**Expert Group Meeting**

**Supporting autonomy and independence of older persons with disabilities**

25-26 October 2017, UNHQ, New York

**Concept note**

1. **Introduction**

The UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, Ms. Catalina Devandas-Aguilar and the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Ms. Rosa Kornfeld-Matte are hosting an **Expert meeting on supporting autonomy and independence of older persons with disabilities**, with the support of the Government of Finland. The meeting will take place in New York on 25 October (all day) and 26 October 2017 (half day) at the United Nations Headquarters.

Ms. Catalina Devandas-Aguilar (Costa Rica) took office as the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on 1 December 2014, following Human Rights Council resolutions 26/20 and 35/6. The Special Rapporteur has underscored in her past thematic reports the importance of ensuring a life cycle approach in all interventions related to persons with disabilities, stressing particularly the significant additional barriers that older persons with disabilities encounter in exercising their rights and accessing support services.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Ms. Rosa Kornfeld-Matte (Chile) took office as the first UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons on 2 June 2014, following Human Rights Council resolution 24/25. The Independent Expert has stressed in her past thematic reports the need to integrate a disability perspective in her work and recognized the potential of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to protect the rights of older persons with disabilities.[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. **Context**

Approximately one billion people, or 15% of the world’s population, are persons with disabilities.[[3]](#footnote-3) A significant number of them, particularly in high-income countries, are older persons.[[4]](#footnote-4) This overrepresentation of older persons among those with disabilities reflects the sustained ageing of the global population, as well as the increased life expectancy of persons with disabilities. While many may not self-identify as persons with disabilities despite experiencing significant difficulties in functioning and participating, the increasing number of older persons poses a significant challenge to States to ensure the full exercise of their human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with others.

Older persons with disabilities face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, particularly in exercising autonomy and independence. For example, they are at heightened risk of having their legal capacity restricted or denied, of experiencing involuntary treatment, or being institutionalized. The risk of institutionalization is particularly high among older women with disabilities, and it increases with age.[[5]](#footnote-5) These discriminatory practices lead to the loss of control over their lives and social isolation, exposing older persons with disabilities to high levels of violence, abuse and neglect.

Older persons with disabilities encounter many barriers in exercising autonomy, due to the absence of appropriate support services and assistive technologies. The latter include, among others, assistive devices, mobility aids, personal assistance, support in decision-making, and living arrangement services. Despite the rising demand for these services, evidence indicates that the majority of older persons with disabilities have limited access to support services and have to rely on informal networks, primarily their families.[[6]](#footnote-6) Moreover, when services exist, they often do not respect the individual autonomy and independence of older persons with disabilities, nor they promote their full and effective participation and inclusion in society.

Against this background, the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities has the potential to ensure access to community-based support services and arrangements for older persons with disabilities, including assistive devices and technologies. Furthermore, the Convention challenges widespread practices such as substituted decision-making, involuntary treatment and institutionalization, calling for a human rights-based approach in all the responses to address the rights of older persons with disabilities. The Inter-American Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons and - to some extent – the draft Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa already incorporate these innovations.

The Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing, established by the General Assembly resolution 65/182, which is currently considering the adoption of a comprehensive and integral international instrument to promote and protect the rights of older persons, has also prioritized autonomy and independence of older persons as a priority cluster for their discussions.[[7]](#footnote-7)

1. **Objective**

The main objective of this Expert Group Meeting is to discuss the intersectionality between disability and ageing in the exercise of autonomy and independence, and to explore the potential of international and regional human rights instruments, in particular the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to ensure their access to accessible, appropriate and affordable community-based support services.

The specific objectives of this meeting are:

1. Explore the intersections between ageing, disability and support;
2. Identify progress, gaps and challenges in the implementation of existing international and regional human rights frameworks in relation to the autonomy and independence of older persons with disabilities;
3. Identify progress, gaps and challenges in the provision of support services and assistive technologies for older persons with disabilities;
4. Document practices to support the autonomy and independence of older persons with disabilities;
5. Strengthen the collaboration between the community of older persons and the community of persons with disabilities.

The agenda of the meeting will be provided at a later stage to participants who confirm their participation.

1. **Methodology**

Discussions will focus around specific thematic sessions, covering the following issues:

* Ageing and disability: multiple discrimination and intersectionality
* Autonomy and legal capacity
* Living independently in the community
* Ensuring access to support
* Assistive devices and technologies

One or more facilitators will moderate the discussions throughout the meeting. Selected experts may be asked to prepare short interventions to introduce key issues under certain thematic areas, and will be informed separately.

The language of the meeting is English, with simultaneous interpretation to/from Spanish. Accessibility arrangements will be provided upon request.

1. **Participants**

Participation to this meeting is by invitation only. There will be approximately 20-25 experts from UN entities, organizations of persons with disabilities, organizations of older persons, civil society, States and academia, with a variety of expertise, perspectives, and regional representation.

**VI. Venue**

The meeting will take place from 25 October (10h00-13.00 and 15h00-18h00) to 26 October 2017 (10h00-13.00) at the United Nations Headquarters, 1 UN Plaza, 10017 New York. The meeting room number will be provided at a later stage.

1. A/70/297, paras. 34-37; A/HRC/31/62, paras. 13, 57, 60; A/71/314, paras. 30, 59; A/HRC/34/58, paras. 17, 41, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A/HRC/27/46, paras. 10, 25; A/HRC/30/43, paras. 19-21, 38, 50, 99; A/HRC/33/44, paras. 53, 113, 114, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. World Health Organization (WHO) and World Bank, World Report on Disability 2011, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid, p. 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Luppa, M., Luck, T., Weyerer, S., König, H., & Riedel-Heller, S. (2009), *Gender differences in predictors of nursing home placement in the elderly: A systematic review*, International Psychogeriatric, 21(6), pp. 1015-1025. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. World Health Organization, World Report on Ageing and Health (2015), pp. 127-149. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A/AC.278/2016/2, para. 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)