulnerable groups, such as older persons living in institutions, older prisoners or older homeless people** are also groups that are often neglected or excluded in data collection.

For example, as pensions are often not properly indexed, their value erodes over time. In addition, the goods and services the oldest need for their health and long-term care exceed by far their pension income and the oldest old have a much higher risk to live in poverty or social exclusion than 'younger' pensioners, but as the oldest groups are not included in data collection, this information is missing and conclusions on older people are misleading. Action is needed to ensure that data collection include and better reflect the situation of very old persons in age groups covering the whole life spectrum. There is no justification to exclude the very old.

The gender dimension is equally important at old and very old age: in the European Union, the gap between men and women's pension income is almost at 40%. When combining this gap with the first point and women's higher life expectancy, as well as with the impact of national family law that might put women in a more difficult situation after divorce or widowhood, older women are at a higher risk of poverty than older men and their situation is comparable to that of men in very old age, especially given the higher risk of living alone that women face in older age. Action is needed to ensure that data collection include and reflect better the situation of very old women;

An illustration of a combined effect **of age and gender discrimination in data collection is the domain of clinical trials**. While older people take higher amounts of medication than younger ones, and additionally women take more medication than men, clinical trials are often conducted only on younger population groups. Both for mice and for humans, it is rare that medication is tested on females as well. This leads to a knowledge gap on the adequacy of treatments for older people and older women with possibly detrimental effects to their health.

The European Union collects an indicator on **healthy life expectancy**, measuring the number of years people can expect to live without major limitations due to ill health. Many pension reforms are aiming to bring retirement ages in line with overall life expectancy regardless of health status. They fail in turn to integrate a preventive health approach that should aim to increase the healthy life expectancy and employability. This is why AGE recommends to link statutory retirement age healthy life expectancy so that the focus will be put on prevention and ensuring everyone can grow and age in good health.

For older workers (55-64), unemployment rates are often relatively low; this is also due to the fact that many older people have given up on finding a job and are listed as 'inactive' rather than unemployed. Inactivity rates should be just as important in labour statistics, especially for this age group. Similarly, employment rates beyond statutory retirement age are often not even collected. Yet a significant and growing number of older people have to or wish to be able to work past retirement age but they are invisible in currently collected data. In addition, in a significant number of countries statutory retirement age has increased to 67 or even later. Yet the older workers group continues to refer to the 55-65. Action is needed to bring more coherence data collection for older workers which should include an age group for older workers before statutory retirement age and after.

We hope that these points will be taken up in your discussions in Cape Town and ultimately will find their way into the statistics used by the UN system and member states.

Best regards,

Anne-Sophie Parent
Secretary-General