

COVID-19 and Older People



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Equality and non-discrimination are underlying principles of international human rights law and of our Union. No crisis allows us to abandon these values.

On 26 March 2020, UN human rights experts declared that:

“Everyone, without exception, has the right to life-saving interventions. [...] The scarcity of resources [...] should never be a justification to discriminate against certain groups of patients.”¹

We must therefore, uphold the approach of UN experts and ensure that any decision to deprioritise or refuse treatment is firmly based on **objective ethical guidelines**. No-one should be deprioritised from receiving medical and other care solely on the basis of age. There’s **no place for ageism** in the EU.

The COVID-19 crisis has revealed discriminatory attitudes towards older persons, through questions regarding their life’s worth, and assertions around the supposed acceptability of the death of older persons and the alleviation of the economic burden posed by pension payments.

Certain older persons are among the hardest hit by COVID-19. Older persons in **residential care** facilities are in particular at risk of infection. Older people living alone are also at risk of isolation and lack of access to necessary services. The virus disproportionately affects older women who constitute a majority of the oldest population group.

Older persons who rely on **social services** such as the delivery of meals or help with daily care are at risk where services have shrunk or are no longer provided.

The European Commission is committed to ensure that the rights of all, including older Europeans, are respected throughout this crisis and that **no one is left behind**. This includes working to actively support Member States in their COVID-19 response by triggering economic, social and mobility measures at EU level.

¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25746>