

NGO statement on International Protection and Solutions

Dear Chair,

Through this collective statement, NGOs express their support to the ExCom Conclusions Process and emphasize the importance of including older forcibly displaced people alongside other potentially at-risk groups in any ExCom Conclusion.

Population ageing is a significant achievement of the modern age. By 2050, it is predicted that 20 percent of people will be over 60 years old. However, 80 per cent of them will be living in lower-income countries and countries affected by conflict or the climate emergency likely to generate important humanitarian needs.

There is much to be done to ensure the inclusion of older people and other vulnerable groups in responses to humanitarian crises. The [Covid-19 pandemic](#) and the [war in Ukraine](#) have demonstrated that older people continue to be overlooked, as they faced the devastating impacts of ageism and heightened protection risks such as discrimination, physical harm and psychological distress. There is an urgent need for the international protection system to adapt and become more inclusive as it responds to the evolving nature of displacement, particularly as demographics shift towards an ageing population.

The UNHCR document "[Working with Older Persons in Forced Displacement](#)" provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by older people in displacement situations. However, the application of the guidance has not been sufficient, and older people often remain invisible and excluded.

While drawing the attention of the Standing Committee Members, UNHCR and its partners to specific considerations for protection of older people in displacement settings, it is crucial to acknowledge their intersecting identities, including their age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, economic activity, and health status. UNHCR's [Policy on Age, Gender and Diversity](#) emphasises the importance of taking a comprehensive and inclusive approach and it is critical that UNHCR and partner staff continue to be sensitised to the policy.

Besides being at risk of losing or lacking identity documents and thus being more vulnerable to detention, refoulement, and other human rights violations, older peoples' health and care needs and social or economic status can make it difficult for them to prepare for and adjust to crises. Many older people are left without support networks, leading to isolation, neglect, and lack of assistance.

Despite these challenges, older people make valuable contributions when adequately supported, playing important roles such as caregivers for children or other adults, community leaders, advocates, sources of guidance and support, protectors, and guardians of cultural heritage, to name a few.

Older women are disproportionately poor, have less access than older men to housing, land and property rights, and less access to pension and affordable healthcare. Furthermore, most services for women are targeted for those of reproductive age and/or adolescence and don't respond to specific health needs of older women.

Forty-six percent of older people experience a disability, with women experiencing a greater prevalence of disability. Older women and older people with disabilities are more exposed to violence before and during displacement and experience heightened risk of violence, exploitation, abuse, and neglect and often encounter multiple and intersecting barriers to accessing essential services, lack accessible information, and face greater psychological impacts. These issues are all compounded by ageism and ableism from humanitarian responders. UNHCR'S [Approach to Persons With Disabilities in](#)

[Displacement](#) provides crucial guidance for responding actors and should be implemented in all settings.

The agency of older people is central to their dignity and self-worth. Including their voices in decision-making processes can make responses more effective. In addition, their leadership roles, and understanding of community dynamics can increase trust and legitimacy and improve the success and sustainability of humanitarian programmes. We therefore urge UNHCR and its partners to promote and support the engagement, participation, empowerment, and autonomy of older people and all at-risk groups, and incorporate their perspectives into programme design, implementation and monitoring and in policy-making, including during the Global Refugee Forum and the development of pledges.

The exclusion of older people from data collection, needs assessments and registration processes leads to a lack of understanding of the specific barriers they face and potentially limits their access to humanitarian assistance and their right to participate in decision making that affects them. We therefore urge UNHCR to require the collection, analysis, use and reporting of age, gender and disability disaggregated data in all programmes. Any sharing of such data must be in line with the principle of data minimisation and follow the recently updated IASC guidelines on data sharing. We urge Member States to support UNHCR in its engagement with specific governments on this issue.

Advocating for conditions that are conducive to voluntary return is critical for the protection of older refugees and asylum seekers. We urge UNHCR to ensure that their rights and well-being are considered when engaging with countries of origin and working to create an enabling environment for safe and dignified return. During any repatriation process, their rights must be upheld, and specific and tailored assistance should be provided to support repatriation.

The socioeconomic integration of displaced older people in host countries implies ensuring that they have equal access to services through their inclusion in national policies and programmes related to healthcare, housing, and social assistance. We encourage UNHCR to work with local authorities, community leaders, and relevant organizations to implement programmes that enhance the capacity of and empower displaced older people, including initiatives like income-generating projects and community-based healthcare programs.

Lastly, facilitating resettlement and complementary pathways such as family reunification, private sponsorship, and labour mobility schemes can be an important solution for displaced older people. We encourage UNHCR to collaborate with resettlement countries to prioritise the admission of older people and ensure their specific needs are considered when providing access to services including healthcare, and housing.

The rights and needs of older people and other at-risk groups must be prioritised in any response to displacement. It is critical that our sector adapts to ensure that the provision of protection and assistance is inclusive and tailored to the needs of this diverse group, both now and in the future. We urge UNHCR, donor countries, and other stakeholders to ensure that resources provided to humanitarian crisis prioritise targeted services that meet the specific needs of older people, and mainstream older people into general assistance programmes.

We need a system that empowers and safeguards the wellbeing of older people so that no one is left behind.

Thank you.