

# More at risk

## *How older people are excluded in humanitarian data*

### About the study

The objective of the study, commissioned by HelpAge International, was to evaluate existing policies and practices concerning the inclusion of data about older people in terms of disaster preparedness and humanitarian response. The methods used were a review of existing documents and a survey. The countries covered were Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. Research focussed on five recent disasters, namely the 2008 Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar, the 2010 floods in Pakistan, the 2010 Merapi Eruption in Indonesia, the 2013 Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines and the 2015 Gorkha Earthquake in Nepal. Research was conducted in 2018.

The full report is available at <http://ageingasia.org/how-older-people-are-excluded-in-humanitarian-data>



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When disaster strikes, older people are more at risk than other age groups. Consider these statistics:

## 75%

of those who died during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were aged 60 or over (who constituted only 16% of the local population)



## 56%

of those who died during the Japanese Tsunami in 2011 were aged 65 or over (who constituted only 23% of the local population)



## 38%

of fatalities in Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 were people aged over 60 (who constituted only 7% of the local population)



## 29%

of those who died in the Nepal earthquake in 2015 were aged over 60 (who constituted only 8.1% of the local population)

The Disaster Risk and Age Index projects an increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, and estimates a global population of 2 billion older people by 2050. This suggests that older people will suffer disproportionately in any future disasters. Yet despite a universal commitment to 'leave no one behind', older people are still left behind when disasters occur, for several reasons. One reason is that older people are still often seen as victims rather than as active participants in their recovery, and another is that they are invisible in terms of data concerning preparedness for and response to disasters. Recent research conducted by HelpAge provides evidence of how older people are excluded in data collection, either intentionally or unintentionally.

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International

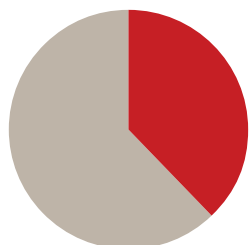
## Highlights of the study

Despite the fact that several international humanitarian organisations, including the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) and HelpAge International, have emphasised the importance of collecting age-inclusive data, the research found that only one in five organisations collected age- and sex-disaggregated data in all their disaster preparedness initiatives. Also, only one in three agencies collected age-inclusive data in all of their emergency responses.

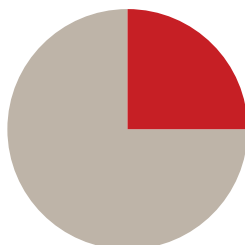
This is particularly disappointing considering the fact that guidelines and tools for the disaggregation of data by sex, age and disability are available from sources such as the Sphere Handbook, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Gender Handbook and Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities.<sup>1</sup>

Several other findings of the study indicate how older people are excluded in data. For example, in most emergency responses, data concerning older people is collected using a single category, such as ‘over 60’, instead of distinguishing between people aged 60–70, 70–80 and over 80. Also, only 13 per cent of reports reviewed mentioned that older people participated in data collection, though this would be an excellent opportunity to obtain their feedback. In addition, the review of documents for five major disasters revealed that just one in four of the needs assessment reports mentioned older people, and only one in 10 reports provided specific data or analysis from the field. Furthermore, the report found that although some agencies collected data from and about older people, they did not use age as a unit or area of analysis.

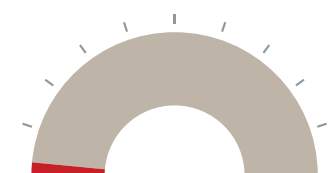
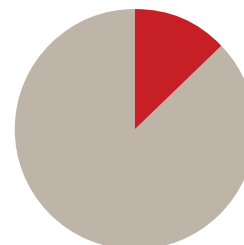
Only **38%** of humanitarian agencies collected age-inclusive data in all of their emergency responses.



**25%** of the needs assessment reports mentioned older people.



Only **13%** of reports reviewed mentioned that older people participated in data collection.



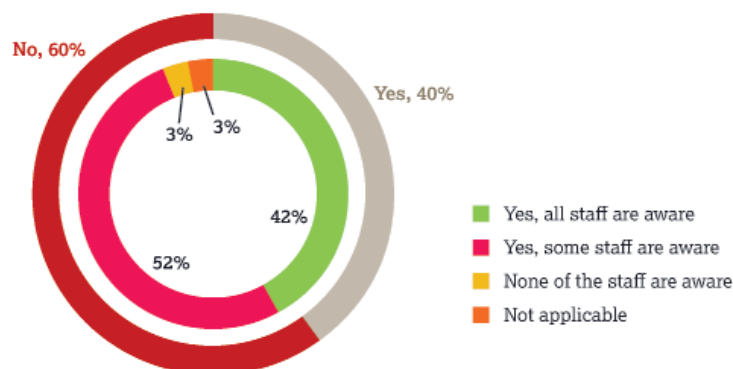
Only **2%** of 226 documents reviewed had specific recommendations to address the special needs of older people.

Another disturbing trend revealed by the study was that older people are often only mentioned as part of a ‘household’, ‘vulnerable group’ or ‘affected population’. Thus the assistance they receive is a standard package, which may not address their specific needs. In all of 226 documents reviewed, only five reports had specific recommendations to address the special needs of older people. In many cases, “priority” for older people only meant they should be first to receive assistance, but the types of assistance were the same for all vulnerable groups. When priority is not matched with appropriateness in the different response phases, the issue of exclusion worsens.

Of the disaster reports reviewed, none discussed how many older people were reached or what actions were undertaken to address their identified needs. Although some reports described older people as a group in need of assistance, few documents mentioned older people’s ability to contribute to their community’s recovery process.

A survey conducted by this study also revealed that there is a limited awareness of humanitarian standards for the collection of data about older people. It was found that only 4 out of 10 organisations that have an inclusion policy ensure that staff responsible for disaster preparedness and response are aware of humanitarian standards (see figure 1).

**Figure 1 - Proportion of organisations with policy on inclusion and extent of staff aware of humanitarian inclusion standards for older people**



Outer pie chart: Survey result of proportion of respondents who have inclusion policies  
 Inner pie chart: Survey result of proportion of staff aware of humanitarian inclusion standards in agencies with inclusion policies

## Conclusions

This study demonstrates that older people are inadequately included in data collection relating to preparedness for and response to disasters, which has marginalised them more than normal. This situation must change, as older people have the same rights as everyone else to assistance that upholds their dignity as people, as well as the right to participate in all matters that affect them, including disaster risk management. Ensuring that there is age-inclusive data in all phases of disaster risk management has been called for since the Madrid International Platform for Action in 2002, and the need for such data has been recognised by almost all country policies. Besides this, Humanitarian Inclusion Standards were produced in early 2018, which are complimentary to Sphere standards and need to be used for planning data collection and analysis from pre-disaster to post-disaster recovery phases of a crisis.

This study also shows that there is a misconception that the needs of older people and people with disabilities are similar to those of the general population or that using ‘vulnerable groups’ or similar terms as a category is sufficient to capture their specific context, which is not the case. Research also revealed that the statistical department of all countries collected minimum and expanded data sets at the pre-disaster stage, and this data could be used in the period immediately following a disaster as a reference guide to analysis.

## Recommendations

Overall, the journey towards inclusiveness so that older women and men are visible in data protection practices still has a long way to go. In general, all stakeholders can improve the situation by:

- Recognising age and ageing as a unit of analysis that intersects with gender and disability across the life stages
- Recognising the capacity of older people to know, analyse and participate in actions that will lead to their recovery after a disaster
- Addressing barriers to collecting data about older people, building staff



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capacities, and integrating data on older people within data collection systems across all sectors and agencies

More specifically, development and humanitarian organisations should work on:


- Integrating analysis of older persons
- Increasing the awareness of staff concerning humanitarian inclusion standards
- Identifying and addressing misconceptions about collecting disaggregated data
- Increasing organisations' capacities for data preparedness
- Reviewing and updating existing vulnerability assessment and DRR action plans to integrate older people's vulnerability and specific needs (e.g. relief items such as food, medicines, blankets, etc.)
- Increasing collaboration in data collection and sharing, beginning with common data sets to be collected, analysed and used
- Ensuring that the overall response meets the needs of diverse affected populations, including the specific needs of older men and women, with reference to the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities.




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**HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.**

HelpAge International  
Asia Pacific Regional Office  
6 Soi 17 Nimmanhaemin Rd.,  
T. Suthep, A. Muang, Chiang  
Mai 50200 Thailand  
Tel (+66) 53 225 400  
Fax (+66) 53 225 441  
hai@helpageasia.org

 @HelpAgeAPRO

 HelpAgeAPRO

**[www.ageingasia.org](http://www.ageingasia.org)**  
**[www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)**

Registered charity no. 288180

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The study and printing of this publication were made possible by the support from the Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.

Collaboration between concerned agencies can be strengthened:

- By working together to influence policy and government data systems in setting up common data standards, tools and templates that incorporate the broader objective to leave no one behind
- By promoting existing tools of data collection and analysis of gender and disability (such as the Washington Group Questionnaire) that enable disaggregation as well as an integrated analysis of the intersection of age, sex and disability data
- By advocating for an increase in investment by government, donors, and other institutions in data management systems, with reference to the Inclusive Data Charter<sup>2</sup>
- By producing information resources on disaster risk reduction and important aspects of the ongoing humanitarian response for development and humanitarian staff, as well as for people with limited sight, hearing, and speech
- By increasing the capacity of local governments and communities for disaster risk reduction, disaster preparedness and planning and monitoring aspects of humanitarian response
- By pooling or sharing resources and expertise and enabling the cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices to effect change throughout the disaster risk management and response phases and by ensuring that needs are met appropriately in an ongoing response
- By providing platforms – physical or virtual spaces – for people or for the use of information management technology for data exchange.

Following these recommendations will enable organisations concerned with disaster risk reduction to better prepare for future disasters and help disaster-affected communities to recover hand in hand, with older people as active participants in rebuilding their lives.

Endnotes:

1. <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/humanitarian-inclusion-standards-older-people-and-people-disabilities>
2. <http://www.data4sdgs.org/initiatives/inclusive-data-charter>