



Fédération Internationale des Associations de Personnes Âgées
ONG dotée du statut consultatif auprès de l'ONU, du statut participatif à l'OMS, à l'UNESCO et à la Conférence des ONG du Conseil de l'Europe • Fondateur et Administrateur de l'Association AGE • Association reconnue comme Etablissement d'Utilité Publique selon Décret du 6 Décembre 2006

• 163 rue Charenton Paris – 75012 PARIS – France
• +33 (0) 176702676
www.fiapa.net • info@fiapa.net

For the attention of the
56th Session of the Commission for
Social Development (CSocD56) - UN

Paris, 8 November 2017

GERONTOLOGICAL EMERGENCY SERVICES: A GLOBAL PRIORITY

In 2006 the International Federation of Associations of Older People (*La Fédération Internationale des Associations de Personnes Âgées, FIAPA*) realised that it was essential to create a function dedicated to responding to international emergencies affecting older people, such as acts of war, epidemics, earthquakes and other natural disasters.

Since then the emergency response team we created has intervened to help victims of earthquakes in the mountainous region of Abruzzi, Italy (6 April 2009) and in Nepal (25 April 2015), of terrorist attacks in France - in Nice (14 July 2016) and in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray (26 July 2016) - and of cyclones in the Caribbean (2017).

Feedback from this team, and from our member associations across the world, is that older people, and the most vulnerable older people in particular, suffer directly or indirectly more than the rest of the population from the consequences of epidemics, natural disasters and acts of war. Their situation is made even worse when local gerontology services are lacking.

Little account is typically taken of this problem in the various schemes for the provision of gerontology services and training programmes. In times of crisis older people are often the most affected but the least supported. Priority is often given to younger people, leaving the elderly to their fate – frequently disoriented, injured, exhausted or even perishing. Without family or friends, shelter or sustenance, survivors are worse off than ever before, and their social and economic inclusion is definitively compromised.

In addition, no attention is given to the management of the post-traumatic stress disorder and other problems experienced by the most elderly in the aftermath of disaster, despite the increase in shock, depression and social exclusion which then results.

Given the increase in the frequency of gerontological emergencies, FIAPA is now making a formal appeal to the ECOSOC General Assembly that the international community should take steps to realise in an effective way the objectives of the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, responding in horizontal fashion to the main needs which arise in gerontological emergencies: notably the introduction of training programmes specifically tailored to the management of these emergencies, and the prevention of psychological trauma.

An important component of the programmes that we are advocating should relate to the management of post-traumatic stress disorder, which can affect providers of emergency care no less than its recipients.

Convinced of the need for specific programmes of this kind, FIAPA is calling, like the Sendia Framework, for older and disabled people to contribute as stakeholders to the development of international gerontological emergency services. We should value their knowledge, experience, resilience and ability to help one another, take account of their views on the measures to be taken, and give them the opportunity to be involved in planning decisions about emergency response programmes which affect them.

On 9 and 10 October 2017 FIAPA held an inter-regional seminar in Martinique, in collaboration with The Martinique Association for Older People (*L'Association Martiniquaise pour l'Age d'Or, AMDOR*), the municipality of Schoelcher and the Schoelcher Community Welfare Association (*Centre Communal d'Action Sociale*), which was entitled "The Rights of Older People, the Fight against Abuse and Regional Cooperation".

The circumstances were most unusual in that the Caribbean had just been ravaged by a series of hurricanes. Representatives of one of the few care homes for older people which exist in Dominica made a special trip to Martinique to bring to our attention the damage sustained by the fabric of the home, and the great difficulties being experienced by the residents and care staff.

Out of this meeting came the "Schoelcher Appeal" documenting a strategic agreement to cooperate in response to disasters which was reached between all the stakeholders (associations, institutions and older people).

It was also decided (1) to send an evaluation team to the area to conduct an analysis of the needs of older people in order to determine the nature of the aid required in the months to follow and (2) to create an emergency gerontology service to track emergencies resulting from epidemics, severe weather events and other natural disasters - taking preventative action, keeping people informed and providing treatment. This will serve to further develop pan-Caribbean healthcare and welfare cooperation and initiatives.

In the light of its experience on the ground FIAPA is also keen to progress the creation of a specialist service to respond to the needs of the smallest islands in view of their unique characteristics and vulnerabilities.

Climate change means that more areas are now susceptible to natural disaster, and the people who live in these areas need to be ready. Particularly vulnerable are individuals who are isolated, dependent on others, or with limited mobility. We therefore have to give our older people the means to prepare themselves and the means to ask – or better still, to insist – that local partners and decisions makers do integrate them in horizontal fashion in all relevant programmes. Account must be taken in this way of the specific needs of vulnerable older people in the preparation of evacuation plans, of public warning systems, of welfare protection procedures and of public awareness and prevention campaigns.

ECOSOC is committed to the promotion of sustainable development and the eradication of poverty in all its forms. It seems to us that achievement of this objective entails taking account of the ageing of the global population and of the increase in the number of

catastrophic disasters – be they manmade or natural – which further isolate and impoverish older people. We need prevention, we need education and we need action.

FIAPA urges the ECOSOC General Assembly of February 2018 to put in place with the minimum of delay an emergency gerontology service which reflects best practice and experience worldwide.
