

**United Nations Open-ended Working Group on Ageing  
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**Portuguese NHRI oral contribution on Protection of Human Rights of Older Persons**

Thank you Madam Chair for giving me the floor, and thank you for the invitation for the National Human Rights Institutions to be present at this meeting.

Portugal is one of the most aged countries in Europe.

The Portuguese Ombudsman runs 3 hotlines, aimed at receiving complaints from different categories of persons: the hotline for children, the hotline for persons with disabilities and, finally, the hotline for older persons. The latter receives three more calls than the others. In 2017, it has received 2.465 calls, whereas the hotline for children has received 502 calls and the hotline for persons with disabilities 642 calls. The major part of the complaints are related to lack or insufficiency of social care services, access to health, and pensions. However, in the past year, we have registered 124 complaints of abuse (encompassing physical and verbal abuse) and 95 of neglect, 52 of financial abuse, 83 of autonomy privation and 12 cases of abandonment (in hospitals, for example). Isolation, mostly in rural areas and permeability to bigotry and assault are also frequently reported.

In order to fight against some of these problems, the Portuguese Government has already enacted some good practises. Special mention must be made to some preventive activities, aimed at responding to violence, abuse, fraud and isolation. One of such measures is lead by national republican guard, which promotes visits to isolated older persons, guaranteeing that their basic needs are being met.

But there is a need to fight against other types of complaints, such as neglect, abuse and abandonment. We believe that prevention of these phenomena may be addressed not only through strengthening protection of autonomy and dignity of older persons but also by providing more support to informal care givers.

Informal care givers are frequently agents of abuse. Portuguese studies demonstrate that root causes of abuse are not only poverty, but also lack of support to informal caregivers, the majority of whom are family members with full-time jobs and dependent children. Therefore, care is still dependent on family-members who overwhelmed with heavy work schedules, career deman-



ding, and guardianship of children. In this context, working women are normally more affected. On other contexts, family members who face unemployment may be dependent on income and pensions received by older persons. These contexts may lead to enhanced risks of violence and abuse.

In order to respond to these risks, any effort to prevent Human Rights abuses must address not only empowerment of older persons and respect for their dignity and autonomy, but also to prevention of abuse on family environment. In this context, measures aimed at reconciliation of work with family life are paramount, and family life must correspond to a broader concept, as encompassing not only children but also older family members. Moreover, informal carers, such as family members, must receive more support, not only financially, when needed, but also technical support, expertise and counseling.

A comprehensive support to human rights and to empowerment of older persons calls for commitments on effective protection of social rights. Also, States need to rethink their budgetary priorities. When poverty and older age meet, vulnerability to violence and abuse are higher. Therefore, work must be done to prevent older persons from living in contexts of economic deprivation.

Thank you

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