



Dorcas

Age inclusion handbook

**Section 1:
Technical
guidance notes**

HelpAge

International

Contents

- 5** Introduction
- 7** Key terms and concepts
- 9** Technical guidance notes
- 10** 1.1 Insuring income security
- 14** 1.2 Promoting healthy ageing
- 18** 1.3 Responding effectively to humanitarian crises
- 22** 1.4 Ensuring accountability and safeguarding
- 27** 1.5 Working towards inclusive data
- 31** 1.6 Challenging ageism
- 35** 1.7 Encouraging voice and participation
- 42** 1.8 Protecting rights
- 46** 1.9 Promoting an intergenerational approach
- 51** 1.10 Developing age-friendly cities and communities
- 54** 1.11 Promoting gender equality
- 58** 1.12 Acting against climate change
- 62** 1.13 Supporting Older People's Associations
- 67** Endnotes for Section 1

Note:

Throughout this handbook, anywhere you see an arrow (→) you can click on it to be linked to another page in the handbook or to an external web page.

Introduction

The world is ageing. By 2030, 1.4 billion people in the world will be aged 60 years or over; by 2050, this number is projected to be 2.1 billion. Currently, over 60 per cent of older people live in lower- and middle-income countries, with this figure growing to 80 per cent by 2050.¹

Population ageing is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored.

HelpAge International envisions a world in which all older people lead dignified, healthy, and secure lives. To achieve this, we promote the wellbeing and inclusion of older women and men and the reduction poverty and discrimination in later life. Older people tell us that they value being treated fairly, with respect and dignity, making their own decisions, having their voices heard, participating in their own and others' development, and having access to services that respond to their different needs. Yet for many older people realising this is a struggle – from making decisions for themselves within the family and going about their lives according to their own values and preferences, to ensuring they are included and able to influence change within social and political spheres at local, national and international levels. HelpAge wants to support older people to exercise their right to speak as they wish, to have their voices heard and their issues included in laws, policies, programmes and services. This handbook aims to both remind us of good practices in this endeavour, as well as offer support to others in achieving this.

As explored further in this handbook, our key areas of work include:

- Improving income security, which means working to ensure that older people have access to sustainable and adequate income, including social protection programmes and livelihood support.
- Supporting healthy ageing to improve the health and wellbeing of older people by ensuring they have access to services and support that meets their needs and upholds their rights.
- Responding to humanitarian crises, including providing essential aid and support to older people, and their communities, when they are affected by conflict, disasters, and displacement.
- Supporting older people to speak out, claim their rights and influence decisions that affect their lives to create a society for all ages.
- Advocating for the rights of older people and working to raise awareness about issues affecting them, such as age discrimination, elder abuse, and neglect.
- Challenging ageism so that older people are recognised as individuals and treated fairly and without discrimination.

- Campaigning to ensure that older people of all genders enjoy the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities.
- Recognising the impact that climate change has on older people and their communities, and the importance of addressing this issue to protect and improve their lives.

In this work, HelpAge strives for age inclusion at every step. We also support other organisations to improve their age inclusiveness in programmes, advocacy and other initiatives. One of the ways we do that is by providing resources, such as this handbook. This handbook has been divided into three sections:

Section 1: Technical guidance notes →

Organised by 13 thematic areas such as participation, accessibility, and data, this section provides insights into the interplay of these themes within the context of age inclusion. Each guidance note includes an overview, examples of this work in practice and top takeaways.

Section 2: Resources →

These resources draw from both internal HelpAge materials and external sources. They offer foundational training materials, exercises, and recommended reading to increase the capacity of staff and communities in age inclusion. The resources are tagged and sorted by theme, so they can be easily extracted for particular needs.

Section 3: Organisational assessment →

This section provides a valuable, tried-and-tested tool for organisations to gauge their level of age inclusivity. It includes a structured assessment framework along with guidelines on how to improve your organisation's age inclusive status.

If you need additional support, feel free to reach out to HelpAge at info@helpage.org →

Key terms and concepts

Human rights-based approach to ageing: A way of working, which is based on human rights principles and standards, and aims to ensure older people's dignity, voice and wellbeing.²

Intersectionality: A sociological analytical framework for understanding how groups' and individuals' social and political identities result in unique combinations of discrimination and privilege. Some factors can include age, gender, disability, legal status, caste, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and religion. These intersecting and overlapping social identities can be both empowering and oppressing. This handbook will help highlight the intersectionality of older people and ensure their inclusion in appropriate programmes and advocacy initiatives.

Inclusion: At HelpAge, inclusion means enabling all people to freely and openly participate and be recognised in society without restrictions or limitations, where they feel they belong and can access their rights.

Inclusive terminology: Language has the power to reinforce or deconstruct systems of power that maintain poverty, inequality and suffering.³ As we analyse and work towards greater age inclusion practices and policies, we must recognise the role of language and communication in promoting equality. We should always communicate with older people in the language and method they prefer, and in a way that enables them to understand and respond. We should also avoid using jargon or overly complicated technical terms.

Disability: More than 46 per cent of older people worldwide live with an impairment, with 250 million experiencing moderate to severe impairments; older people represent the majority of the overall population of people with disabilities.⁴ Given that the number of people over the age of 80 years is expected to more than triple by 2050, there is a clear correlation between the ageing population and increased rates of disability. A longer lifespan is associated with an increased prevalence of chronic diseases and physical and cognitive impairments, which, combined with various barriers, may result in disabilities.

The age at which people first experience disability influences their sense of identity and societal perceptions. Those who acquire impairments when older are more likely to perceive a decline in physical and cognitive functioning as a 'normal' part of ageing. However, older people who acquire impairments earlier in life may see older age as a secondary identity and therefore have very different expectations about older age. These distinct individual experiences and perceptions are also reflected in how the disability and the ageing communities address the intersection between ageing and disability. The intersection between older age and disability results in both aggravated forms of discrimination and specific human rights violations against older persons with disabilities.⁵

Acronyms

ADCAP	Age and Disability Capacity Programme
AFCC	Age-Friendly Cities and Communities
CGD	Citizen generated data
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
CSO	Civil society organisation
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
GAROP	Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People
GBD	Global Burden of Disease
GBV	Gender based violence
HIS	Humanitarian Inclusion Standards
HRBA	Human rights-based approach
ICOPE	Integrated care for older people
IGA	Intergenerational approach
INGO	International Non-Government Organisation
LMIC	Low- and middle-income countries
NCD	Non-communicable disease
NHIF	National health insurance fund
NHRIs	National human rights institutes
OCHA	Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OCMG	Older citizen monitoring group
OEWGA	UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing
OPA	Older people's association
PANEL	Participation, Accountability and transparency, Equality and non-discrimination, Empowerment and Legality
PLA	Participatory learning approach
PSEAH, SEA, SEAH	Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment
SADDD	Sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UHC	Universal Health Care
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

Technical guidance notes

This handbook demonstrates that age inclusion is highly achievable. In this section, we outline what this looks like across different technical areas and the steps needed to attain this. The supplementary resources (Section 2) and organisational assessment (Section 3) provide advice on how to take this valuable approach forward.

Section guides the reader through various thematic areas related to achieving age inclusion, starting with broad thematic areas – Ensuring income security, Promoting healthy ageing and Responding effectively to humanitarian crises. It then moves to cross cutting themes such as Ensuring accountability and safeguarding, Working towards inclusive data, Challenging ageism, Encouraging voice and participation, Protecting rights, Promoting gender equality, Using an intergenerational approach, Developing age-friendly cities and communities, Action against climate change and Supporting Older People’s Associations. Many of these technical areas relate to one another, highlighting the need to work across teams and ensure quality communication among technical experts.

In each technical area you will find an overview, examples of what this looks like in practice, along with top takeaways for quick reference to help get you started on your age-inclusion journey.

As you read through this section, consider how your organisation approaches each technical area. This will help you prepare for the organisational assessment. An organisational assessment has the advantage of setting aside time for a face-to-face discussion with key members of staff. This gives you the chance to talk through specific areas of work at organisational, programme and technical level, and identify to what extent age, gender and disability inclusion are being addressed. You can find out more about this on page 79, Section 3.



Maheder Hailelassie Tadese/
Fairpicture/HelpAge International



1.1 Ensuring income security

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), older people's income security is based on a mix of work, cash transfers and pensions, support from family members, as well as savings and assets. Where widespread poverty and limited economic opportunities restrict older people's incomes from work, and families have little scope to support them, even low pension benefits are important.

As sources of income are inadequate for most older people, especially in LMICs, poverty and susceptibility to shocks and crises tend to increase in older age.⁶ An estimated four billion people worldwide are currently left without social protection.⁷

Globally 68 per cent of older people receive a pension, but just 20 per cent in most low-income countries do. In most countries, older women are less likely to receive a pension compared to men, and if they do their benefits tend to be lower. As pension systems are largely financed through contributions tied to formal employment, women's disadvantages and discrimination in the world of work reduces their abilities to save and contribute to schemes and therefore leaves them less financially secure in older age.⁸ For older people with a disability, social pensions and disability benefits are often mutually exclusive and too low to compensate for extra costs of disabilities and to support independence. Similarly, without social protection, accessing health and care systems can be prohibitively expensive and out of reach for most people.

Despite these shortcomings, there has been significant progress in expanding pension coverage, largely due to the growth of tax-financed social pensions, which provide at least basic income security in older age. These are provided regardless of people's work histories and therefore also help reduce gender inequalities in older age.

While paid work declines significantly in older age, it remains an important source of income for many, and decent work⁹ has the potential to contribute to wellbeing, dignity, and active ageing. Globally 20 per cent of people aged over 65 are part of the labour force, rising to 42 per cent in low-income countries. Most of older people's paid work takes place in the informal economy, which comes with limited social protection, lower and less reliable incomes, and higher levels of occupational health and safety risks.¹⁰

Older people face many challenges in accessing financial services. Ageism and age-discrimination further compound these difficulties, as older people face age caps in accessing credit and negative attitudes regarding their abilities from financial service providers.¹¹ This can also exclude older people from accessing emergency social protection cash transfers.

Here are some ways to advocate for improved income security for this group:

Raise awareness

- Support older people in education about their financial rights through community outreach programmes, workshops, and collaboration with older people's associations.
- Implement financial literacy programmes specifically designed for older people.

Appeal to authorities

- Advocate for policies that promote financial inclusion for older people, including simplified pension plans and micro-savings programmes with flexible options.
- Push for the adoption of pension plans with consideration for those in informal employment or who have had to take time off work (i.e. maternity or sick leave).

Support informal safety nets

- Recognise the importance of traditional family and community support systems for older people. Look for ways to strengthen these networks through social programmes or community centres.

Leverage technology

- Explore innovative solutions and use technology to make financial services more accessible to older people, particularly those in remote areas. This could involve mobile banking apps, SMS-based money transfer services, or training on using online financial tools.

BOX 1**Examples of advocacy impacts**

When we advocate for ensuring income for older people, change can look like this:

- Around 5 million more older people are now getting social pensions or benefits worth about £750 million per year in countries where HelpAge has been active.
- More older men and women in Bangladesh, Jamaica, Nepal, Thailand, Uganda and Vietnam are receiving pensions or benefits than ever before.
- Increased awareness within the international community of the critical role of social protection to eradicate poverty, vulnerability, and inequalities, which have been exacerbated by increasingly frequent crises and shocks.

In the spotlight**Older people gain income security**

As part of the Accountability and Fulfilment for Older People to Raise their Dignity (AFFORD) programme, HelpAge is working closely with older people's associations (OPAs) in Ethiopia, Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania, which support their members to generate income, access services (such as social protection schemes) and healthcare. The programme ensures that older women's needs are integral to how services are delivered. Job training and livelihood grants enable older people to earn money to support themselves and their families. Community workshops build awareness about the contribution older people make in society. Through this programme, HelpAge has delivered technical assistance to these national governments and strengthened the communication between OPAs and authorities. The programme has led to tangible achievements including:

- Ethiopia and Malawi have signed-up to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights of Older People.
- In Mozambique, the Basic National Social Strategy (2016–24) now includes pensions.
- In Tanzania, the Zanzibar Universal Pensions Scheme came into law in 2020.

Top takeaways

- Older people, especially in LMICs, rely on multiple income sources, including work, pensions, family support, savings, and informal cash transactions.
- When work is not an option, and family support is limited, even small pensions become crucial to avoid falling into poverty, especially for the most vulnerable.
- Globally, far fewer women receive pensions than men, and their benefits tend to be lower due to employment discrimination. Disability benefits and pensions are often insufficient and can be mutually exclusive, leaving older people with disabilities to struggle financially.
- Paid work, especially decent work, remains important for income, wellbeing, and active ageing for many older adults, particularly in LMICs.
- Much of older people's work is informal, offering lower income, less security, and greater health risks.
- Ageism and discrimination make it harder for older adults to access financial services and social safety nets.



Ben Small/HelpAge International



1.2 Promoting healthy ageing

Promoting healthy ageing is about maximising people’s ability to continue to do the things that matter to them as they age.

Healthy ageing is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as *‘the functional ability that enables wellbeing in later life’*.

Our ‘functional ability’ is made up of our intrinsic capacity (our physical and mental abilities), the environments in which we live (including all the elements of our physical, social, economic, and cultural contexts) and the interaction between these.¹²

Ensuring older people and their communities are engaged and empowered to act on their own health and wellbeing and promoting older people’s access to the quality health and care services they need is essential to support healthy ageing.

Achieving Universal Health Coverage fit for an ageing world

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is defined as everyone, everywhere being able to access the health services they need, when and where they need them, without facing financial hardship.

Alongside action to address factors that shape our health and wellbeing across the life-course and tackle the root causes of poverty and inequality, progress towards UHC is essential for promoting healthy ageing. UHC is also essential for delivering social and economic development, and building resilient and equitable societies that respond effectively in times of crisis – whether pandemics, climate-related or other threats to global health security.

Most health and care systems worldwide remain unprepared for population ageing and associated rises in rates non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and disabilities. This is particularly true in LMICs where most older people live. Today, millions of older people in these countries are unable to access the services they need or are pushed into poverty doing so. Of the 1 billion people each year who face catastrophic health spending – that is health spending exceeding 10 per cent of a household’s budget – older households are most at risk.¹³ Meanwhile, critical opportunities for promoting healthy ageing across the life-course are being missed.

While there are differences in how people age, on average, older people are more likely to live with one or more health condition and to experience a disability. Just over half (51 per cent) of people aged 60 years and over globally are estimated to live with two or more health conditions and rates for all adults higher among women (39.4 per cent) than men (32.8 per cent).¹⁴ The World Health Organization estimates 34.4 per cent of older people experience a significant disability.¹⁵ Overall, women live longer than men but spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health or with a disability.

HelpAge has set out a framework for Achieving UHC fit for an ageing world.¹⁶ It calls for governments to champion age and disability inclusive and gender responsive health and care systems that deliver equitable, integrated and person-centred services, founded upon strong primary health care approaches that promote healthy ageing for all. This must include:

- Addressing the barriers older people face to enjoying their right to health, including those related to the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of health and long-term care and support services, as well as ageism and age discrimination in their funding, design, and delivery.
- Investing in the building blocks of a health system fit for purpose in an ageing world, including services, workforce, access to medicines, vaccines, and assistive technology, data and information systems; financing; and governance and leadership.
- Adopting a rights-based approach to the design and delivery of UHC at all levels, upholding the PANEL principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, and Equality; Empowerment; and Legality.

In the spotlight

Delivering age-friendly health services in Kenya and Mozambique

The Better Health for Older People in Africa Project (BHOPA) was a comprehensive health system strengthening project. It worked to make health systems more inclusive, responsive, and accountable to the needs of older people, particularly those with chronic diseases and disabilities.

The results were impressive:

- 220 community health workers trained on healthy ageing and supported to provide healthy ageing services.
- 50 clinical officers and 220 nurses trained on Integrated care for older people (ICOPE).
- The project reached 29,000 older people with health and care information and services at the community level, including through referrals.
- 1,000 OPA members were trained on healthy ageing and 360 older citizen monitoring groups received capacity building.
- Older people's leadership, participation and voice within health and care activity was strengthened, and their skills for promoting healthy ageing, monitoring the access and quality of health and care services, and advocating for more inclusive and age-friendly systems.

In Mozambique, the project helped improve access to free care in public hospitals for older people, by raising awareness of the policy of free medical services for older people in public hospitals among this group and health workers. In Kenya, the work contributed to increased numbers of older people registering with the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). Training of health and care staff and volunteers also led to more responsive services, outreach programmes, and referral processes.

The project also contributed to a draft national healthy ageing strategy in Kenya, and the forthcoming national ICOPE guidelines.

Top takeaways

- Older people are among those with the greatest need for health and care services, yet often the furthest behind in accessing them.
- To leave no one behind, action on health, including progress towards UHC, must meet the needs and uphold the rights of older people.
- Governments and health actors at all levels must champion age and disability inclusive and gender responsive health and care systems that deliver equitable, integrated and person-centred services, founded upon strong primary health care approaches that promote healthy ageing for all.
- Action on health must adopt a rights-based approach, upholding the PANEL principles of Participation, Accountability, Non-discrimination, and Equality; Empowerment; and Legality in the design and delivery of systems, services and programmes.



KwaraWazee



Muhammad Abdullah Hameed/
HelpAge International

1.3 Responding effectively to humanitarian crises

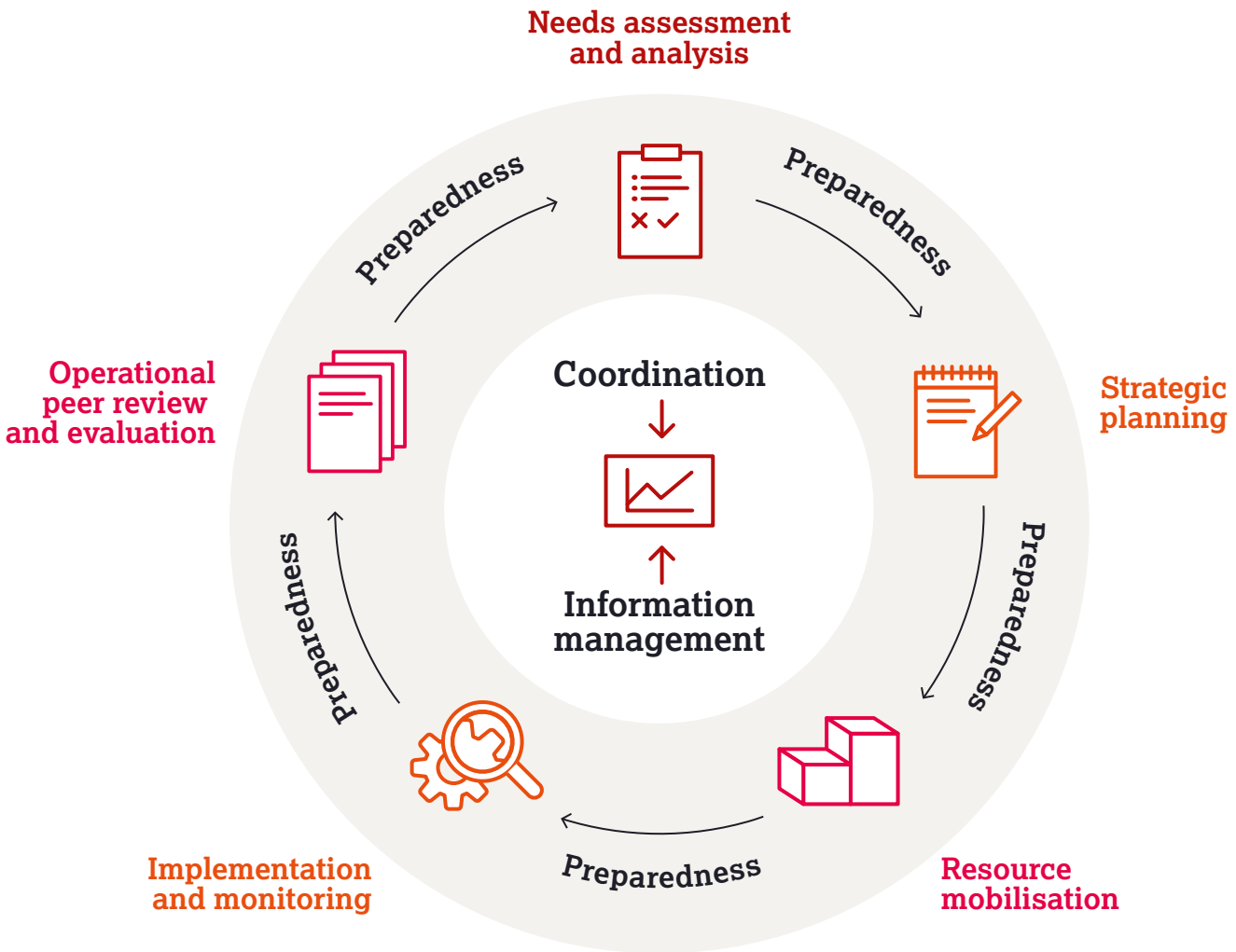
During internal conflict, war or natural disasters, communities and public services are shattered, and it is often older people who are the most affected but the most overlooked. A growing number of older people are affected by humanitarian crises.

The proportion of the population aged 50 and over in fragile countries, where conflict and disasters are more likely to occur, is expected to rise from 12.3 per cent (219.9 million) in 2020 to 19.2 per cent (586.3 million) in 2050.¹⁷ In emergency response, older people are typically overlooked in favour of larger, more visible groups. They are rarely consulted and often missed when data and information is collected so, their needs are unknown. Without information, humanitarian work often relies on outdated assumptions about older people.

How to create an age-inclusive humanitarian response for older people:

- Make food distribution points accessible for older people, and food aid packages appropriate to older people's particular nutritional requirements.
- Ensure older people who are physically unable to flee during movements and evacuations are not isolated from their family and communities.
- Address the health and care needs of older people, including higher rates of NCDs, such as heart disease or diabetes, and disability. Medicines and assistive products for older people should be sourced and age-appropriate health services established.
- Pay attention to older people in livelihoods programmes, such as microcredit (loan) schemes.
- Avoid delivering a 'one-size-fits all' approach. Consider age inclusion at every step of the humanitarian programme cycle (see **Figure 1: Humanitarian Programme Cycle** on next page →).

Figure 1: Humanitarian programme cycle and Age inclusion



Needs assessment and analysis: Ensure older people are involved in the design and deployment of surveys, as well as analysing the data that is collected.

Strategic planning: Include older people's opinions in the planning of the projects that will occur in their communities.

Resource mobilisation: Remember that older people are a resource with a wealth of knowledge.

Implementation and monitoring: Include older people in the project implementation, as volunteers or paid staff, so their views are not overlooked.

Operational peer review and evaluation: Ensure that older people participate.

Preparedness: Older people often have experience of living through natural disasters; so include them and their knowledge in preparedness planning.

Source: OCHA

BOX 2

The ‘Humanitarian-Development Nexus’

The volume, cost and duration of humanitarian assistance has increased dramatically over the past few years. Now 89 per cent of humanitarian funding worldwide is dedicated to responding to humanitarian needs,¹⁸ inevitably reducing development aid work with older people and other marginalised groups at risk of being left behind.

This requires that humanitarian and development efforts are more integrated, working towards achieving collective outcomes that reduce need, risk and vulnerability, over multiple years. This approach is referred to as the Humanitarian-Development Nexus (HDN). To ensure age inclusion across programmes and advocacy initiatives, a cross-sectoral approach needs to be used.



Andalus Media/HelpAge International



In the spotlight

Ukraine: We are still here

Two years of war in Ukraine through the eyes of older people; watch their experience via the link:

We are still here →

Age-friendly spaces in Bangladesh for people fleeing Myanmar

Hundreds of thousands of people, mostly Rohingya, have fled Myanmar to Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh to escape conflict and violence. Watch how age-friendly spaces can help provide health screenings and home-based care in the camp community, access to age-friendly toilets and water facilities, and ensure older people reach the services they need:

Myanmar crisis – The reality of daily life for older people in Bangladesh camps →

Top takeaways

- Including older people and people with disabilities at the start of an emergency response is essential to ensure we leave no one behind. This means ensuring teams collect disaggregated data to identify the diverse needs in the community and make sure humanitarian support is accessible to all.
- Promoting the participation of older people and people with disabilities strengthens the quality of the response and ensures the design and implementation of a programme is informed by the community at risk. *The Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for older people and people with disabilities* → can be key to this process.
- The Humanitarian Programme Cycle, seen in Figure 1, is a useful tool to ensure that older people are included at all stages of the project.



1.4 Ensuring accountability and safeguarding

Accountability

To ensure the participation of older people in programmes, we must be accountable to the communities and populations that our initiatives serve.

The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS) → (see **Figure 2** on next page) → sets out core commitments, with the idea of adopting a principled and people-centred approach. Newly updated for 2024, CHS has been strengthened, making it more people-centred, with a simplified structure and clearer language, promoting accessibility to a diverse range of actors. The CHS is not just applicable for humanitarian or emergency programmes, as it is the responsibility of everyone working in LMICs to ensure quality and accountability.

While it may seem challenging to meet all the CHS's core commitments during the initial steps of a programme (i.e. baseline, design, Rapid Needs Assessments), these are crucial to ensure quality and accountable programming and to ensure that older peoples' needs are at the centre.

Figure 2: Core Humanitarian Standard Commitments



Source: The CHS Alliance

While all nine CHS core commitments are important, there are some aspects that are particularly relevant when working with older men and women:

Recognising power imbalances

Conduct a thorough assessment of needs, capacity and risks that engage diverse groups of older people. Assessments must be followed up with the right mitigation measures. Cases of sexual exploitation, abuse or harassment can be more likely when programmes do not consider the specific needs and risks for older people.¹⁹

Informed participation throughout the project

Older people need access to information and services to protect themselves and their families. Organisations must ensure that information regarding their activities is easily accessible and is shared in appropriate formats and languages. Diverse views should be sought to create different ways to access information, participate and provide feedback. Two-way flows of information, done well, help to gain the trust of older people and their communities, ensuring they provide valuable feedback.

Importance of consultation and the feedback loop

Older people involved in projects must be made aware of the behaviour and support that they can expect from project staff and volunteers. This needs to be clearly explained, and not assumed. To ensure that services meet older people's needs, organisations must get the views of people they support and adjust their programmes in response. Programmes should be adapted regularly based on monitoring, feedback and complaints.

BOX 3

Humanitarian Inclusion Standards (HIS)

The Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for older people and people with disabilities →, (again, to be used in all programmes, not just emergency response), have been structured around the CHS, to ensure accountability to older people and people with disabilities. These standards can help to inform programme planning, community engagement and participation, programme quality and budgetary guidance to include the necessary adaptations. The standards are designed to help address the gap in understanding the needs, capacities and rights of older people and people with disabilities and promote their inclusion humanitarian and development programmes. They can be used to influence organisational policies and practice to be more inclusive – including policies to prevent discrimination, sexual exploitation, and all forms of abuse against older people and people with disabilities.

In the spotlight

Christian Aid Truth Truck

One year after the 2015 earthquake in Nepal, Christian Aid toured two affected districts asking people, including older people, what they thought about the aid they'd received. They asked what the most and least useful aid was, and what they would need to help them survive a disaster in the future. More than 200 people took part; listen to what they had to say:

Nepal Aftershocks: the people's truth about aid →

Top takeaways

Accountability refers to the responsible use of power (resources, decision-making) by NGOs and CSOs and UN agencies, combined with effective and quality programming that recognises the community of concern's dignity, capacity, and ability to be independent. Bringing accountability to older people means:

- **Put communities first:** The rights, needs, dignity and perspectives of older people and their communities should shape and define the work you do. Accountability mechanisms ensure you provide the best possible programmes and advocacy support.
- **Implementing the rights-approach:** Human rights principles should guide all work, including that relating to accountability. Participation in decision-making is a right and cannot be achieved without accountability mechanisms.²⁰
- **Feedback and complaints should be addressed,** filed, and referred to as a source of community information, rather than a box ticking exercise.

Safeguarding

Organisations are responsible for ensuring that their staff, operations, and programmes do no harm to older people, at-risk adults and children, and other vulnerable groups, nor expose them to abuse or exploitation. Organisations should safeguard everyone who encounters their work. This encompasses Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) and child safeguarding. It is good practice to think about how we safeguard everyone (not just children and adults at risk) in our organisations at all times, including protecting staff from harm and inappropriate behaviour such as bullying and harassment.

Abuse and neglect do not occur in isolation and an older person may be experiencing, or be at risk of, more than one kind of abuse or neglect. For example, financial abuse may include an element of physical abuse, or neglect may be a feature of coercive control. Perpetrators of abuse or neglect are often people who are trusted and relied on by an older person, such as family members or care staff. Official reports show that, compared to other age groups, people aged 85 and above are much more likely to be the subject of a safeguarding enquiry.²¹

Safeguarding is everyone's business

Everyone should be alert to possible signs of abuse or neglect of older people and acts on any concerns that arise. This includes friends and family, health and social care professionals, CSO staff and volunteers, and community members. It also applies to the police, as abusive or neglectful behaviour can also be a criminal offence, and some private sector agencies, not just those providing social and health care. For example, staff in financial institutions such as banks should be aware of the prevalence of financial abuse of older people and be alert to signs it may be taking place.

In the spotlight

Safeguarding during the Ukraine conflict

This evidence review focused on the safeguarding situation in Ukraine, Poland, Moldova and Romania during the Ukraine-Russia conflict. It reviewed the risk factors impacting people's safety and risk of harm, including from sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH). It also looked at the evidence on the scale of harm caused by the humanitarian community; and considered how effective their approaches were at reducing harm and sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment risks.

Evidence Review – Safeguarding in Ukraine, Moldova, Poland and Romania in relation to the conflict in Ukraine →

InterAction, Community Based Safeguarding, A Visual Toolkit

This document is a community-based safeguarding visual toolkit with multiple elements. This resource can be accessed as ready-to-use posters, as files to edit to make your own posters, or as ready to use visuals with and without text. You may also find the *introduction video* → helpful to find which set of documents is best suited for your needs.

Community Based Safeguarding Visual Toolkit →

Top takeaways

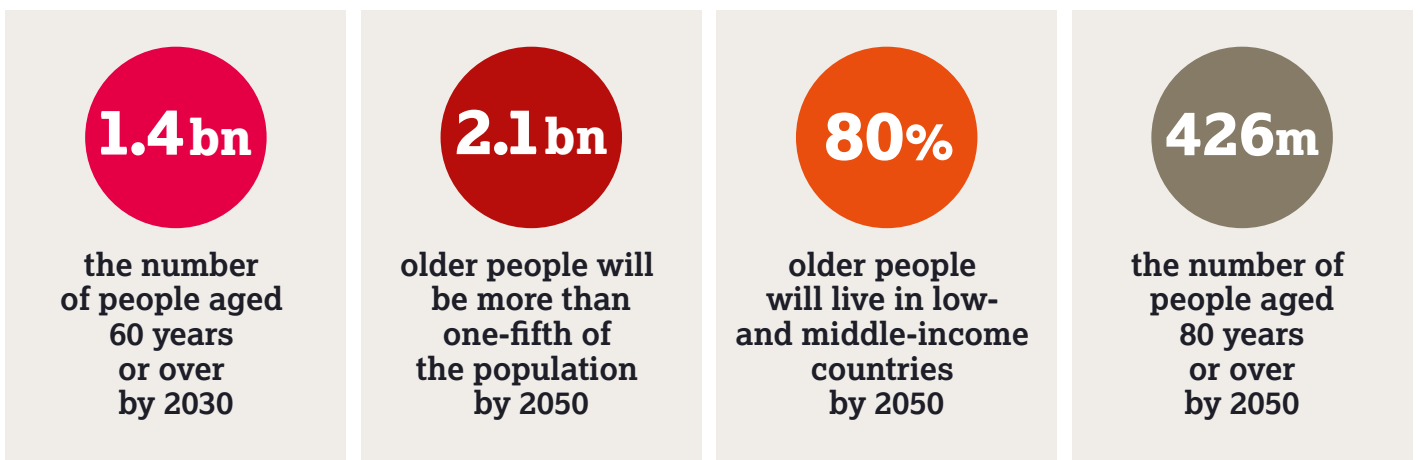
- It is crucial that organisations have safeguards in place to prevent abuse and exploitation of vulnerable groups, including older people.
- Safeguarding goes beyond the communities that we work in; it should protect everyone encountering an organisation's work, including staff.
- Abuse and neglect can be complex, with older people potentially experiencing or at risk of various forms at once.
- Being alert to signs of abuse or neglect and reporting concerns is everyone's responsibility, from family and friends to professionals and community members.

Ben Small/HelpAge International



1.5 Working towards inclusive data

Figure 3: Demographics for an ageing world



Source: HelpAge Corporate Report 2022

The use of sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) is essential for humanitarian and development programmes, advocacy, and learning. The application of a targeted methodology enables teams to understand the demographic composition, profile, and number of the older population with which they are working.

BOX 4**Washington Group Questions**

Given that almost half of older people are classified as having a disability, it is essential to collect data on disability wherever possible. *The Washington Group Short Set* → is a set of questions designed to identify people with functional limitations. The tool can be rapidly and easily deployed in a variety of settings.

The six Washington Group short set questions are:

1. Do you have difficulty seeing, even if wearing glasses?
2. Do you have difficulty hearing, even if using a hearing aid?
3. Do you have difficulty walking or climbing steps?
4. Do you have difficulty remembering or concentrating?
5. Do you have difficulty with self-care such as washing all over or dressing?
6. Using your usual (customary) language, do you have difficulty communicating, for example understanding or being understood?

Answers:

1. No, no difficulty
2. Yes, some difficulty
3. Yes, a lot of difficulty
4. Cannot do at all

Studies show that using the term ‘disability’ in relation to the data collection can lead to unreliable data, because of respondents being reluctant to reveal their functional limitations. Data collectors should avoid any verbal references to ‘disability’ in an introductory statement.

You can access the Washington Group Questions, part of the cbm Humanitarian Hands-on Tool, here:

The Washington Group Short Set →

Without proper data on the communities in which we work, we cannot design and plan programmes or advocacy initiatives that will address the concerns of older people, their families, and their communities. Inadequate data collection causes gaps in information about the lived realities of older persons, meaning that inequalities faced by older persons frequently remain invisible.

Older people are often excluded from surveys and national censuses, which affects the extent to which they can participate in society and enjoy their human rights. **HelpAge's Data Technical Brief explains why this happens and the ways forward →**. In addition, demographic and health surveys typically exclude women aged 50 and over and men aged 55 or 60 and over.²² Good data provides essential knowledge about the needs of older people and enables policymakers to identify gaps and therefore improve their approach and measures. Data can also contribute to awareness and the empowerment of older people, highlighting the structural and systematic ways in which they are left behind. Collecting disaggregated data contributes to capturing the diversity of older people and their intersectionality.

Ideally, data should be disaggregated by 5- or 10-year age cohorts and include information on disability, to reflect the diversity of older people. **See Box 4 on the Washington Group Questions →**. Older people should actively participate at all stages of data collection, analysis, use and reporting, including in the development of surveys.

BOX 5**The importance of qualitative data**

We should also remember the importance of qualitative data and its role in creating a complete picture of the situation, as well as the opportunities it provides to allow for community engagement.

You can find more examples of quantitative data gathering from a community perspective here: **Missing Voices: 2030 and Counting →**.

It is also important to include sources of secondary sources of information to confirm or discount other data. These can include technical reports, government data, reports from international and national agencies and peer-reviewed articles.

HelpAge has created a **technical brief →** to support practitioners with the collection, disaggregation and analysis of the SADDD (also available as the fifth link on this page of the **Resources section →**).

In the spotlight

Initiatives that are working to improve data collection on older people:

Titchfield City Group on Ageing →

The aim of this UN Statistical Division City Group is to develop ageing-related data across the life cycle in official statistics. The City Group will also address existing issues and deficits in data on ageing. It will also encourage governments to adopt these standards and address these gaps.

Inclusive Data Charter →

The Charter's aim is to advance the availability and use of inclusive and disaggregated data so that governments and organisations better understand, address, and monitor the needs of marginalised people, and ensure no one is left behind. Its vision and principles were developed by representatives from governments, UN agencies, and CSOs.

Leave No One Behind Partnership →

The Leave No One Behind partnership was launched in 2017 to provide a practical solution to the challenge of marginalised communities being invisible in official statistics, resulting in policies that do not fully reflect their situations and needs, and endangering the achievement of the SDGs. The partnership addresses this challenge by focusing on 'community generated data' on SDGs and advocating for its inclusion in official SDG reporting.

United Nations Collaborative on Citizen Data →

This aims to bring together partners from different sectors to:

- a. fill critical data gaps on groups that are often less visible in data, such as migrants, people with disabilities and Indigenous People
- b. enhance citizen participation in government decision-making and advance values such as fairness, inclusiveness, openness, and transparency in statistics.

Top takeaways

- Collecting, analysing, and using sex, age and disaggregated data will allow for the intersectionality of older people to be properly captured and factored into programme design.
- The participation of older people and other community members in survey design, data collection and analysis will allow for organisations, groups, and governments to access and respond to better quality data.
- Citizen generated data (CGD) can be a valuable tool for collecting clear, robust data; it is important to look at existing initiatives within communities to determine what data is already being gathered.
- Don't forget the value of qualitative data including stories, testimonies, and information directly from the mouths of older people; their experience is varied and valuable.

Reminder:
Where you see an arrow (→) you can click on it to link to another page in this handbook or to link to an external web page.



1.6 Challenging ageism

Ageism is stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination against a person based on their age.

It leaves older people excluded, considered different, restricted in what they can do or simply treated like they do not exist. It prevents age equality, denies older people their human rights, and can have a serious impact on health and wellbeing.

Ageism is widespread and often overlooked. Unlike other forms of discrimination, including sexism and racism, it is often accepted and unchallenged:

- **Ageism is widespread:** AARP reports that ageism is prevalent in various aspects of life, including employment, healthcare, housing, and technology.²³
- **Ageism can impact financial security:** A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that age discrimination in hiring can lead to lower wages and reduced retirement savings for older workers.²⁴
- **Ageism is linked to poorer health outcomes:** WHO states that ageism is associated with earlier death (by an estimated 7.5 years), poorer physical and mental health, and slower recovery from disability.²⁵
- **Ageism can limit social connection:** Research published in the *Journal of Gerontological Social Work* highlights how ageism can contribute to social isolation and loneliness among older adults.²⁶

The *UN Global Report on Ageism 2021* → outlines strategies to combat ageism including improving policy and laws that protect older people's human rights, educational interventions, intergenerational contact interventions and campaigning.

BOX 6

Definition of Ageism

“Stereotyping and discrimination against individuals or groups on the basis of their age: ageism, can take many forms, including prejudicial attitudes, discriminatory practices, or institutional policies and practices that perpetuate stereotypical beliefs.”²⁷

World Health Organization

Systemic and gendered ageism

We often talk about ageism by focusing on negative actions, attitudes, prejudices as well as practices and laws and how these affect older people. Less focus is given to exploring its systemic nature addressing the different elements that work together to perpetuate ageism throughout our lives.²⁸

Gendered ageism can occur across the life course and affects both older women and men. However, older women are negatively impacted by both their age and their gender with far-reaching consequences.²⁹

Our approach to challenging ageism:

- 1. Capacity Building:** We train staff, network members and partners to recognise how ageism manifests itself in their countries and encourage them to take action to challenge it. Our training is tailor made and can be delivered in person and also online.
- 2. Elevating Lived Experiences:** Hearing directly from older people provides us with greater insights into older people’s experiences of ageism. We conduct qualitative research as well as collect lived experience case studies so that we can amplify older people’s experiences and gain a better understanding of the intersections and ageism.
- 3. Empowering Advocates:** We train older people to equip them with the knowledge and tools to become effective advocates against ageism within their communities.
- 4. Collaboration and Partnerships:** Through collaborating with others and building partnerships, we leverage diverse perspectives and strategies, fostering innovative approaches to challenge ageism.
- 5. Targeted Campaigns:** We campaign to highlight the diverse experiences and contributions of older people while confronting harmful narratives that perpetuate discrimination.

In the spotlight

Guide to exploring systemic ageism →

We believe that strengthening our understanding of how ageism works at different levels in society will help us design more effective strategies to counter it. We have created a practical guide to help campaigners do this. It contains an analytical framework, which can be applied to your own context through guided activities and worksheets. Our campaign partners in Cameroon, Philippines, and Uganda used this guide to develop their own ageism campaigns.

Older women's experiences of gendered ageism →

Despite advances in ageism research, there is little evidence from LMICs, let alone testimonies of gendered ageism. To help fill this gap HelpAge conducted in-depth interviews with 18 older women from Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda, who shared how gendered ageism manifests in their daily lives. You can read further about this in the Gender section of this guide.



Kierran Allan/HelpAge International

Top takeaways

Proactive steps that can challenge ageism include:

- **Challenge our own ageist beliefs:** Gaining insight into how our biases affect our work is crucial. We need to identify and challenge any ageist beliefs we hold.
- **Raise awareness of older people's lived experiences of ageism:** By sharing personal narratives and experiences of ageism, we can humanise the issue and foster empathy and understanding.
- **Provide training for organisations to understand how ageism manifests itself in their countries:** Collaborating with local organisations empowers communities to recognise and address ageism in culturally relevant ways, bringing sustainable change.
- **Support ageism advocacy initiatives:** By providing resources and amplifying advocacy efforts, we can mobilise collective action to challenge discriminatory practices and policies that perpetuate ageism.
- **Use our tools to design a campaign that challenges the systemic nature of ageism:** Leveraging tools and resources enables the development of strategic campaigns that target the root causes of ageism, driving systemic change and promoting inclusivity.
- **Build intergenerational projects or activities:** It has been proven that interventions that foster interactions between generations help to reduce ageism.
- **Understand how ageism intersects with other areas of your work:** Exploring the intersectionality of ageism with various sectors like humanitarian responses unveils systemic inequalities and enables tailored interventions to address them effectively.
- **Join the WHO's global campaign to combat ageism:** Joining the WHO's global campaign provides a platform for collective action and collaboration on a global scale, amplifying efforts to combat ageism and promote age-friendly societies worldwide.

www.aworld4allages.org/ →





1.7 Encouraging voice and participation

Strengthening Voice

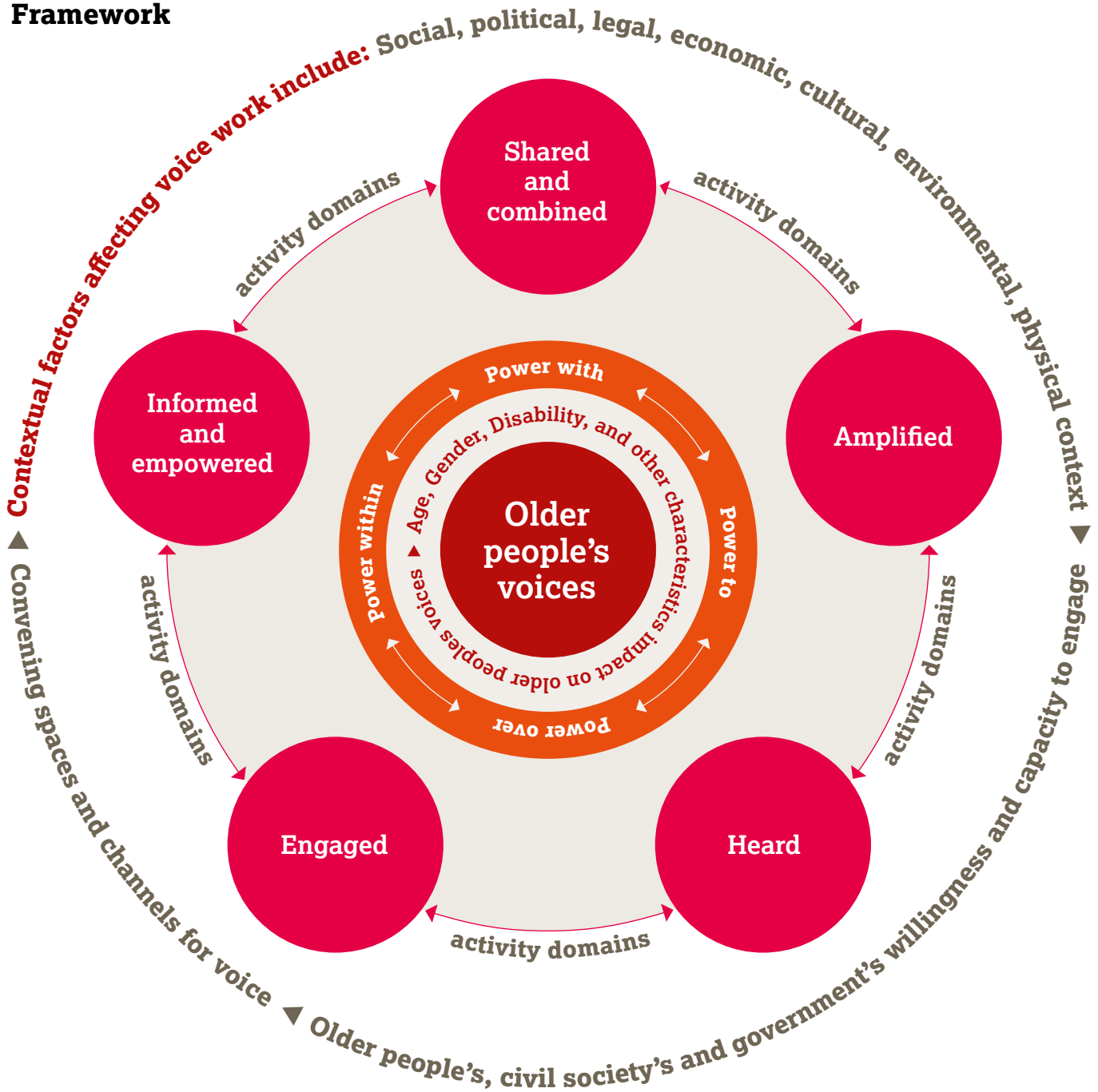
Older women and men have a right to be empowered and informed so they can speak out, be heard by those with power, and effect change. Strengthening the voices of older women and men is essential for them to be able to claim their rights, participate actively in development processes and lead dignified, healthy, and secure lives.

Yet, for many older people, being able to exercise their voices and be heard is a struggle – from making their own decisions within family contexts and according to their own values and preferences, to ensuring they are included and able to effect change within social and political spheres at local, national and international levels.

Ensuring that the voices of all older women and men are strengthened means understanding, analysing and engaging in the complex, messy and, often, highly confrontational contexts where people express themselves. It also means addressing and challenging deep-rooted power imbalances, exclusion, and discriminatory attitudes towards older people by transforming the systems, institutions, and the structures (legal, political, economic and social) through which these are reinforced.

Ensuring no one is left behind means undertaking in depth power analysis of how these realities and their intersection affect older people's voices in different spaces and designing transformative interventions.

Figure 4: HelpAge’s Voice Framework



HelpAge’s Voice Framework,³⁰ illustrated above in Figure 4, outlines five domains of Voice along a continuum from older people’s voices being ‘engaged’ to older people’s voices being ‘heard’. However, while these domains are presented along a continuum, work on each should not be thought of necessarily as a linear process. Older people’s voices being heard by decision makers and able to effect change may lead to more opportunities to engage older people in activities that strengthen their Voice, while voices of older people being amplified may lead to more of them being informed and empowered.

Elements of each domain may also overlap – the line between one domain and another is not always clear cut. On the other hand, where two activities are grouped together – for example ‘Informed and Empowered’ and ‘Amplified’, this is intended to reflect the symbiotic relationship of these activities, though each may also occur independently.

The Voice Framework recognises that older people are diverse and emphasises the importance of including marginalised older people in Voice-related activities. There is also a toolkit, to help others understand the key elements of the framework and to strengthen their ability to implement activities that ensure older people are heard at all levels. The toolkit comprises a facilitator’s guide, six training modules, and a series of handouts.

In the spotlight

Power Walk

A **Power Walk exercise** → can help us understand the challenges that older people face when it comes to Voice. In this activity, participants experience firsthand how power dynamics affect one’s ability to be heard. By assigning different ‘power levels’ and navigating obstacles, the Power Walk simulates situations where voices are silenced or limited. It is a powerful reminder of the importance of creating spaces where everyone feels comfortable speaking up, especially those who have traditionally been marginalised.

Throughout the walk, introduce challenges that simulate situations where power imbalances affect someone’s ability to be heard or participate.

Examples:

- **Narrow passage:** A narrow passage symbolises limited resources. Only a certain number of people from each group can pass through at a time, forcing negotiation or prioritising who gets heard.
- **Obstacles:** Obstacles on the path represent challenges faced by certain groups. Depending on their power level, some groups might have to navigate more obstacles than others, limiting their ability to move forward.
- **Voice limitations:** Blindfolds or limitations on speaking can represent situations where certain voices are unheard or silenced.
- **Debrief and discussion:** After the walk, have a group discussion focused on Voice and inclusion:
 - How did your assigned power level affect your ability to navigate the challenges?
 - Did certain groups have unfair advantages or disadvantages in being heard?
 - How can we ensure everyone has an equal opportunity to express their needs and concerns?



Top takeaways

Don't reinvent the wheel! Use existing resources

HelpAge International's Voice framework was developed to guide action on Voice. It illustrates how different activities relate to each other and how, collectively, they contribute to strengthening older people's voices. The Voice framework includes five domains of activity:

- **Engaged** – activities to motivate older people to engage in decision-making processes.
- **Informed and empowered** – activities to support older people to be informed about issues affecting their lives and empowered to participate in decision-making processes.
- **Shared and combined** – activities to enable older people to share their experiences, identify their needs and rights, and combine their views to create a collective voice.
- **Amplified** – activities to support older people to communicate their views by using different channels of communication.
- **Heard** – activities to support older people have their Voices heard by those in positions of power.

From participation to meaningful engagement

Older people have the same rights as others, but they are at risk of being excluded if stakeholders do not involve them actively in decisions that concern them. Through consultative processes such as participatory assessments, older people can help design and implement programmes that meet their own needs and build on their skills and experience. Employing accessible and context-specific participatory methodologies at each stage of the project cycle is a core action highlighted by the *UNHCR Policy on Age Gender and Diversity* →.

The right to participate is recognised in the international human rights framework and enshrined in Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. It means that all older people have an equal right to participate in the conduct of public affairs, either directly or through their freely chosen representatives. They also have an equal right to vote and be elected and have access to public service positions.

In policy and advocacy, participation is often only used at the early stage of policy development through stakeholder consultations. Meaningful participation however involves stakeholders in all stages of the policy cycle. This includes research, data collection, priority setting, policy formulation, budgeting, implementation, and review and evaluation.

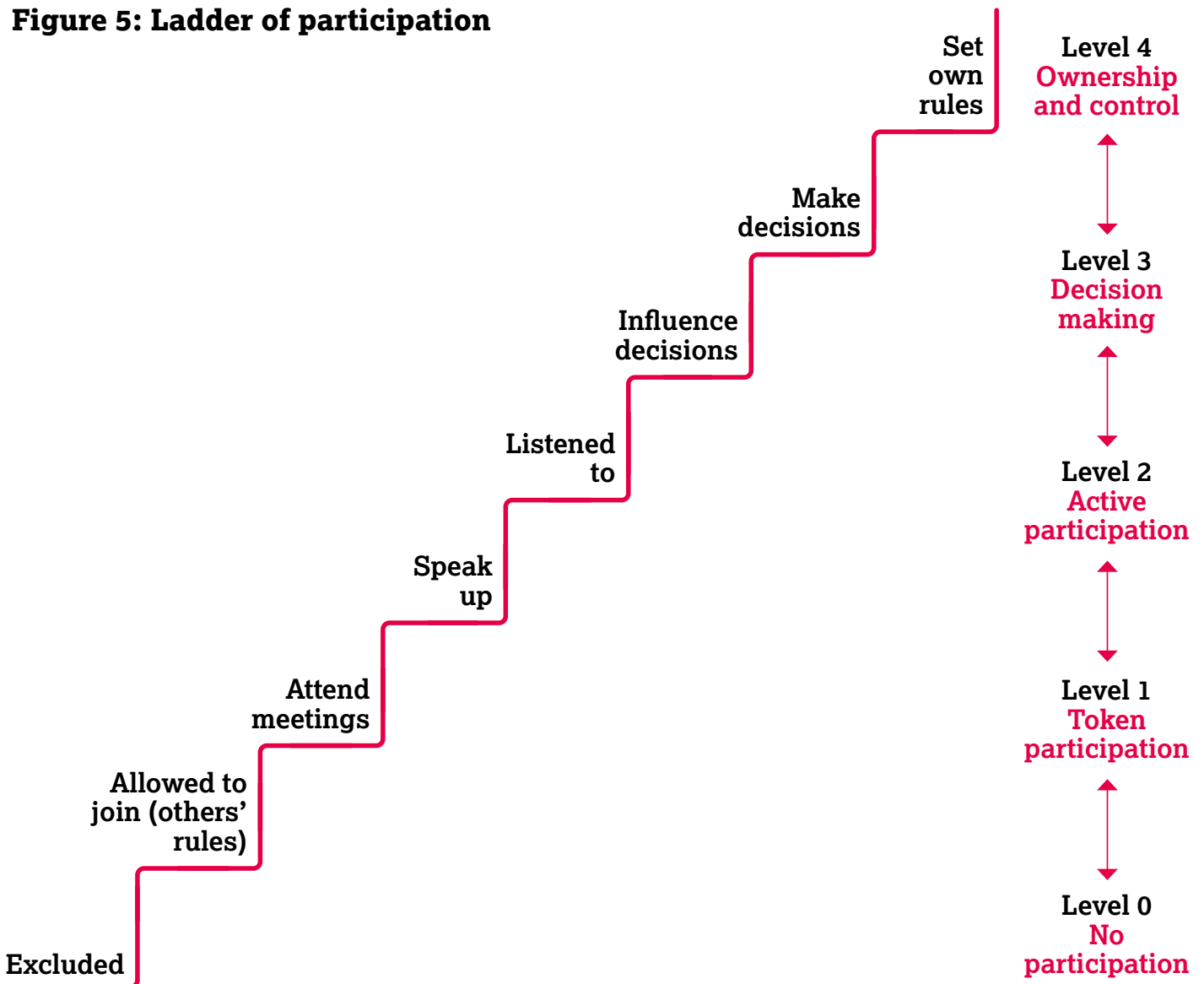
Meaningful participation depends on effective stakeholder involvement and engagement in decision-making which involves a two-way flow of information between decision-makers and stakeholders. Joint decision-making and transferring control over decision-making and resources to stakeholders are empowering forms of participation along a 'continuum of participation' (**Box 7** below, and **Figure 5** →).

BOX 7**Continuum of participation**

- **Contribution:** Voluntary or other forms of input to predetermined programmes and projects.
- **Information sharing:** Stakeholders are informed about their rights, responsibilities, and options.
- **Consultation:** Stakeholders are given the opportunity to interact and provide feedback and may express suggestions and concerns. However, analysis and decisions are usually made by outsiders, and stakeholders have no assurance that their input will be used.
- **Cooperation and consensus building:** Stakeholders negotiate positions and help determine priorities, but the process is directed by outsiders.
- **Decision-making:** Stakeholders have a role in making decisions on policy, project design and implementation.
- **Partnership:** Stakeholders work together as equals towards mutual goals.
- **Empowerment:** Transfer of control over decision-making and resources to stakeholders.

Tools commonly used in participatory policymaking include information sharing tools, consultation tools and active participation tools.³¹ Each of these tools requires interaction between governments and citizens. While governments may disseminate information about a policy or citizens may access information, in both cases the flow of information is often one way.³² Consultation tools facilitate a two-way process; however, they are quite low on the participation continuum. Active participation tools are preferable, being at the higher end of the participation continuum and representing a two-way relationship.

Figure 5: Ladder of participation



Source: <https://blogs.cornell.edu/gblblog/files/2016/09/STSS.Harts-Ladder-of-Participation-19tvldl.pdf>

In the spotlight

Putting participation into action

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) is a type of qualitative research, which can be used to gain an in depth understanding of a community or situation. It is widely used in work involving local communities. PLA is a participatory methodology and should always be conducted with the full and active participation of community members. The main purpose of PLA is to support people within communities to analyse their own situation, rather than have it analysed by outsiders, and to ensure that any learning is then translated into action.³³ Some participatory tools include:

- **Community maps:** Hand-drawn maps with details important to the community.
- **Transect diagrams:** Maps highlighting land use zones, created by walking through an area.
- **Social maps:** Maps showing where different groups live, highlighting their priorities.
- **Daily routine diagrams:** Visualise daily routines of different groups to understand workload distribution.
- **Flow diagrams:** Track the flow of resources or impacts of a project.
- **Preference ranking:** Prioritise options by voting with points.
- **Timelines:** Show key events over time, highlighting different perspectives.
- **Role play:** Act out situations to explore different viewpoints.

Top takeaways

We must go beyond tokenistic inclusion and strive for the meaningful participation of older people in the programmes and advocacy initiatives that affect them, as is their right. The following steps can work towards this meaningful engagement:

- Use a range of approaches and methodologies to consult with older people directly, considering different factors including age, gender, disability, culture, mobility, language, and accessibility.
- Support the involvement of older people in decision-making and leadership structures while recognising that older women and older people with disabilities, in particular, may have different needs to access these structures or opportunities.
- Involve older people in the design of the programmes, and programme monitoring and evaluation, to review how the activities are meeting their needs. They may need support in their roles and responsibilities.
- Support or create OPAs where they do not exist. Strengthen their capacity to support older people and advocate for their specific needs.
- Advocate for the inclusion of older people in national policies and programmes.³⁴



1.8 Protecting rights

As the global population continues to age at a rapid pace, many of the world's older people are still denied their human rights.

Older people face particular challenges in accessing their rights due to ageist perceptions and behaviour that is deeply rooted in our laws, practices and institutions. When ageism and age discrimination are not addressed, sanctioned, measured or sometimes even noticed, it often leads to violations of human rights in older age. Intersectional discrimination based on age and gender, disability, ethnicity, health status etc. creates further challenges for older people.

The invisibility of older people in the international human rights framework combined with systematic and institutionalised ageism has led to fragmented and inadequate protection and monitoring of their fundamental rights. The lack of a specific international legally binding instrument on the rights of older people (a new UN convention) and recognition of the human rights challenges faced in older age also means that ageing and the rights of older people are often excluded from global policy.

A new convention on the rights of older persons would address the gaps in the existing human rights system. It would:

- Cover all areas of older people's lives that are currently not adequately provided for.
- Clarify states' human rights obligations and responsibilities towards older people and require states to implement laws and policies that promote older people's equality, dignity and autonomy.
- Require states to collect, disaggregate, analyse and disseminate information and data on older people's rights.
- Establish dedicated monitoring and accountability systems.

BOX 8**Exploring systemic ageism and human rights**

To learn more about how ageism works at different levels in society, see HelpAge's practical guide: *Exploring systemic ageism* → as mentioned in the Ageism section.

HelpAge has compiled a *Human Rights Training Toolkit* → designed to develop a deeper understanding of ageism's impact on older people's human rights and equality and significance of a rights-based approach in development and humanitarian efforts. It teaches the essential elements of a human rights-based approach to ageing and how to implement it in practice. Additionally, it enhances skills for advocating for older people's human rights and promoting a rights-based approach to ageing.

HelpAge and our network members and partners actively engage and advocate for a convention with the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWGA),³⁵ created by the UN General Assembly in 2010 to consider the gaps in the human rights framework and how best to fill them.

HelpAge also supports the work of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP),³⁶ a network of over 400 organisations worldwide. Its mission is to support and enhance civil society engagement with Member States and national human rights institutions (NHRIs) at all levels around a convention on the rights of older persons.

In the spotlight

Human rights in Tanzania: older women stand in solidarity

In two districts of Mwanza, a region in north-west Tanzania, older women are changing their lives.

Many know of someone who has been killed, abused or threatened for their land and they might have been on the receiving end of this kind of treatment themselves. A combination of ageism, age discrimination, gender inequality and economic disempowerment mean these older women are at risk of and subjected to financial exploitation and physical violence, sometimes even murder.

Often, incidences of abuse and murder are not investigated. Perpetrators are never brought to justice. This is a violent denial of older women's basic human rights to property and to life.

HelpAge International and our partners Magu Poverty Eradication Rehabilitation Centre initiated projects to empower women in Mwanza to challenge this discrimination. Awareness-raising through village workshops, local theatre groups, and local and national campaigns helped the wider community better understand older women's rights, and media outlets promoted these messages widely.

Outreach to older women ensures they understand their rights and share this knowledge with their community. They are supported to write wills to protect their properties when they or their husbands die, or sometimes to write wills together. They are also encouraged to document their family histories to help support their property claims.



Clemence Eliah/HelpAge International

Top takeaways

Older people are denied their rights worldwide. A UN convention would protect older people's rights, change attitudes to older people and contribute towards greater age-inclusion in government policies and programmes. HelpAge has produced guidelines to support CSOs wishing to influence their governments to support a convention. You can find about more about them here: [FAIR Advocacy Guidelines](#) →

Figure 6: FAIR Advocacy Guidelines – Four steps for you to take





Ben Small/HelpAge International

1.9 Promoting an intergenerational approach

An intergenerational approach encourages two or more generations to work together for their mutual benefit to promote greater communication, understanding and response.

Intergenerational activities have been proven to support older and younger people to work together; encourage cross generational bonding; and address issues affecting one generation, or both, as well as the wider community.

Using an intergenerational approach can help break down stereotypes and challenge misconceptions held by older people about younger people, and vice versa. It can bridge knowledge gaps between older and younger generations in important areas such as natural resource management. And it can challenge existing power dynamics within a community or society based on age and other factors.

HelpAge has identified 14 principles to establish and execute successful intergenerational approaches:

1. Understand power dynamics

Do a stakeholder analysis to understand existing dynamics, including gender, power or social dynamics and issues that people are facing. Detailed instructions on how to run a power analysis can be found here: *Christian Aid Programme Practice: Power Analysis* →.

2. The importance of context

Make sure the approach is specific to the context and promotes local ownership. Knowledge of the local, regional and national context will help ensure that the project is more likely to succeed.

3. Put gender justice at the centre

Completing a gender analysis beforehand is essential. HelpAge has some guidance on this in the *Gender Equality Learning Pack* →, part of the *Gender Equality Training Toolkit* →.

4. Clarify your role

Be clear about your role and the value you can add (this might just be listening and supporting people in the process of engaging with one another). If issues emerge, let the solutions come from others in the community.

5. Don't start from scratch

There may already be initiatives happening in communities, but just without the label of 'intergenerational'. Take the time to establish what groups have already been formed and find out what their power dynamics are.

6. Involve diverse members of the community from the outset

An approach which looks at how various identities intersect gives more understanding and context to the nature of dynamics and any reasons for exclusion/discrimination. Hold separate meetings with different groups before bringing them all together, so diverse points of view can be captured and addressed.

7. Avoid making assumptions

Ask people, listen, and try to let go of your own biases, conscious or unconscious. Everyone works in different ways at and different speeds.

8. Pay attention to who leads and who can lead

Try to avoid reproducing or reinforcing unequal power relations and acknowledge that different generations might have different leadership styles.

9. Start with the premise that everyone has a skill and some knowledge to transfer

Everyone has a skill to share that has equal value and should be appreciated. Local and traditional knowledge should be shared and valued.

10. Use a rights-based approach as a compass

Adopting a rights-based approach aligns your intervention with internationally recognised rights, standards and principles including participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment and legality.

11. Go beyond participation to meaningful engagement

Ensure the project supports those taking part so that they can raise their voices and engage with each other meaningfully to find common goals.

12. Activities should be fun!

Try to develop engaging activities that are fun for community members to break down barriers and facilitate engagement.

13. Think ‘structural’ changes

To maximise the impact of your work, think about how it can support enduring change – not just around policies but also in terms of social norms.

14. Track your progress and measure change

This should start from the very beginning (in the planning and design phase) and go through to the end (evaluation).

HelpAge’s intergenerational guide also includes nine key steps to get your intergenerational approaches off to a strong start:

Bringing Generations Together for Change →.



In the spotlight

BOX 9

Climate change and an intergenerational approach

Between August 2023 and March 2024, HelpAge International, Restless Development, and a researcher from Newcastle University's Living Deltas Hub collaborated on a pilot project to explore the effectiveness of an intergenerational approach in supporting locally-led responses to the climate crisis.

In Nepal and Uganda, local partners and facilitators organised dialogues in rural and urban settings, enabling both younger and older people to share their experiences of climate change, coping strategies, and ideas for future action. The approach was guided by an emphasis on meaningful participation and respecting diverse experiences, while acknowledging power dynamics.

You can find out more through:

- *the learning document* →
- *a video capturing the intergenerational experience* →
- *and a blog written by a local team member of Restless Development* →





Top takeaways

- Take time to discover what is going on in a community and how generations are interacting.
- Start with separate discussions with each age group to allow for any difficulties to be aired ahead of time, reducing the possibility of community friction.
- Acknowledge and highlight that everyone has something to learn, and everyone has something to teach. Often, the benefits from intergenerational approaches are unexpected and people learn much more than they expected.
- Share your experiences and progress! More and more, local and national authorities are paying attention to the importance of intergenerational work and its benefits.



Malik Alymkulov/HelpAge International

1.10 Developing age-friendly cities and communities

Population ageing and urbanisation are two of the biggest social transformations of the 21st century. Cities and communities have a key role in enabling people to live longer and healthier lives while fostering fairer and more sustainable societies.

An age-friendly city or community (AFCC) is designed for and promotes diversity, inclusion, and cohesion across all ages and capacities. AFCCs might have, for example: accessible and safe road and transport infrastructure, barrier-free access to buildings and houses, and public seating and sanitary facilities. They enable older people to stay active, keep connected, and contribute to their community's economic, social, and cultural life. An AFCC can foster solidarity among generations, improving relationships between residents of all ages. They also have mechanisms to reach out to older people at risk of social isolation, falls or violence through personalised and tailored efforts.

HelpAge has identified a few steps that can be taken for successful, low-cost initiatives that increase age inclusion and AFCCs. These can also be found in the *Let's Go Guide*, provided in the resources section.

Below are some steps on how to work with older people to increase small scale and low cost AFCC initiatives:

Ask older people about their daily lives in their community

- Ensure diversity in the voices that are heard: someone who is 60 will not have the same experience as someone who is 90; two 70-year-olds might have very different experiences based on intersecting identities i.e. disabilities, ethnicity, etc.
- Strive for a participatory approach: don't forget to reach out to older people who live alone and are often excluded and make sure any written surveys meet accessibility standards. Focus groups about city life with small groups of older people are a good means of gathering diverse viewpoints. Consider the mix of group participants and make sure everyone is comfortable sharing their experiences.

Build a coalition for change

To help build momentum for change and make scarce resources stretch further, consider the existing assets in the community (people, places) and how they can get involved to help bring about transformative change. For example local government, transport authorities, universities and schools, faith-based groups, and local media.

Develop a strategy

A strategy formulated by older people with other stakeholders and partners to generate commitment to work towards shared objectives:

- Identify key decision makers, government departments and organisations to influence. Understand how decisions are taken and who needs to be engaged to bring about change.
- Determine which local authority departments need to be involved to provide the relevant permissions and support for your projects, particularly when doing activities in public spaces.
- Consider how your objectives for older people can be included in other local government strategies around public spaces, transport networks etc.
- Design a simple monitoring plan with dates and indicators of success.
- Establish a diverse and inclusive group of older people to participate in monitoring and evaluation activities.

Put your ideas into action

Sometimes even the smallest projects and initiatives can help develop a more age-friendly community.

BOX 10

Important to remember

Strong social connections are vital for our mental and overall well-being. Loneliness and isolation are widespread, with a significant number of older adults feeling lonely. Research overwhelmingly shows these factors have a serious negative impact on their lifespan, physical and mental health, and quality of life. This is why AFCCs are critical to the wellbeing of older people.

You can find out more about AFCCs throughout the world through WHO's *Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities* → of which HelpAge is an affiliate member.

In the spotlight

Don't forget about the voices of older people! Supporting older people to have their voices heard on urban issues can lead to great developments in terms of AFCCs.

In 2023, HelpAge worked with partners across Latin America to support older people in their advocacy initiatives focusing on age-friendly cities and communities. Check out the video to see how older people, their voices, and all other stakeholders benefited from the experience: *Voice and Age-Friendly Cities and Communities* →

Voice Toolkit Module 5: Age Friendly Cities and Communities → A module to help practitioners and older people understand the key elements of the Voice framework and to strengthen their ability to implement activities that ensure older people are heard at all levels. The toolkit includes a facilitator's guide, six training modules, and a series of handouts.

Top takeaways

Find simple ways to engage with older people on the issues in their cities and communities that affect them, for example:

- Use short, guided walks or tours with older people to enable them to point out different barriers and challenges in their local environment.
- Conduct simple surveys in local parks and squares to find out what older people think is missing or can be improved.
- Organise focus groups about city life:
 - Consider the mix; who is in the room and who is not
 - Some questions: what do you value most about living in the city? How do you feel when you are walking through the city? If you could change three things in the city, what would they be?
 - Keep questions open ended to allow for conversation to evolve naturally.



1.11 Promoting gender equality

Gender equality means equal rights, responsibilities, opportunities and treatment of women, men and people of other genders in all of their diversities, including age.

Challenging the assumption that older people are genderless or asexual is vital to addressing ageism. Gendered processes continue to shape the lives of people in older age, intensifying disadvantages faced by women and potentially disempowering men. Understanding gender relations and power dynamics throughout life is essential to comprehend the experience of ageing. As mentioned in other notes on intersectionality, it is important to prioritise the wellbeing, dignity, and voice of older people in their diverse identities in programming. Neglecting gender inequalities poses a risk of perpetuation and exclusion, and can result in further discrimination. Therefore, recognising and addressing gender disparities is essential for fostering inclusivity, meeting the needs and rights of all older people, promoting their dignity and ensuring that our approach promotes equal opportunities and outcomes.

Age and gender tend to intersect in the following ways:

Gender-based discrimination and gender inequality can accumulate throughout a person's lifetime and become more pronounced in older age. Older women in particular often face double discrimination based on both their age and their gender, while older men can experience challenges to their masculinity that can lead to feelings of isolation.

Gender inequality significantly impacts health outcomes for all older people due to stereotypes being assigned to older people and discriminatory attitudes, particularly for older women who often lack access to health and care services, including sexual and reproductive health, and are likely to spend a greater proportion of their lives in ill health or disability. Older women outlive men by an average of five years, yet a greater proportion of those years are spent in ill health or with a disability.

Older women are more likely to take on unpaid care responsibilities (older women dedicate an average of **4.3 hours per day** → to unpaid care and domestic work – survey data for 47 countries confirm that older women aged 65+ spend, on average, **nearly twice as much time** → on unpaid care work than older men) within their families or work in the informal sector, leading to lower earnings and limited entitlement to pensions or retirement benefits. These factors contribute to increased poverty and social exclusion in old age.

Older women are also at greater risk of poverty than older men in almost all countries across the globe due to a lifetime of inequalities and discrimination across multiple and intersecting domains. Many women reach older age with few assets and savings and lack an adequate pension or social protection benefits, due to barriers to decent work (i.e. working in informal sector or gaps in employment due to care responsibilities).



Anwar Sadat Swaka/HelpAge International

To address these challenges, we must take steps to ensure gender equality in our work. These include:

- Understand why gender analysis is important in all development and humanitarian interventions and learn how to carry out a gender analysis, as well as a power analysis.
- Reflect on perceptions of gender and other identities across the life course, particularly in older age and how these affect older men, women and older people of other genders in a given context.
- Encourage the participation of diverse groups of older people to ensure you have a range of perspectives and context specific information. Be prepared to have discussions in singular groups (i.e. female participants and moderator in one group and male participants and moderator in another group) to ensure that all voices are heard. Make sure that needs assessments and baseline evaluations include a focus on older people and consider the different experiences of older age and gender groups.
- Understand discrimination based on bias towards gender and other identities, particularly with regard to older people.
- Rely on existing tools and resources that can provide insight and knowledge into working with older people of diverse identities. For example, HelpAge's ***Gender Equality Training Toolkit*** →.

In the spotlight

Gendered ageism

Older women often experience gendered ageism, the intersectionality of age and gender discrimination and bias. Many women therefore face deepened inequalities, greater exclusion, and heightened risk of gender-based violence in older age.

Older women are an integral part of our communities and of wider society. Yet as women age, they often report feeling invisible, and can face widespread discrimination based on both their age and gender. HelpAge conducted research across Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda to capture the voices of 18 older women. This paper describes their lived experiences of gendered ageism and what changes they would like to see from those in positions of power – governments, UN agencies, civil society organisations, and donors – to take action to address gendered ageism. ***Older women's lived experiences with gendered ageism*** →.

Top takeaways

- Mainstream age, gender, and disability into your programming: To better understand and address specific gender inequalities, ensure sex-, age-, and disability-disaggregated data (SADDD) and gender analysis informs and tailors programmes, promoting age, gender and disability responsive interventions.
- Promote the voice and meaningful participation of older people, especially older women to transform gender power structures, promote gender equality, and ensure their voices are heard through their active participation in programme design and implementation.
- Be sensitive to gender identities not expressed within binary categories – recognise the complexity, diversity, and varying contexts of older age, that gender intersects not only with age but with race, class, geography, disability, and sexuality, and indeed, 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.

BOX 11

Gender based violence against older women

Violence against older women is a severe human rights abuse. It is driven by both ageism and sexism, but also affected by other characteristics such as marital status or having a disability. It is grounded in deep-rooted prejudices, dehumanising stereotypes and social norms that tolerate and even condone acts of violence. For older women, cumulative impact of **gender-based violence** → can hinder their ability to accumulate assets, harm their physical and mental health, and diminish their agency and voice.

An older woman may be the victim of verbal and physical abuse in her home. She may be accused of ‘witchcraft’ and attacked or even murdered by members of her own community. She may be denied the right to land when her husband dies due to discriminatory inheritance laws. Or she may be deprived of autonomy in a care setting. She may face many forms of sexual, physical, financial and emotional abuse.

The social stigma that goes along with violence against older women and the lack of attention the issue receives all combine to leave the victims invisible and marginalised, unable to access psychological or legal support. And it enables the status quo to continue with the perpetrators unpunished.

The shame older women feel when they are the victims of violence, combined with a lack of support services, discourages them from speaking out. The WHO estimates **just 1 in 24 cases of elder abuse is reported** →.



Jorge Panchoaga/Fairpicture/HelpAge International

1.12 Acting against climate change

Few understand better the impact of the climate catastrophe than older people. Through surviving cycles of droughts, floods, vicious summers and cruel winters, older people have honed their skills over decades.

In villages and communities, they are relied on to read the weather and plant or prepare accordingly; to know where safe water and higher ground can be found. Yet older people are often absent from the climate debate: their skills and knowledge are side-lined; their rich experience ignored.

At HelpAge our work on ageing and climate change is heavily focused on inclusion, our commitment includes amplifying the voices of older people, ensuring inclusive climate actions, promoting intergenerational collaboration, and reducing our carbon footprint.

As part of the **#GreyAndGreenManifesto** → we have developed five top priorities to steer collective action for older people and highlight their role and needs in tackling climate change.

1. Collect the data and shout the facts about how the climate catastrophe affects older people.
2. Ensure that older people are engaged, supported and involved in climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives.
3. Spearhead the leadership of older people by amplifying their voice when demanding climate action and holding leaders accountable.
4. Bring older and younger people together to take a collective stance on climate change.
5. Promote international solidarity on climate change.

An analysis of 20 national adaptation plans of LMICs shows that there are gaps in knowledge on ageing and the needs of older people. The national adaptation plans of most countries barely refer to the demographic changes that their populations will be facing and hence are not age inclusive. Climate change policies must fully integrate the reality of ageing to protect older people from adverse climate change impacts as well as ensure their full participation in adaptation and mitigation strategies.

In recognition of this HelpAge has produced the ***Climate Justice in an Ageing World*** → discussion paper, which identifies knowledge gaps and highlights key recommendations including:

- Integrating ageing into climate analysis
- Strengthening life-course resilience through targeted public policies at the national level
- Empowering older people in the transition to new techniques
- Supporting intergenerational solidarity
- Tackling injustice by addressing intra- and inter-country carbon equalities.



In the spotlight

Biochar brings climate benefits

In Vietnam, older people have been converting plant waste into soil enhancer (biochar), capturing carbon that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere. It can have huge benefits for the environment – one village can remove 1000 tonnes of carbon dioxide a year from the atmosphere by producing biochar.³⁷ Importantly, it also improves soil health and ultimately farming productivity, creating better and more food for everyone.

Older people share water knowledge

The Colombian Caribbean coast is particularly vulnerable to the effects of extreme weather events associated with climate change, and experienced torrential rain and flooding in 2022. This contaminated the water reservoirs, creating a lack of safe drinking water, and severely damaged the crops resulting in high food insecurity for the Wayuu community. HelpAge collaborated with local authorities to set up a humanitarian response to the crisis. Older people were nominated as leaders of water committees to manage the water systems and ensure knowledge would be transferred to the younger generation. Abandoned or damaged water systems were repaired; operational and technical capacities were strengthened; and robust intergenerational water committees now ensure constant maintenance and smooth functioning of the water systems. Two hundred people from the Wayuu communities now actively manage the water systems, which provide water to approximately 1,000 people living in indigenous communities nearby.

Top takeaways

- **Older people are underrepresented in climate discussions:** Despite their experience with extreme weather events and valuable knowledge for adaptation, older adults are often excluded from climate conversations. Their skills and perspectives are crucial for tackling this crisis.
- **Action is needed to integrate older people into climate solutions:** There is a need for a multi-pronged approach. This includes collecting data on how climate change affects older people, ensuring their participation in climate action plans, and promoting collaboration between generations.
- **Climate policies need to consider the aging population:** Many national climate plans lack consideration for the growing older population. The needs of older people should be integrated into climate strategies to ensure their protection and empower them to contribute to solutions.

Recommendations for inclusion:

- **Data and awareness:** Collect data on how climate change impacts older adults and raise awareness about these issues.
- **Participation:** Actively involve older adults in developing climate solutions (mitigation and adaptation).
- **Empowerment:** Amplify the voices of older people and enable them to advocate for climate action.
- **Intergenerational aspects:** Bridge the gap between generations to create a united front against climate change.
- **Global cooperation:** Promote international solidarity on climate solutions that address the needs of older adults everywhere.



Aung Myat Soe/HelpAge International



HelpAge International

1.13 Supporting Older People's Associations

Older People's Associations (OPAs) are community-based groups that include both current and future older people working together to improve the situation of older people and the communities they live in.

OPAs use older people's unique resources and skills to provide social support, facilitate activities and deliver services.

OPAs work closely with local authorities and with a wide range of community members, enabling them to make positive contributions:

1. Building livelihood security

Despite their own poverty and vulnerability, older people play an important role in alleviating family and community poverty. OPAs have helped older people access microcredit, livelihood grant schemes, and job training leading to income generating activities.

2. Improving health and wellbeing

Older people face multiple barriers to accessing good quality health and care services that meet their needs and support them to enjoy healthy ageing. OPAs engage older people and their communities in improving their health and wellbeing, for example through health promotion activities; prevention services such as screenings and medical check-ups; delivering home and community-based care and support for older people and their caregivers; strengthening linkages between communities and health and care providers; and advocating for improved services. OPAs also reduce social isolation and loneliness among older people.

3. Promoting participation in community life

OPAs promote mutual support among older people, reducing their isolation and vulnerability by creating social support networks that can facilitate community development activities. They can empower older people, particularly older women. Benefits include mutual support and friendship with other members improving emotional wellbeing.

4. Promoting participatory governance

OPAs play a vital role in raising awareness of the rights and entitlements of older people and improving their access to existing services. Linking up with government service providers enables OPA members to recognise that government departments are resources for them to use. This can build their confidence in expressing their specific needs.

5. Supporting disaster response

Older people are respected sources of knowledge in their communities, providing information on traditional coping mechanisms and/or their experiences of previous disasters, which is invaluable as part of preparedness planning.

The success of OPAs can be attributed to:

- Their members, older people, are widely respected and have a wealth of community knowledge and experience.
- Older people tend to remain in their communities, providing continuity to the OPA and its activities, thus contributing to its sustainability.
- The wider community has a vested interest in the success of the OPA – the OPA benefits the whole community and people see themselves as future members.

BOX 12

Keys to success and sustainability

- Conduct needs assessments with OPA members themselves, rather than coming with pre-conceived project ideas
- Ensure OPAs adopt a flexible model that can be adjusted over time
- Include people of different ages in OPAs so they are intergenerational
- Self-financing – consider membership fees to help sustain the OPA and be used to support its members and also income generating activities
- Embed a leadership model into the OPA – including leadership training
- Be inclusive in all OPA practices as OPAs that are inclusive tend to be more sustainable
- Recognise the collective voice of OPA members (not just its leaders)
- Include capacity building activities with older people that empower different groups of older people and encourage their participation and sense of belonging
- Recognise and empower older people as rights holders
- OPAs must be grassroots and community driven
- Build in OPA leadership training to help drive success and sustainability
- Ensure there is commitment and stakeholder buy-in – especially from government
- Encourage activities that are fun – this helps to build commitment.

BOX 13

How to promote inclusion in OPAs

- Provide continuous/ongoing training, capacity building and sensitisation of OPA members on gender equality and social inclusion
- Ensure gender diversity of OPAs and be aware of gender composition of OPA membership. Tailor approaches based on cultural and social contexts (e.g. in some cases, separate groups for older women have been created which has been important for building women's participation and empowerment).
- Recognise the barriers some older people may face and support their participation - create an enabling environment for meetings that are easily accessible and conducive for OPA members living with disability
- Ensure half of the OPA's leadership positions are filled by older women
- Ensure at least one older person living with a disability has a leadership role.



Ben Small and Nang Su Hnin Htwe/HelpAge International

In the spotlight

OPAs generate money from waste

In Nglumut sub village in Indonesia, OPAs have used a lump sum grant to establish a waste bank, by collecting and selling recyclable waste in their community and bringing it to the OPA centre. This has proven to be a useful way of generating revenue not only for the OPA and its members but also wider community members. The annual income earned by each member from the waste bank is significant, and close to an average week's wages in the community. Following the initiative's success, members are intent on developing 'upcycling' activities – using some of the waste collected to make products that can be sold.

Improving wellbeing through song and dance

In Cambodia, the civil war ended less than 40 years ago and many OPA members were affected by the trauma of living through the conflict. Activities like singing and dancing are helping to rebuild community ties that are still weak after the conflict, while also providing a way for older people to remember and reconnect with happier times before the war. According to HelpAge Cambodia, many older people have been very isolated and had forgotten what it felt like to dance or have fun. The HelpAge OPAs create a welcoming space where older people can form relationships with their neighbours without fear.

Health checks in the community

In Yogyakarta, Indonesia, OPA members regularly take part in health screenings and group exercise. At some clubs, health checks are done before their monthly meeting, with members helping to check blood pressure and weight. OPA leaders say attendance is higher when the health screenings are part of their events. Local healthcare providers are starting to use OPA activities to promote disease prevention, for example by offering training on healthy eating and other topics, and by administering health checks. In this way OPAs are complementing local strategies for reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases and helping health centres reach an important target group.

Top takeaways

There are three main steps to establishing an OPA:

1. Mobilise the community to support the establishment of an OPA.
2. Get legal registration and set up an organisational structure.
3. Notify local authorities of the OPA's establishment.

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Find out more:

www.helpage.org/what-we-do/

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

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