



**BUILDING A BETTER
WORLD FOR OLDER
PEOPLE** | 2024 Manifesto

Welcome

We live in a world of incredible potential. One of the greatest success stories in recent years has been increasing lifespans in every region of the world.

Globally, 1.4 billion people will be aged 60 and over by 2030. By 2050, this will rise to 2.1 billion. Older people will make up more than one fifth of the world's population, with up to 80 per cent living in low and middle-income countries.¹

Yet living longer does not always mean living longer well. Women live longer but often spend those additional years in poor health. Climate change increasingly threatens the wellbeing of all older people. Around the world the number of older people whose basic needs are not being met and whose human rights are being overlooked is growing. This undermines their safety and dignity.

Older people, no matter where they are in the world, should be respected, with their rights protected, their voices heard, and their contributions recognised and valued. They should have enough money, healthcare, social care and support to enable them to live fulfilling lives.

The next UK Government has an opportunity to take the lead in creating a fairer world in which all generations can contribute to the future of their families, communities and countries. We're calling on UK leaders to

stand up for the rights and needs of older people in 5 ways.

These calls to action reflect the work Age International does with older people and their communities in over 30 countries across Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. The recommendations capture the aspirations and experiences of older people facing some of the most challenging situations, and show how the UK Government can achieve change.

Across the world, older people continually demonstrate they are resilient, wise and have a lot to offer.

The inclusion of older people is not optional, and is integral to building a more just, more sustainable future for all.

Alison Marshall
CEO, Age International



Our manifesto at a glance

Our manifesto calls on the next government to:

1. Make history by championing older people's rights globally.
2. Tackle gender inequality for women of all ages globally.
3. Strengthen global healthcare to maximise wellbeing in later life.
4. Ensure international development, humanitarian and climate policy and practice include older people.
5. Make older lives visible by including them in data collection and analysis.



Eugenia, 69, received a mini-grant for a greenhouse in Moldova.

1. Make history by championing older people's rights globally

While human rights are universal, the specific experiences of people as they get older are not captured in existing international law and standards. For example, there is no universal prohibition of discrimination on the basis of age.



Everywhere in the world, older people are being subjected to daily violations of their most basic rights, but there is no legally binding universal legislation to guide governments in doing better or to hold them accountable.

This should be addressed through a new United Nations (UN) human rights convention: an international agreement

formed by national governments from around the world that all countries agree to follow. We need a UN convention on the rights of older people to clarify how rights can best be protected in later life, to create obligations and responsibilities for governments and the UN system as a whole, and to help us reframe our understanding of ageing and older people in a more positive light.

There is an active discussion taking place in the UN on the creation of a new human rights convention for older people. We need the next UK Government to champion older people's rights and inspire other governments to support a convention.

Recommendation

Champion the creation of a United Nations Human Rights Convention for Older Persons to ensure older people across the world live with dignity and respect.

Change is possible...

Human rights conventions, like the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, have the power to shift perceptions and reframe attitudes, as well as policy. Since the Convention became effective in 2008, people with disabilities not only have stronger legal protections, they are treated with greater respect.



Ahmad, in a refugee centre in Syria, following the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes.

Credit: Right: SEMA / HelpAge International



We already lost our cattle. Now it's affecting our lives. We can't buy food because we don't have any money so we don't eat. I am an old man. I need food to survive.

**Jatani (Ethiopia)
Sharing his experience of the drought in Ethiopia to raise awareness**



I can't work anymore. I stopped five years ago. I felt I was getting too old and someone had to take care of the grandchildren, so I did that.

Daw Hnin Ku (75, Myanmar)
Receives financial support through our partner HelpAge Myanmar's older people's group

2. Tackle gender inequality for women of all ages globally

Tackling gender inequality not only means protecting the basic rights of women and girls, but also ensuring that they are not subjected to further discrimination on the basis of their age in later life. It means recognising and valuing the paid and unpaid work older women do for their families, communities and societies.

So often, it is grandmothers who enable girls to go to and stay in school. They use their meagre pensions to pay for school fees, books or uniforms. These older women also do the cooking, cleaning, fetching of water, and childcare that girls would otherwise have to do, interrupting their education.

It is grandmothers who hold together families where parents have died from HIV/AIDS or have had to migrate to find work in capital cities or abroad. Yet the

rights and needs of older women are not being recognised or addressed.

The UK Government should advance gender equality for all ages and across the globe. Ensuring older women receive basic support through state pensions, improving health systems for older women, and ensuring that older women can live free from discrimination and threats of violence, are all key to reducing inequality for women and girls of all ages.

Recommendation

Recognise the contributions of older women to their families, communities and societies and ensure UK Government support responds to their economic, health and social needs.

Change is possible...

In 2022/23, thanks to the work of our partner HelpAge International and others, 1.3 million older women received improved financial support or a social pension for the first time.

For example, our partners influenced the government in Malawi to move from means-tested pensions to targeting by age group or vulnerability. This meant 14,500 extra older people were able to receive regular financial support.



Daw Taw, 85, receives financial support from HelpAge Myanmar.

3. Strengthen global healthcare to maximise wellbeing in later life

Older people have the right to the highest attainable standard of health, like everyone else, but often face greater barriers to accessing services that meet their needs.

As we age, we're more likely to experience disability and multiple long-term health conditions, such as hypertension, arthritis and diabetes. Yet these are often not addressed effectively by health systems that are largely organised around single conditions, and where health workers lack training on older people's challenges.



Credit: Above: Ben Small / HelpAge International

A preventative approach could improve the quality of life for older people and reduce pressure on health and care systems. Stopping or pushing back the onset of long-term conditions is key. 'Non-communicable diseases' such as cancer, heart disease, diabetes and dementia account for 74% of all deaths globally, killing many more people than infectious diseases like malaria.⁴

Currently, care of older people is largely provided unpaid by women, old and young. Investing in healthcare in the community that takes into account the needs and rights of people of all ages is both cost-effective and will have a greater impact on improving health and wellbeing throughout life.


Recommendation

Ensure the UK Government's contribution to global health system strengthening considers older people's needs and maintenance of health at all ages, with better primary care and greater focus on chronic illnesses.

Change is possible...

In Tanzania, our partner HelpAge International and others were instrumental in the development and roll out of the government's countrywide strategy for older people's health. The strategy formally recognised the role of homebased care in managing long-term illnesses and introduced the topic of healthy ageing in primary and secondary schools.

Over 3 years, the percentage of older people in two districts in Tanzania reporting access to age-friendly health services rose from 3% to 15%. The number reporting improvements in independence and self-care rose even more dramatically, from 4% to 47.7%.



My future is bright because I have support. I am not isolated or scared. Life would have been difficult. I would have been stuck at home without any medication. Instead **I get to join up with other people** and get treatment to improve my condition.

Augustin (66, Tanzania)
Describing support from our partner HelpAge Tanzania



During the Eid holidays, I used to give my children money, and enjoyed our time together. Now I'm all alone.

Derifa (65, Syria)
A survivor of the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes

4. Ensure international development, humanitarian and climate policy and practice include older people

Older people are valuable, both in and of themselves and as members of their families, communities, and societies. They run businesses and farms, volunteer, and invest in the future of their communities, children and grandchildren.

The UK Government should lead the way in ensuring that its UK Aid and climate programmes value the contributions of older people. Supporting older people is investing in a country's future.

International Development

The world has experienced tremendous progress over the past three decades, with extreme poverty falling rapidly and health and standards of living improving.

But the objectives adopted by the world's governments in 2015 (the Sustainable Development Goals) are badly off track.⁵ This means that many of the targets

including on poverty, health and gender equality may not be met by the 2030 deadline.

More and faster progress could be achieved by putting older people at the heart of the UK Government's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Humanitarian response

Older people are at particularly high risk in an emergency, whether because of age-related health problems and reduced mobility or because they are already marginalised.

Humanitarian response often fails to provide food or health and social care that meets older people's specific needs, and older people are made invisible by data gathering that doesn't include them. This

is despite the knowledge and experience older people can bring to preventing and preparing for crises, and the vital role they play in caring for others.

Our humanity demands that older people are not left behind. The UK Government must ensure that older people are not forgotten in crises and that they listen to older people in shaping UK emergency responses.

Climate adaptation

Current events leave no doubt that older people are among those most at risk from the extreme weather and crises related to climate change.⁶ With global population ageing happening alongside climate change, the number of older people affected will increase significantly.

Older people's experience and knowledge need to be included in efforts to prevent

and prepare for the impact of climate change. Lower income countries must be able to access climate funding fairly alongside other forms of support necessary to address the causes and effects of climate change. The UK government should ensure older people are included in its international climate plans and schemes.

Change is possible...

In the Thar desert in India, older people are leading their communities in the fight against the effects of the climate crisis by using traditional rainwater harvesting techniques. So far, the project delivered by our partners HelpAge International and GRAVIS has benefitted 4,000 older people and 24,000 family members.

For example, in 2022-23, 27 older people were selected to have traditional 'khadin' dykes installed to channel rainwater into their crop soil. This enables them and their communities to grow more crops despite the increasing levels of drought. This work also increases the older people's status in the community.

Gafur, 97, showing his garden, supported by local partners in India.



Recommendation

Embed the inclusion of older people in UK Government policy and programmes on international development, humanitarian response, and climate change.

Because water gets channelled by the khadins a lot of things do take place. **Water gives life.**

Bheru (70+, India)
Discussing the community rainwater programme



5. Make older lives visible by including them in data collection and analysis

Older people and their experiences are not being counted, and their needs, rights and contributions are often invisible because of the way data is gathered and analysed.

For example, “working-age” continues to be defined internationally as people between the ages of 15-64.⁷ This ageist approach reinforces the negative stereotype that people over 65 are economically inactive, dependent and frail.



IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA
2 IN 5
OLDER WOMEN
ARE IN THE
WORKFORCE⁸

In order to make sure that development programmes are effective, that money

gets spent well, and those most in need get help, it is vital that the UK Government invests in and uses data on people from all ages, including those in later life.

The UK Government was at the forefront of embedding the commitment to Leave No One Behind in global development goals and ensuring that age was included. It also recognised the importance of strengthening data on later life internationally, including data broken down by sub-categories such as age, sex and disability. But much more work is needed in this area to ensure programmes can target those older people most at risk of being left behind.

Recommendation

Invest in improved international collection and analysis of data, so experience of later life is more visible to decision makers.

Change is possible...

Our partner HelpAge International carries out interviews with older people (“Rapid Needs Assessments”) in humanitarian emergencies, using the insights gathered to shape our programmes and to advise others on how to meet older people’s needs.

When floods devastated Pakistan in 2022, data from Rapid Needs Assessments

helped us adapt to the needs of older people in a changing environment. The HelpAge Global Network provided tailored support that met the needs of over 50,000 older people and their families and delivered training sessions on including older people to 100 people from government, UN and humanitarian agencies.



80 year old, Layla, Pakistan, points to the tree indicating how high the water level reached during the 2022 floods.



Vera, 81, uses her phone to stay in touch with family members after attending a Digital Skills Workshop in Moldova.

About Age International

Age International is a charity which responds to the needs and promotes the rights of older people, focused on those facing challenging situations in low and middle-income countries.

We recognise that around the world, including here in the UK, there are increasing numbers of older people whose basic needs are not being met, and whose human rights are being overlooked, leading to increasing inequality and injustice.

Age International is part of the Age UK Group and is the UK member of the HelpAge Global Network which supports older people across the world. We see parallels between the challenges facing older people in the UK and globally related to healthy ageing, climate change and loneliness.

References





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