

Policy Brief:
**The Impact of
COVID-19 on
older persons**

MAY 2020

SOLIDARITY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT IN ACTION

There have been encouraging community-level responses from informal and formal networks of volunteers in many countries affected by COVID-19, showing solidarity and support to ensure the physical and mental well-being of older persons.

- In Mumbai, India, a bottom-up community aid approach has been set up by the "WE Group - Mission Feed Hungry - Mira Bhayandar" which has been distributing 15 days worth of rations to underprivileged persons since 20 March through an informal group of volunteers.
- In Queensland, Australia, a grassroots, community group of 100 older persons called Seniors Creating Change sings in public places and long-term care facilities to raise awareness of the root causes of ageism and social isolation. They also conduct health and well-being checks, sharing news and community

information, while working to break-down ageist stereotypes and social isolation.

- In Rwanda, in coordination with the Government, community health workers are monitoring the health and social conditions of older persons and training them on social distancing and other necessary measures to avoid infection and stay healthy.
- In Ireland, postal workers have been instructed to connect isolated people with specific needs, such as through support for grocery shopping.
- In Chile, the First Lady launched the "Major Protection" plan that includes a set of measures to reinforce the care for adults over 80 years of age who must remain at home as a protection measure.
- In Spain, the City Council of Castelló de la Plana is providing training for older people through a virtual training programme.

Impact of the digital divide: For many, the Internet and other digital technologies have become a window to the world during the lockdown, enabling us to connect with family, friends and the community. However, many older persons have limited access to digital technologies and lack necessary skills to fully exploit them. While about one-half of the world's population has Internet access, older persons remain disproportionately offline.²⁴ In the United

Kingdom, for example, 4.2 million people 65 and older have never used the Internet.²⁵ Older persons in less developed countries are least likely to have access to digital technologies.²⁶ Those living in institutions might also struggle to receive the necessary support to connect with their loved ones. Barriers that older persons face related to literacy and language, including visual and hearing impairments, may be amplified during the crisis.

† <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027991>; <https://news.itu.int/itu-statistics-leaving-no-one-offline/>;
In the OECD, only half (49.8 %) among older persons aged 65-74 were using Internet, compared to nearly all (95.9%) young people aged 16-24;
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888933274795>

‡ https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/active-communities/rb_july16_older_people_and_internet_use_stats.pdf

§ <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2016/02/22/internet-access-growing-worldwide-but-remains-higher-in-advanced-economies/>