

# Minimum standards checklist:

*Including older people in disaster risk management*

**HelpAge  
International**

*age helps*



# Background

The world is changing rapidly. Globalisation offers endless economic opportunities, but also has costs. Unsustainable land use and biodiversity loss are happening at an unprecedented speed. Global warming has seen a rise in temperature of about 0.8°C in the past century (with about two-thirds of this increase occurring since 1980), leading to greater environmental and climatic risks.<sup>1</sup>

These changes are occurring alongside rapid population growth and population ageing. The world population has quadrupled to 7 billion people in just over 100 years. Today, people aged over 60 constitute 11 per cent of the global population. By 2050, this proportion will have doubled, to 22 per cent – that is, 2 billion older people. Populations are ageing most rapidly in developing countries, which are currently home to 60 per cent of the world's older people, projected to rise to 80 per cent by 2050.<sup>2</sup>

While the ageing population is to be celebrated, as it represents the triumph of development and improvements in healthcare, the combination of more extreme climate events and an ageing population has the potential to increase older people's vulnerability to risks and disasters, especially in low- and middle-income countries. All too often, disasters (whether slow or rapid onset) result in avoidable and disproportionate loss of life and impoverishment among older people, whose vulnerabilities and capacities are overlooked, even though they have the same rights as other age groups to protection from physical and psychological harm.

## Disaster risk management

With the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, many countries are realising the importance of disaster risk management. Preparedness measures can significantly reduce the impact of disasters on people's lives, livelihoods and assets, while some disasters like floods can be prevented entirely by investing in flood-resistant infrastructure. Robust preparedness plans also enable a rapid and more effective response when a disaster is unfolding.

Yet HelpAge has found that the needs and capacities of older people and other vulnerable groups are consistently overlooked in disaster preparedness planning, and consequently during the response. To give just a few examples: early warnings are not reaching people who have hearing problems; bedridden people are not assisted to evacuate; and emergency stockpiles do not contain medicines commonly used by older people (such as for diabetics or heart disease).

## Minimum standards checklists

These guidelines recommend minimum standard checklists to ensure the inclusion of older people in the planning and implementation of disaster preparedness and response activities. Policies and programmes that follow these guidelines will significantly reduce the impact of disasters on older people's lives and livelihoods.

These checklists are not exhaustive but provide a framework for policy makers and practitioners for the different phases in disaster risk management.

This document is a summary of the publication *Disaster resilience in an ageing world*.

### Disaster resilience in an ageing world:

*How to make policies and programmes inclusive of older people*



# Vulnerability and capacity

Extreme weather events tend to have a disproportionate impact on older people. When Hurricane Katrina struck New Orleans in 2005, 75 per cent of those who died were aged over 60, even though this age group comprised only 16 per cent of the local population.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in the Japanese tsunami of 2011, 56 per cent of those who died were 65 and over, despite this age group comprising just 23 per cent of the population.<sup>4</sup> These figures illustrate that disaster management systems are ill equipped to respond to older people's needs.

## Understanding older people's vulnerabilities

There are four key reasons explaining older people's heightened vulnerability in the face of climate-related shocks:

1. Physical decline that comes with ageing, which can include poor health, mobility, sight and hearing.
2. Lack of provision of adequate services for older people, both on a daily basis and in emergency situations.
3. Age discrimination, which serves to exclude and isolate older people, and often violates their rights.
4. Poverty levels among older people, often exacerbated by lack of social protection mechanisms and livelihood opportunities.

Older people's physical challenges can reduce their capacity to prepare for disasters – for example, they may struggle to stockpile food and water, bring livestock to safety quickly, or travel long distances. Frail and poor older people



Anwar Sadat/HelpAge International

who live alone, isolated from family and community support, are more likely to live in poorly constructed houses, which can put them at greater risk. In addition, many frail or housebound older people may be less able or willing to flee their homes.

Yet simple things can make a difference. For example, providing walking sticks and frames, hearing aids and eye glasses for older people as part of a disaster response can help them reach distribution points, access assistance, prepare food or collect firewood.

## Recognising older people's capacities

Older people have a lifetime of experience, knowledge and skills that are vital to understanding local environmental hazards and their impacts. It is therefore vital to recognise older men and women's capacities, and support them to make a significant contribution to all stages of disaster management activities, from risk assessment through to operational response and recovery. Potential contributions include:

1. As village elders and traditional knowledge-holders, older people can be a valuable source of information on local hazard and risk profiles, and sustainable mitigation strategies.

2. Older people may not be as heavily engaged in day-to-day economic activities as younger people, and so may be able to spend more time on disaster risk management actions, while encouraging other community members to get involved too.
3. Older women, in particular, play an important role in supporting family members and grandchildren. As well as having their own protection needs during a crisis, their role as carers of other vulnerable groups also needs to be considered.
4. Older people can be strong agents for change when it comes to disaster risk management. They generally have the ability to reflect, and to benefit from hindsight, and are strongly motivated by wanting to make the world a safer place for their grandchildren.

Experience shows that with the right kind of support, older people can use their knowledge and experience to complement scientific and technological developments to strengthen key disaster risk management and preparedness measures.

## Including older people in disaster preparedness and response

By taking some simple measures to include older people in disaster preparedness and response planning and management, the impact of disasters on older people's lives can be significantly reduced. This section outlines minimum standards checklists for the seven areas of disaster risk management work that should consider older people's vulnerabilities and capacities, as well

as provide opportunities for older women and men to participate. These include: risk assessments, early warning systems, stockpiling, evacuation planning, training of responders, protection and psychosocial response, health and nutrition planning.

### Risk assessment

To conduct risk assessments that are inclusive and reflect the needs and capacities of older people and other vulnerable groups, it is important to:

- Ensure that older people have been consulted and been given the opportunity to contribute their knowledge and experience.
- Ensure that the community is sensitised to older people's vulnerabilities and capacities, is respectful of older women and men's right to contribute to discussions and decisions, and values those contributions.
- Give adequate time to engage older people, using appropriate techniques (eg, through storytelling, community walks).
- Disaggregate all data by sex and age to understand the different risks faced by different groups.
- Create an "at risk" map and register, so that the location and status of all older people with specific vulnerabilities have been recorded.
- Make space available for discussions between older and younger people to promote intergenerational learning and so maximise the impact of the response.
- Ensure that all external data, such as scientific investigations, are communicated effectively and discussed in relation to local knowledge, with older people and the wider community.

## Early warning systems

To ensure that early warning systems are designed in ways that encourage older people to access, understand and react to them, it is important to:

- Consult older people when identifying indicators to be used in an EWS, and ensure that all stakeholders understand these.
- Ensure that early warning messages are accessible to older people, including those with sensory or mobility impairments, or mental disabilities.
- Ensure that early warning signals have good levels of repetition and visual aids.
- Ensure that where early warning signals require people to take specific actions, older people are aware of these actions and able to carry them out unassisted.
- Ensure that provisions are in place to support older people to take action in response to early warning signals such as an evacuation support system.

## Stockpiling

To ensure that stockpiled goods cater for older women and men's specific needs, it is important to:

- Ensure that first aid kits include locally appropriate items, and that basic medications include insulin, analgesics (paracetamol, aspirin), antiseptic creams, and antibiotics.
- Ensure that sanitation supplies include adult sanitary wear and disposal bags.
- Ensure that stockpiled materials include reading glasses, and mobility aids such as walking frames, sticks, and even wheelchairs.
- Ensure that clothing supplies are age appropriate; it may also be appropriate to include hot water bottles, and small

water containers that are light and can be carried by older people.

- Ensure that stockpiled foodstuffs are appropriate and are easy to swallow and digest, and are packaged in small bundles that can easily be carried by an older person.
- Ensure that stockpiles include hoists and lifting equipment.

## Evacuation

### Evacuation route

To ensure that evacuation routes are accessible to and appropriate for older people, it is important to:

- Consider evacuation routes and shelters that are appropriate to the speed of onset of the disaster, taking into account mobility restrictions of the most vulnerable members of a community in order to reach them between warning and impact.
- Put in place a support system (whether at the institutional or community/individual level) to help vulnerable older people evacuate (eg, the “buddy system”).
- Ensure that evacuation routes are large enough for the number of people expected to use them and are free of obstacles such as steps, gaps and steep slopes.
- Ensure that evacuation signs are eye-catching, with clear visual and audible instructions.
- Provide information and posters about evacuation routes to individual households as well as putting them up in public meeting places, government buildings, etc.
- Carry out regular evacuation drills that include older people and test transport and support systems.



Warren Antolar/HelpAge International

### Evacuation centre

To ensure that evacuation centres are accessible to and appropriate for older people, it is important to:

- Ensure that evacuation centres provide warmth and comfort for older people, and have age-appropriate items (see stockpile checklist above) as well as appropriate seating and facilities.
- Ensure that supports such as ramps, handles and hoists are available to allow older people to move safely.
- Ensure the privacy and dignity of older people, providing private places for women and men to change and wash separately, with support if needed.
- Toilet facilities should have:
  - doors wide enough for wheelchairs and large enough to enable carers to support people during use
  - ramp access and grab rails
  - space underneath the basin to allow use by people in wheelchairs
  - non-slip floor surfaces
  - lever handles to allow easy opening of doors instead of regular doorknobs.

### Personal grab bag

To ensure older people themselves are prepared for disasters, they should be encouraged to have a grab bag ready at all times.

A grab bag should at minimum contain:

- Spare glasses
- Hearing aids and batteries
- Personal medications (enough for a week)
- Identity documents
- Contact details of friends and family, and home address
- Warm blanket and clothes
- Sanitary ware

### Training emergency responders

To ensure that those involved in the emergency response are aware of older people's needs and that older people can use their capacities to become responders, it is important to:

- Ensure that all local emergency response personnel are trained in working with older people and responding to their needs.
- Explore opportunities to engage older people in disaster risk management according to their capacities and skills (for instance, in early warning systems, risk assessments, record-keeping, and first aid).
- Ensure that mock drills take place regularly and involve all emergency responders and older people.

## Protection and psychosocial response

To ensure that older people's protection and psychosocial needs are addressed by the emergency response, and that their capacities are used to support others, it is important to:

- Consider and analyse the specific protection issues faced by older people in preparedness, response and recovery contexts.
- Provide protection training to response teams and partner organisations involved in needs assessments.
- Provide or pass on information to older people and their families and carers so that they can better protect themselves, taking account of sight or hearing impairments and literacy levels.
- Ensure that older people have access to safe and secure shelter with basic security fittings, and that they know where they can get support and information in an emergency.
- Provide psychosocial support for older people by supporting them and their families to cope with the crisis.
- Ensure that older people are not at risk of separation from their relatives while being allocated shelter in camps. Where necessary, ensure that family reunification programmes include older people as well as children.
- Identify older people who may be interested in providing psychosocial support to others and provide them with the necessary skills and training to do this.

## Health and nutrition response planning

To ensure that emergency healthcare and food assistance meets older people's health and nutritional requirements, it is important to:

- Ensure that older women and men have access to food distribution points, either themselves or by proxy, and are able to carry rations.
- Ensure that older people can access appropriate nutritious foods through stocks and supplies. Organisations providing emergency food assistance should adapt food rations to meet older people's needs, giving sufficient consideration to micronutrient content, palatability, chewability and digestibility.
- Ensure that disaster response plans involve older people in nutritional and health assessments and monitoring, and that responders have been trained in using appropriate participatory assessment tools.
- Ensure that older people's health status is noted on at-risk registers, which are passed to emergency responders at the onset of a crisis.

Kate Holt/HelpAge International





- Facilitate older people's access to health facilities by organising transport or mobile clinics. Such facilities should be age-friendly (eg, ground floor consulting rooms).
- Ensure that good quality essential drugs are available – particularly drugs for chronic diseases where continuity of treatment is vital.
- Ensure that services are designed to meet the needs of older women and men equally; and that both sexes are involved in the design of emergency health plans.
- Make information about health services available to older people in an appropriate form.
- Provide basic training for emergency responders on the health and nutritional needs of older people, and on how to communicate with older people.

## Including older people in disaster mitigation and resilience-building

While disaster preparedness actions can reduce the impact of disasters, we need longer term disaster mitigation and resilience-building actions that reduce the intensity, scale and impact of a disaster and address the underlying economic, social, environmental and/or physical causes of vulnerability. This section presents minimum standards checklists on supporting older people to build resilient livelihoods, age-friendly and climate-smart agriculture, micro-credit and micro-insurance services available to older people, and social protection measures to support older people.

## Supporting older people to build resilient livelihoods

To ensure that livelihoods support and programming meets the needs of older people, it is important to:

- Include older women and men in all livelihood programmes, ensuring that their specific needs are addressed and their capacities utilised.
- Ensure that mechanisms are in place to help older people access credit and other financial schemes, whether through older people's associations or formal lending institutions.
- Strengthen the work of older people's associations (through funding and capacity building) to support their members, access services, and pool resources, skills and knowledge.

## Resilient and climate-smart agriculture for older farmers

To ensure that older people have equal access to agricultural interventions designed to mitigate the impact of disasters on food consumption and production, it is important to:

- Encourage policy-makers and decision-makers to consider the needs and implications of the ageing farm workforce in policies and planning on agriculture, food security, economic development, and disaster risk management.
- Use older people's knowledge of local agricultural and environmental challenges to develop locally appropriate climate-smart agriculture. Older people's contributions to finding sustainable agricultural solutions should be valued and acknowledged.
- Promote policies to diversify farming practices and sources of income for older people, including social protection.

## **Making micro-credit and insurance available to older people**

### **Micro-credit**

To ensure that older people have access to the services and products offered by formal lending institutions, NGOs, and other groups, it is important to:

- Sensitise microfinance institutions and other financial organisations to older people's needs and capacities, advocating for them to extend their services to older people by removing age requirements, helping older people understand loan terms and conditions, and offering more flexible repayment conditions where necessary.
- Ensure that locally relevant disaster risks are taken into consideration in the design of loan products, with flexibility in repayment schedules in the event of (and after) a disaster.
- Ensure that older people are eligible to participate in and benefit from community-managed revolving funds or savings and loan schemes.

### **Micro-insurance**

To ensure that older people have access to the services and products offered by insurance providers, it is important to:

- Ensure that micro-insurance schemes are accessible to the poorest and most vulnerable members of a community by: revising eligibility criteria and payment structures; providing accessible information on the conditions in an age-appropriate format; and providing support in submitting an insurance application.
- Support older people's associations/self-help groups or farmers' groups to set up community-managed micro-

insurance funds, and provide training in record-keeping and financial management.

## **How social protection for older people can support disaster mitigation**

To ensure that social protection mechanisms (and specifically cash transfers) support older people to build more resilient livelihoods, it is important to:

- Support older people to realise their right to a secure income in old age, and support governments to design and implement universal pension schemes.
- Consider distribution mechanisms for cash or other transfers from a disaster risk management perspective, so that plans are in place to ensure that older people and other vulnerable groups experience minimal disruption to payments during or after a disaster.
- Ensure that wherever possible, cash transfer schemes as part of an emergency response use existing social protection mechanisms and distribution systems to deliver support, rather than duplicating effort and causing delays. Disaster management authorities, social security departments, and local banks and cash delivery systems should work together to plan how to deliver emergency cash transfers immediately after a disaster.
- Ensure that older people are included in cash transfer programmes. This may require sensitising older people on the purpose and use of cash grants, as well as working with cash delivery agents or government officials who may need to accept forms of identification other than official certificates, which older people might not possess.

# Recommendations to governments and civil society to strengthen the disaster resilience of older people

Government are primary duty bearers in regard to ensuring the safety of their populations and the most vulnerable. After the community themselves, government disaster management authorities and also civil society organisations are the primary responders to disasters. Therefore it is imperative that governments and civil society manage risks within their countries and prepare adequately for emerging disaster risks to their populations.

Furthermore, they should create opportunities for people to protect themselves and manage the disaster risks impacting on their lives and livelihoods.

We recommend that governments and civil society should make age-inclusive resilience-building a reality by:

- Ensuring that relevant departments, local authorities and emergency responders have specific budget lines for meeting older people's needs and utilising their contributions.
- Ensuring that national disaster and emergency policies explicitly acknowledge the vulnerabilities and contributions of older people and other vulnerable groups in disaster risk management and resilience-building activities.
- Providing training for all staff involved in civil disaster management, emergency response, and (where appropriate) the military, to raise awareness of older people's needs and to build capacity in age-inclusive disaster management.
- Ensuring that older people, along with other vulnerable groups, play a key role in community-based disaster management planning.

Coalition of Services of the Elderly



## Older people in emergencies

identifying and reducing risks



HelpAge International  
true aid

## Protection interventions for older people in emergencies



HelpAge International  
true aid

## Health interventions for older people in emergencies



## Nutrition interventions for older people in emergencies



## Food security and livelihoods interventions for older people in emergencies



HelpAge International  
true aid

## Guidance on including older people in emergency shelter programmes



International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

HelpAge International  
true aid

## Resources

The in-depth guideline document *Disaster resilience in an ageing world: How to make policies and programmes inclusive of older people* is also available.

*Older people in emergencies: identifying and reducing risks*, HelpAge International, 2012.

*Protection interventions for older people in emergencies*, HelpAge International, 2013.

*Health interventions for older people in emergencies*, HelpAge International, 2012.

*Nutritional interventions for older people in emergencies*, HelpAge International, 2012.

*Food security and livelihoods interventions for older people in emergencies*, HelpAge International, 2012.

*Guidance on including older people in emergency shelter programmes*, HelpAge International/International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2011.

HelpAge International resources on ageing and disaster risk management available at: [www.helpage.org/resources/publications](http://www.helpage.org/resources/publications)

## Endnotes

1. National Research Council (2011), *America's climate choices*, Washington DC, The National Academies Press.
2. HelpAge International and United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) (2012), *Ageing in the Twenty-First Century: A Celebration and A Challenge*, New York and London, UNFPA and HelpAge International.
3. Wilson N (2006), 'Hurricane Katrina: unequal opportunity disaster', *Public Policy and Aging Report* 16(2), pp 8-13.
4. HelpAge International (2013), *Displacement and older people: the case of the Great East Japan earthquake and tsunami of 2011*, London, HelpAge International.

Copyright © 2014 HelpAge International  
Registered charity no. 288180

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

Written by Clare Harris and Jessica Hartog

Cover photo by Artemio Andaya

Design by TRUE [www.truedesign.co.uk](http://www.truedesign.co.uk)

Print by Park Lane Press [www.parklanepress.co.uk](http://www.parklanepress.co.uk)

Any parts of this publication may be reproduced without permission for non-profit and educational purposes unless indicated otherwise. Please clearly credit HelpAge International and send us a copy of the reprinted sections.