

15 June 2020

A statement on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day by the Steering Group of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP)

‘A new UN convention is essential to fully protect everyone’s right to freedom from violence, abuse and neglect in old age’

‘Older people are now facing even higher levels of violence, abuse and neglect in the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation demands urgent interventions now as well as the development of a dedicated international human rights instrument to prevent such violations from recurring in the future.’

On World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, we acknowledge and thank GAROP members in 80 countries around the world for their untiring efforts to raise awareness, prevent, and tackle all types of ongoing elder abuse. All individuals everywhere have the right to live free from violence, abuse and neglect, including older people. However, in 2017 elder abuse remained widespread globally with 1 in 6 older people subjected to abuseⁱ. The COVID-19 pandemic is exacerbating all types of abuse, including physical, emotional, financial, and sexual, as well as neglect, in a number of ways.

Older people who are in quarantine or lockdown with family members or caregivers face higher risks of violence, abuse, and neglect. Older women who depend on family members for their essential needs and care are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse. The alarmingly cruel and ageist narratives that we have observed in relation to this crisis has amplified these risks facing older people by perpetuating negative stereotypes and harmful societal attitudes and behaviours.

The spread of COVID-19 in care homes and other institutions is taking a devastating toll on older people’s lives. Nena Georgantzi, GAROP Deputy Chair and Human Rights Coordinator at AGE Platform Europe, said *‘In recent weeks we have seen some very distressing reports of neglect and abandonment of older people in care institutions in European countries. This pandemic has exposed deeply rooted structural problems in long term care systems that must be addressed in order to better protect human rights in such crises.’*

In a joint statement issued on 11th May, 146 UN Member States also expressed deep concern about the higher risks of violence, abuse and neglect facing older people in lockdown and care institutions and recognised the need to strengthen measures to protect older peopleⁱⁱ. Member States now have an opportunity to develop an international legal instrument to strengthen the protection of the rights of older people and place renewed urgency on the work of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing in this regard.

‘GAROP believes that a new UN convention must include binding legal standards on the right to freedom from all forms of violence, abuse and neglect, which would apply in both public and private settings and to public and private actors. This would help to provide the strengthened protection for older people’s human rights that Member States have agreed is necessary’ said Nena Georgantzi.

A convention would have a direct impact on older people’s lives. It would result in greater recognition of violence, abuse and neglect in all settings. It would trigger services to monitor, evaluate and respond to this violence, with legislation adopted to ensure investigation and prosecution. More financial resources would be allocated to policy implementation and older people would have access to information they need to seek support.

About GAROP

The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP) is a network of over 370 civil society organisations from 80 countries working together so that all older people can live free from discrimination and are able to fully enjoy their rights. We believe a UN convention on the rights of older persons is essential for older people to fully enjoy their rights.

ⁱ https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_covid-19_and_older_persons_1_may_2020.pdf

ⁱⁱ https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/wp-content/uploads/sites/24/2020/05/ENG_final_-with-countries.pdf