

THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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VIDEO MESSAGE TO LAUNCH POLICY BRIEF ON OLDER PERSONS

New York, 1 May 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic is causing untold fear and suffering for older people across the world.

The fatality rate for older people is higher overall, and for those over 80, it is five times the global average.

Beyond its immediate health impact, the pandemic is putting older people at greater risk of poverty, discrimination and isolation. It is likely to have a particularly devastating impact on older people in developing countries.

As an older person myself, with responsibility for an even older mother, I am deeply concerned about the pandemic on a personal level, and about its effects on our communities and societies.

Today we are launching a policy brief that provides analysis and recommendations to address these challenges. Our response to COVID-19 must respect the rights and dignity of older people.

There are four main messages.

First, no person, young or old, is expendable. Older people have the same rights to life and health as everyone else.

Difficult decisions around life-saving medical care must respect the human rights and dignity of all.

Second, while physical distancing is crucial, let's not forget we are one community and we all belong to each other. We need improved social support and smarter efforts to reach older people through digital technology.

That is vital to older people who may face great suffering and isolation under lockdowns and other restrictions.

Third, all social, economic and humanitarian responses must take the needs of older people fully into account, from universal health coverage to social protection, decent work and pensions.

The majority of older people are women, who are more likely to enter this period of their lives in poverty and without access to healthcare. Policies must be targeted at meeting their needs.

And fourth, let's not treat older people as invisible or powerless.

Many older people depend on an income and are fully engaged in work, in family life, in teaching and learning, and in looking after others. Their voices and leadership count.

To get through this pandemic together, we need a surge in global and national solidarity and the contributions of all members of society, including older people.

As we look to recover better, we will need ambition and vision to build more inclusive, sustainable and age-friendly societies that are fit for the future.