



HelpAge

International

Ageing in a just world

*HelpAge International
2030 strategy*

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Ben Small/HelpAge International

98-year-old Mikelina fled conflict in South Sudan to Uganda where she is supported by HelpAge Global Network member Uganda Reach the Aged Association

The world we want to see

We are all born free and equal in dignity and human rights.¹ However, as we grow older, people don't always see us or treat us the way they did when we were younger. Sometimes we are not respected as we were before, our needs are ignored, our contributions are not valued, and the fact that we have rights like anyone else is not recognised.

Social attitudes and norms, policies, laws and public opinion can all lead to bias against older people and set generations against each other, instead of building solidarity.

Every older person should be able to face their future with confidence, reach their potential and play a full part in the society they live in. Every older person is a valued member of society who has the right, whatever their support needs, to continue to participate in their families, communities and society, based on what is important to them.

Our mission is to enable today's older people and future generations to claim these rights. We believe everyone should be able to determine how they live in older age.

Every national government is responsible for ensuring older people enjoy their rights. Inclusive laws, policies and service delivery by governments and others can ensure that older people are included, treated with dignity and have access to the services they need.

We want to live in a world where older people's rights are fully recognised and protected in international, regional and national human rights law. The world we want to see is a just and fair world for everyone, whatever their age.

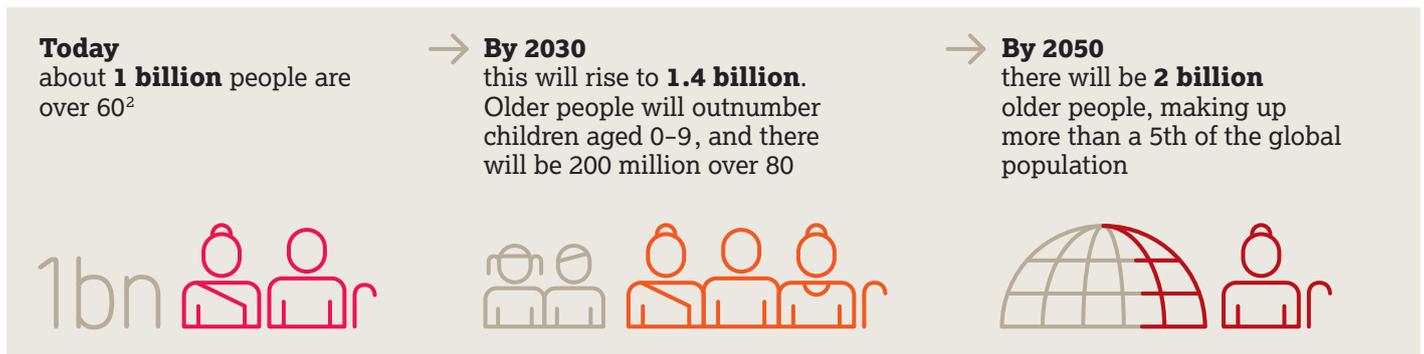
We are calling on governments and societies to work with us to recognise older people's needs, rights and potential, and to take action when and where it's needed most.

Our vision A world where every older person leads a dignified, healthy and secure life.

Our mission To promote the wellbeing, rights and inclusion of older people so we can all enjoy a future free from poverty, inequality and discrimination.

We are all getting older

Population ageing



We live in an ageing world. By 2030, one in six of us will be over 60.³ People living longer and better lives is one of the greatest achievements of modern times. We have more years to work and learn, to be part of our families and communities, and make a difference in the world.

As we grow older, we are adapting to our changing situation, circumstances and needs. Society also needs to adapt to support people of all ages and care for those who need it. Population ageing is affecting our entire society, with implications for work forces and financial markets, the demand for goods and services, family structure and intergenerational ties. Ageing and the growing numbers of older people are often described as a problem, but the problem of adjusting to changes lies with society and its attitudes and norms, not with older people themselves.

Virtually every country in the world is projected to see an increase in people over 60. Population ageing is one of the most significant dimensions of global demographic change, yet few countries have adequate systems in place to adapt to this trend.

While the ageing process is most advanced in high-income countries, the pace of change will be fastest in low- and middle-income countries, where 70 per cent of people over 60 live.⁴ The majority of countries are not prepared to meet the demands of a growing older population. There is a real risk that millions of people will fail to get the access, opportunities and support they need.

We know that for today's older generation, ageing can mean anxiety about the future and fear of things like hunger, sickness, disability, loneliness, of being a burden, or not being able to cope with a change or a crisis. Many of the world's older people are being denied their human rights.

In 2015 the world came together in a global movement of governments, civil society and others to adopt the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which aim to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for **everyone** by 2030. This commits us all to ensuring that the world's most marginalised people are not left behind. If we ignore older people, we will not achieve the SDGs.

We must act now to create a just and fairer world.

Global statistics

Older people suffer much more than others from non-communicable diseases, but these health issues receive only **2.3%** of development assistance⁵



Less than **20%** of older people receive a pension in low-income countries, with women less likely to have a pension⁶



An estimated **14 million** older people with disabilities are affected by humanitarian disasters each year⁷





Age Demands Action partner, HelpAge Korea, joins the campaign to expose ageism on International Day of Older Persons 2019

Recognising the diversity and complexity of older age

Ageing is not just a physical process of change we go through. It is influenced and defined by our **wider society**. Whilst ageing is inevitable, how we age is not.

We are all born with certain advantages and disadvantages. People who have lived in poverty or through crises often experience poorer health in later life and a lower life expectancy.

How we age is also influenced by many other factors, for example, the physical, social and economic environment we live in, our gender, state of health and any impairments we may have.

When inequalities build up over the course of our lives, we will probably experience increased disadvantage and discrimination in later life.

Although life expectancy is higher for women, many are unable to enjoy their later years because they struggle

to meet their basic needs. A lifetime of inequalities has led to older women experiencing significant health inequities, enjoying fewer human rights, and having less financial security, with fewer savings and assets to support an adequate standard of living in older age.⁸

There is no simple definition of old age. It is most commonly defined by a person's **chronological age** – usually described by the UN as those aged 60 or over. However, such a statistic cannot reflect the diversity of older populations or our individual experiences of ageing.

So, while chronological age is often used as the benchmark to define older age, we prefer to take a life course perspective (viewing life as a journey with different phases, events and transitions) and highlight the ways in which age is influenced by many different factors.

Our world is changing

Over the next decade, we will see unprecedented changes which will reshape the world we live in.

We are not only getting older, the number of people in the world is growing, with **urban areas** expected to absorb virtually all of this population growth. Many of the fastest-growing populations reside in the world's poorest countries, putting further strain on already stretched services such as healthcare and resources like food, water and shelter.

People are also moving more. **Migration** has become a major mechanism of population change in some countries and regions, driven by the demand for workers or by violence, insecurity, and conflict. Migration also has a significant impact on older people especially those who become separated from other family members and those who are caregivers.

The impact of **climate change** on older people is already severe, affecting livelihoods, shelter and resources, leading to displacement or insecurity. Older people face particular challenges during humanitarian crises and they are disproportionately affected because they are overlooked and excluded and their needs are not recognised. Lack of adequate support puts them at greater risk during floods or droughts.

Advances in **technology** are fast and lead to rapid social change. We're more connected than ever thanks to technology like mobile phones. Affordable technology has the potential to dramatically improve the quality of lives of older persons. Older people can benefit greatly from technology like artificial intelligence, and mobility aids which are designed to meet their needs or improve their connectivity, but they are also at risk of being excluded or having their rights violated, by other technological innovations.

Over the next decade, the world is likely to become more **fragile** and **unpredictable**, placing increased pressure on governments and societies. Progress towards greater democracy, more open markets and peaceful international cooperation appears to be slowing and growing inequality around the world is leading to more poverty and exclusion which in turn can feed into insecurity and conflict.

The combined effect of trends like climate change, pressure on natural resources, protracted conflicts, the backlash against human rights, and reduced multilateralism will put pressure on international frameworks and priorities, profoundly affecting international development efforts. This could lead to increased inequality and limited capacity to tackle global trends. Older people will be disproportionately impacted, particularly those with lower levels of resilience or living in the poorest or most fragile communities.



Older people from Myanmar flee their homes to Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh

The 2030 strategy

The world is changing. And we're changing with it.

Global trends like population ageing and climate change are shaping the world now and in the future. How we respond, evolve and adapt is critical if we are going to change the systems and challenge the attitudes that prevent older people from claiming their rights and participating equally.

This strategy sets out how we will work together with network members, partners and other stakeholders to change the world for older people over the next ten years.

Our approach

To create meaningful change, we must work with older people, network members and other organisations, and forge new strategic alliances, collaborating across borders and sectors.

The **HelpAge Global Network** and our work with others, will be central to this strategy in the decade ahead.

This diverse network – which includes 157 organisations across 90 countries at the beginning of 2020 – is united in creating a fairer world for older people. Together, we have already improved the lives of millions of older people across the world.

Over the next decade, we will grow and strengthen the network and our work with partners, inspiring a broader movement for change which will put population and individual ageing at the heart of development and transform the lives of older people. To do this we will bring older people, partners, governments, researchers, civil society and others together at a local, national and global level.

We have listened to older people, network members and partners and thought carefully about our role and how we can prioritise our efforts to achieve the biggest impact. We have also reflected on the changing environment for international aid and development and how we can achieve the impact we want to see, which is multi-sectoral, systemic and can only be delivered by a wide range of actors working together across boundaries.



Network members Shashi, co-founder of GRAVIS and Elisha, Executive Director of the Good Samaritan Social Service Trust speak at the UN, 2018

Verity McGivern/HelpAge International

We will act as a **supporter, convener** and **thought leader**.

- **Supporter:** By supporting network members to build and share knowledge and expertise and to achieve greater impact with and for older people, through capacity building, organisational strengthening and resource development. We will work with members to sustain themselves and each other through funding, sharing learning and resources and taking joint action where appropriate. We will also work with and support those who partner with us on specific activities, share our interests or can help bring about our vision. Our aim is for the network to become a stronger element within a wider and growing movement acting on issues affecting older people and ensuring their voices are heard.
- **Convener:** Bringing together stakeholders from different sectors and disciplines at national, regional and international levels. Fostering learning, sharing and collaboration among older people's organisations, network members, civil society, governments and other actors, in order to achieve a desired outcome for older people, and help build a movement.
- **Thought leader:** Developing new thinking, matched with practical solutions, on specific issues related to global trends and their impacts on older people and population ageing. The selection of issues will be informed by visioning and scenario planning, collaborating with others on ageing issues and trends we identify in our work. Through listening to older people and gathering key information and evidence, we will, with others, develop new thinking, generate debates, challenge assumptions and inspire changes in attitudes.

As an organisation we are committed to localising and focussing our efforts on working with, through and for network members and other actors. We will become more outward-facing and more entrepreneurial when working with others, which will challenge us to develop expertise and be a focus for moving the ageing agenda forward.

Our promise

We talked to hundreds of individuals, including older people, staff, partners, network members, policymakers and women's and disability groups from around the world to inform this strategy. These consultations gave us a sense of the struggle to survive for the majority of older people we spoke to, and the barriers to ageing well.

What also emerged is the resilience and experience of older people, which is often overlooked by governments and civil society when they are designing policies and programmes.

Older people told us that they want the opportunity to contribute and to feel connected. To be independent, treated with dignity and respect, and to participate equally in society.

They want a secure income, access to quality health services and good care and support.

What unites us all is the belief that older people should enjoy the same rights as everyone else and an improved quality of life. Our promise is that:

By 2030, millions of older people will enjoy a better quality of life, through improved wellbeing, enhanced dignity and greater voice.

“[I want] society to better understand my needs and characteristics, to listen to and respect my voice.”

Older person, Vietnam

“[Equality is] to access employment, to learn, develop oneself, run a business, access financial services such as loans, and to have these and enjoy human rights equally.”

Older person, Mongolia

“The biggest impact on our quality of life is the poverty we live in. This affects many areas: health, education, social relationships.”

Older person, Moldova

“We ourselves are responsible to our lives. And we have to continue fighting for the improvement of our lives.”

Older person, Tanzania



Judith Escribano/Age International

Kailash, a member of a Nepalese Older People's Association, received an unconditional cash transfer to help him support himself and his family

What 'quality of life' means for older people



Wellbeing, dignity and voice will be integrated across all our work so everything we do is grounded in what older people say is important to them.

Ensuring older people have a **good quality of life** means going beyond meeting their basic needs. Older people must also be able to make their own decisions and have access to high quality, accessible services and resources which support their dignity and independence, and uphold their rights.

Bringing these three components together in our strategy means that we balance an understanding of the material aspects of a good quality of life with other things that older people tell us are important, such as self-worth and value, and participation.

These components also challenge us to address deep-rooted power imbalances, listen to the voices of the most marginalised, and support all older people to be heard.

Wellbeing

We want every older person, everywhere, to be able to say: "I enjoy wellbeing"

We have a sense of wellbeing when we are able to lead fulfilling lives with purpose and meaning to them. Our wellbeing is influenced by our own outlook, characteristics and circumstances, our connections to the world around us, and the social, cultural, economic and political systems we are part of.

Dignity

We want every older person, everywhere, to be able to say: "I am treated with dignity"

Dignity is central to wellbeing. It is our inherent value because we are human. We feel it in a sense of our own self-worth and in other people's respect for us. Human rights instruments set out the minimum standards necessary for everyone to live a life of dignity. We are all born free and equal in dignity and human rights and this does not change as we age.

We want to live in a world where older people are recognised and respected as individuals, have a strong sense of belonging, purpose and self-worth and can cope with the changes life presents. We're striving for a world where dignity is understood – not as doing things for, or to, older people in their best interests – but as older people determining their own lives and making their own decisions, with support if necessary, based on what is important to them. When laws, policies, services and our individual relationships all foster this sense of dignity, we can flourish and thrive in older age.

Voice

We want every older person, everywhere, to be able to say: "My voice is heard"

Voice is about older people's ability to claim their rights, to make choices and to participate meaningfully in decision-making in all parts of life, including the personal, family, social and political.

We want to support older people to exercise their right to speak as they wish and have their voices heard and their issues included in laws, policies, programmes and services. To do this, we must understand the contextual factors that can act as a barrier to older people's voices and better understand the power relations at work.

What we'll focus on

Starting from wellbeing, dignity and voice helps us to recognise that our individual experiences of older age are shaped by the systems and people around us. They help us make our own decisions, have our opinions heard and feel our life has meaning.

We looked in depth at what the **wellbeing, dignity** and **voice** of older people could mean for us as an organisation and identified a range of potential interventions which could translate our vision into practical action. This has led to the selection of **ten focus areas** which will be a guide for the whole organisation.

The focus areas provide a framework for us to harness what older people say is important to them, addressing the root causes of inequality by transforming systems through influencing governments and ultimately changing societal and individual attitudes towards older age.

We know we can't transform the world through these focus areas by working alone. But by working with older people, network members, civil society, governments and others, we believe we can concentrate our efforts so we can change the systems and attitudes that exclude older people and limit their quality of life.

We expect that actions in these ten areas will progress in different ways and different pace over time. The significance and priority of each focus area will vary considerably across different country contexts. Some actions will be led by network members at local and national levels, others may be broader, involving action at regional and global levels too.

Our focus areas

Inspire a movement for change

We will support older people and civil society to unite and demand change, mobilising a people's movement for a fairer world for everyone to grow old in, promoting older people's rights and transforming the way people think, feel and act on ageing.

Create a society for all ages

We will promote inclusive environments and communities integrating all ages, where older people feel connected and can participate equally as they wish.

Improve income security

We will protect older people's independence and sense of purpose by promoting social pensions, access to decent work, economic opportunities and financial services without discrimination.

Promote age-inclusive systems

We will call for and secure ratification of age-inclusive laws, policies and systems to guarantee older people's rights across all sectors, tracking implementation and holding actors to account.

Support healthy ageing

We will support the transformation of systems to promote healthy ageing, including the implementation of inclusive universal health coverage and long-term care and support systems.

Deliver inclusive humanitarian action

We will promote age-inclusive humanitarian preparedness and response to ensure older people are protected, feel safe and have full access to assistance.

Challenge violence, abuse and neglect

We will expose the risks of violence, abuse and neglect older people face, with a particular focus on older women, and work with others to take action.

Take a stand against ageism

We will take a stand against ageism,⁹ engaging all stakeholders including duty bearers, the wider community and older people themselves. We will promote positive attitudes and behaviour towards older people, ensuring their contribution is valued and they are treated fairly and with respect.

Embrace technology

We will advocate for older people to receive maximum benefit and minimum harm from technological change in all sectors of society.

Foster lifelong learning

We will promote access to lifelong learning, professional and personal opportunities, as well as other educational opportunities so that older people develop their full potential to participate in society.



Ben Small/HelpAge International

Loru Max, 77, is an older citizen monitor in Gulu, north-eastern Uganda where he helps older people access the Government's social pension



Ben Small/HelpAge International

An older woman in Magway Region in central Myanmar weaves a basket as part of a community enterprise funded by HelpAge

How we'll make change happen

Many older people are being systematically marginalised or excluded. Barriers, constraints and discriminatory attitudes exclude and disadvantage older people, not older age itself. We believe that all older people should be treated fairly and without discrimination, whatever their diverse and overlapping identities, values, beliefs or needs.

To create an age-inclusive world, we must work with older people, network members, civil society, governments and regional and global institutions to transform systems, challenge attitudes and social norms, influence policies and inspire older people's movements. Change must happen at a local, national, regional and global level.

We are committed to prioritising the promotion of gender equality in all our work. We recognise that gender is increasingly viewed as being on a spectrum and the need for sensitivity to gender identities that are not expressed within binary (man and woman) categories. We will seek to broaden and deepen our understanding of what this means and how to transform gender relations.

We know that the inequalities women face in terms of power relations, voice and access to resources are compounded by ageing while at the same time, women form the majority in the higher age groups. For these reasons we will orient and prioritise our gender equality work primarily towards the empowerment of older women and the transformation of currently unequal gender relations between older women and men.

An equally significant area will be disability, given that globally more than 46 per cent of older people are living with an impairment.¹⁰ Higher disability rates for older people result from accumulated health risks across the lifespan. Older people with disabilities face physical, social and attitudinal barriers to their participation and inclusion and may encounter double discrimination because of their age and impairment. We know that older women with disabilities are at particular risk of violence, abuse and neglect.

We recognise the contributions older people make to the lives of their families and communities. Older people tell us they want to be useful but also to have choices in how they find purpose in their lives. In promoting a fully inclusive approach, our aim is that all older people, whatever their age, support needs or choices, should enjoy a sense of self-worth and be able to age without shame, living as well as possible until the end of life.

Over the next decade, we will be at the forefront of development in an ageing world. We will develop solutions which are inclusive of all, recognising the diversity of older people and their roles and the specific challenges they face over their life course. We will promote cooperation between different generations, adopting an intergenerational approach where appropriate.

We want change on a global scale that is inclusive of all older people. Our efforts will focus in low- and middle-income countries and where older people are most at risk of being left behind, which may be because they're poor, because of their gender, because they have an impairment, or they're affected by humanitarian crises or for other reasons.

We will explore how population ageing intersects with other global trends (such as climate change, population pressure on resources, urbanization, and technology) and be alert to the potential impact on older people's rights and the opportunities for interventions with policy and decision makers to promote positive change.



Older people in Gaza create their own theatre play to expose ageism

El Wedad



An older member of an intergenerational group shares the secrets of caring for children in Jeti-Oguz village, Kyrgyzstan

What this means for us

Our organisational values will guide the way we develop our organisation.

We want to achieve significant and lasting impact for older people and to do that we need to change so that we have the flexibility to do the right thing, at the right time, in the right place. We must be set up to respond and act when it matters most. We recognise that action at the national level is key to achieving sustainable change for older people at scale and we will prioritise country level strategies and approaches.

Two-year business plans will be developed to implement this strategy, and we will regularly check-in on progress, consulting with older people to make sure our direction is still relevant to their lives. We will also track and measure the delivery of the strategy and the impact we make.

We work as committed partners and we will work with and through the organisations that understand the local context and can hold others to account. This enables us to reach many more older people and their communities. It will ensure that the action they take is relevant to them and it is their voices that are heard by those responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling their rights.

We will be open to new partnerships, collaborations and ways of working. We want to sustain and deepen our relationships with existing funding partners. We also want to explore new funding partnerships with other organisations who can bring different perspectives, resources, reach new audiences and generate support.

We will learn from everything we do, adapting continuously to a changing environment. We already benefit from decentralised decision-making and the expertise within our specialised teams. We can increase our flexibility to respond to opportunities, do more to promote learning and sharing, and reduce barriers between our teams and members around the world.

Over the next decade we will focus on maximising the potential of one of our biggest strengths, our staff. We will invest in our people and create opportunities that help them to develop further, collaborate across teams and grow to achieve both their own personal goals and our collective ambitions.

We are inclusive and we will continue to create a working culture which is inclusive, promotes staff retention, and fosters adaptable leadership that empowers staff to change the world for older people. We will be alert to opportunities for improving our ways of working, for example to reduce our environmental impact, harness new technology or better safeguard people and resources.

These steps will make us more cost-effective and agile, opening up potential space for innovation and investment which we know is needed, as our understanding deepens of the complexities of ageing and how it interacts with other development issues.

By being flexible and collaborating across boundaries, borders, sectors and themes, we can make a real and long-lasting difference to older people's lives.

A fairer world is within our reach

Population and individual ageing bring unique and complex challenges and opportunities. There's no easy fix. It can sometimes seem daunting.

But by working together, embracing change and ensuring all our work promotes older people's wellbeing, dignity and voice, we can transform the lives of older people now and in the future.

We want all older people, whatever their age, support needs or choices, to enjoy a sense of self-worth and be able to age with pride and dignity, contributing as much as they wish until the end of life.

This strategy sets out how we will work together to shape the future we all share.

Every single voice makes a difference in creating a movement across the world.



MUSA/HelpAge International

A network member in South Africa campaigning for older people's rights on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day



Aide Ortiz was displaced by violence in Colombia and HelpAge helped her access legal support to ensure she got humanitarian assistance

Find out more:

www.helpage.org

Endnotes

1. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 1
2. UNDESA WPP 2019
3. UNDESA WPP 2015
4. UNDESA WPP 2019
5. Skirbekk et al, Health Affairs, 2016
6. ILO World Social Protection Report 2017–19 (p.75 onwards)
7. HelpAge International, *Missing Millions* report April 2018
8. “Challenges Facing Older Women” Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN UnderSecretary-General and Executive Director, UN Women, February 28 2017
9. Ageism means treating people unfairly because of their age. Older people say that they are often seen as less equal, less deserving of respect, less part of mainstream society and less capable than people of younger ages. Research indicates that this age discrimination has a negative impact on societies in every part of the world.
10. www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/disability-and-ageing.html

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Front cover photo by Hereward Holland/Age International
Design by TRUE www.truedesign.co.uk



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ISBN 978-1-910743-66-9