

The NGO Sub-Committee on Older Women of the NGO/CSW/NY applauds the U.N. CSW 2008 for focusing on the vital issue of financing for women's empowerment and gender equity. Working with the text adopted by the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Recommendation 1796 (2007) "The situation of elderly persons in Europe"

(<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta07/EREC1796.htm>), we hereby urge the support of the following material.

We are keenly aware that the world's population is rapidly ageing. However, old age, particularly ageing in women, must be regarded not as an illness but as a highly complex progressive process requiring a new approach to the development and financing of effective social policies for optimal human development. Elderly female persons possess an extremely diverse range of experience, skills, needs and concerns and constitute a new source of richness on account of their private and professional experience.

Unfortunately, elderly persons still too often encounter discrimination, older women doubly so, whether in their daily lives or in a professional context. This discrimination concerns their employment, their access to health care, education and financial services and their involvement in political decision making. In this context, extremely rapid action is needed to end, *inter alia*, the scandalous situations plaguing elderly women suffering from social exclusion and having to live in unacceptable conditions incompatible with the fundamental principles governing member states. Increased life expectancy must be a blessing for everyone. To achieve this goal, the double-edged sword of discrimination hanging over elderly women's lives must be addressed with a gender perspective sharply in focus for effective, just and sustainable, empowering development.

We point out that the majority of elderly persons in many member states are women, who form a particularly vulnerable group which is discriminated against in many ways. Furthermore, the insecurity of elderly women is exacerbated by inadequate social support and their low income. It can also be noted that it is frequently women who have the responsibility of caring for elderly persons, obliging them to stop working with all the ensuing consequences for their income level and future pension.

Optimal development for older women would mean getting "legalized" at birth, so if by any chance, there was education or a job available, she could get it. Perhaps even more important in terms of development, is to offer stipends for her care of the children and family members which too, can be done only when they are legalized. The older woman is truly no one without these documents and has no access to her basic human rights.

There is a pressing need to change approaches and stereotypes, particularly related to women's ageing and to adjust financing social policies accordingly, notably with regard to the human right to a legally documented "identity". Increased life expectancy also has significant implications for social protection systems, another basic human right that cannot be implemented when people are deprived of legal documentation of their very existence. The older women who have no legal "identity documentation" are truly the nameless older women with no rights whatsoever, as they have no means to establish their identity. They are the countless women displaced by conflict, who lack the resources to access offices where they could try to establish their identity, often from areas where there is no access to public offices. Identity documentation is also denied to many females at birth where traditionally, their lives are deemed of no value compared with a male infant. With no legally recognized and documented identity, the inherent rights of citizenship are thus systemically non-existent. Discrimination and violence against women is thus further perpetuated with older women rendered exceptionally vulnerable to these human rights violations.

While states have the obligation to a legally recognized identity under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (10 December, 1948) Article 15 #1. Everyone has the right to a nationality and # 2. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of their nationality nor denied the right to change their nationality There are many other International and National Instruments that pertain to the rights of people to an identity; for example, the United Nations Conventions relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and on the Reduction of Statelessness.

The issue is the mobilization of the will of the states to address the issues of the stateless people by complying with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other legal instruments. We, as NGO's, must urge the Governments to address this tragic and wide spread tragedy which affects especially the most vulnerable of all people, namely the older women. We must urge collaborative efforts between state parties to resolve political and other territorial issues in order to restore the human rights to the nameless older women.

The NGO Sub-Committee on Older Women of the NGO/CSW/NY, as did the Council of Europe, proposes greater inter-generational co-operation, aimed at establishing forums for gender-sensitive dialogue between the generations, governments and civil society, and all of the private and the business stakeholders in human development. Elderly women should have access to "the gender-specific physical and mental health care and services necessitated by their state", we deplore the fact that in some countries elderly persons may be denied treatment because of its high cost- particularly aged women, who are traditionally deemed less deserving of care by discriminatory beliefs and norms.

In this connection, we underline the need for appropriate legislation or collective agreements, not least in respect of dependent elderly women living in institutions or retirement homes. Therefore, "Older persons, especially women, should have the opportunity to work for as long as they wish and are able to, in equal paying and valued, satisfying and productive work".

We also draw attention to the particular situation of elderly migrants and elderly disabled people, again mostly female. Elderly women migrants face a particular risk of double or even triple discrimination and requires gender-specific financing policies and culturally sensitive services, as outlined in COE Recommendation 1619 (2003) on rights of elderly migrants. Moreover, governments should recognize the significant contribution that elderly women migrants have made to economic growth in the past and the important role they can still play in helping new generations of migrants to integrate in the host country.

Regarding social protection systems, we also recommend member states to take the consequences of demographic trends into account in developing and financing their social and economic policies. We wish to invite the social partners and the relevant international organizations to hold a debate on gender-sensitive pension reform; specifically, the necessary steps to ensure the gender equitable funding and long-term viability of social protection systems (pension systems, health care and other social benefits) so as to avoid the risk of economic dependency;

Needed too, is the review of gender-relevant social support programs for the female elderly; and to develop, sign and ratify multilateral social security agreements, such as the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78);

Regarding employment of elderly women and their participation in local affairs: we must develop gender-equitable policies for the employment of elderly persons, seeking to keep younger elderly persons in jobs so that they remain in the working population. Implementation of new patterns of working time is also urged, so as to be able to derive maximum benefit from elderly women's professional skills and knowledge.

Local authorities must be encouraged to develop projects aimed at involving elderly females in gender-equitable decision making and reinforcing inter-generational solidarity. To this effect, we must create forums for exchanges between the generations of women and girls experience and skills in areas such as education, art, history, traditions, crafts, etc. and voluntary work by elderly women persons should be fostered.

Regarding assistance and support for families, we strongly urge all parties to strengthen assistance and support measures for families by introducing a system of special allowances, in particular for those caring for the elderly, traditionally falling almost exclusively to women, and thereby promote greater family involvement when elderly people encounter health problems.

We need to encourage supplementary and specific allowances in the case of loss of autonomy; to expand support facilities in the form of short-stay institutions for the elderly; and draw up model rules on minimum standards for elderly persons in institutional care.

Regarding financing of and access to physical and mental health care, we seek to improve health-care systems and make them accessible to all elderly persons, ensuring they receive appropriate medical and psychosocial care, with specific attention to their nutritional needs. We urge the establishment of gender-sensitive preventive physical and mental health-care systems for elderly persons.

We call for the establishment of decent palliative and end-of-life care services for elderly persons and provide special training for individuals caring for elderly persons at home, the majority of which are women, and for their appropriate medical practitioners.

Existing structures for the provision of health care and assistance to the elderly should be adapted in order to make them culturally appropriate to the needs of elderly migrants. Regarding vulnerable groups; especially older women victimized by double discrimination, there is a clear need to launch a process of reflection on the consequences arising from the migration of elderly persons and to establish a special support program for ageing immigrants, women and people with disabilities. Specially adapted language courses and other activities fostering inclusion and participation of all elderly migrants should be provided, as well as support of non-governmental organizations in their activities and assistance programs. Gender-relevant practical information must be made accessible to all elderly migrants about receiving social welfare, pensions and health care in the host country and the country of origin, via public institutions, community centers, immigrant organizations, cultural centers and religious institutions; so that all elderly migrants can facilitate links between their countries of origin.

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