

5 EASY ACTIONS

THE UK GOVERNMENT CAN TAKE TO BUILD A
BETTER WORLD FOR OLDER PEOPLE



WELCOME

The UK Government has set a bold agenda to create a world free from poverty on a liveable planet. This presents a historic opportunity to transform the lives of marginalised groups, including older people who are often most at risk of being left behind due to ageism and discrimination.

The Government can only achieve its international ambitions by fully recognising the contributions, agency and rights of older people. The hardships they face must be addressed urgently by the UK and its global development partners.

Prior to the General Election, Age International set out our own manifesto and vision for what the UK Government could do over the next five years to build a better world for older people. The five areas we identified will have a significant impact not only on older people in low and middle-income countries, but also their families, communities, economies and societies. Acting on these recommendations will help the UK to rebuild its development reputation and create a safer, more prosperous world.

As the sister charity to Age UK and the UK member of the HelpAge global network, Age International works with over 199 partners in 98 countries to improve the lives of older people locally, nationally and internationally. Historically, governments and international organisations have failed to protect the rights of older people, but the tide is turning. We want the UK Government to be at the forefront of this worldwide change.

There is a crucial role for Parliamentarians acting as Age Champions to make this vision a reality. This Government and Parliament could leave a lasting global legacy by securing concrete action that places the agency, rights and needs of older people at the heart of the UK's international development, humanitarian and climate crisis responses.

Alison Marshall
CEO, Age International



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

Ageism is pervasive worldwide and disproportionately affects older people. It intersects with ableism and sexism to further disadvantage older people with disabilities and older women. Ageism undermines our goal to create fairer and more prosperous societies.

Daily violations of older women's basic rights are often dismissed and ignored. They face an acute risk of sexual violence and specific forms of age-related neglect and abuse which is often not captured in data collection.

A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is crucial to building a world where older people can live with dignity. It would provide guidance for the UK Government and partners to address the challenges faced by older people, ensuring accountability and concrete action. By establishing international obligations, the Convention would support older people around the world to claim their rights and contribute fully to society.

We need the UK Government to show the UK public and members of the UN Human Rights Council that it supports the creation of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons now.

EASY ACTION 1: State publicly that the UK Government supports the creation of a new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.



Jacinta, 68, Kenya, is a member of the KARIKA Older People's Association (OPA). She enjoys group activities, such as exercise sessions, as well as learning new skills like sewing and poultry farming. The OPA also provides advice and support on her rights.

"We have laws talking about children and women but there is none for older people. Older people deserve to be treated better and laws that recognise their rights would help address that."

2. Tackle gender inequality for women of all ages globally

Ageing is distinctly gendered. Women typically live longer than men, but often spend more years in ill health with one or more disabilities.

Despite making vital contributions to their families, communities, economies and societies, (contributing around 4.3 hours of unpaid care work a day¹), older women are subject to a combination of age-based discrimination and systemic gender inequalities. Older women tend to have fewer resources and less access to pensions than men because of their greater caring responsibilities. This has a profound impact on their health, income and livelihoods.

Supporting older women's economic independence, healthcare and protection from abuse is crucial for their dignity and wellbeing. It also benefits younger generations, especially girls, who often rely on older women for support and guidance.

The UK Government can play a pivotal role by integrating a clear focus on older women's rights in its international programmes, policy and diplomacy, ensuring they are age and disability inclusive, and gender-responsive. This would contribute to eradicating poverty and promoting gender equality worldwide.

EASY ACTION 2: Include an explicit focus on older women within the UK Government's commitment to women and girls. Take this message to partners in global policy forums such as the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women and the 30-year review of the Beijing Platform for Action in 2025.

3. Strengthen global healthcare to maximise wellbeing in later life

Getting older should not be disabling. 51% of older people globally, especially older women, live with multiple chronic conditions² like diabetes, hypertension, and dementia, which diminish the quality of their life.

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are the world's biggest killers and overwhelmingly affect people in low and middle-income countries, undermining economic productivity, mental health and family life. Millions of older people are pushed into poverty each year by the cost of treating and managing NCDs. To enable people to live longer, healthier lives, governments must prioritise NCD prevention and primary healthcare at the community-level.

To ensure global health policies are 'fit for the future', cost-effective and contribute to tackling health inequity, the UK Government must advocate with international partners and address the growing burden of NCDs in a rapidly ageing world. The UK Government has an opportunity to be a global leader by advocating for the health rights and needs of older people at the 2025 UN High-Level meeting on NCDs.

EASY ACTION 3: Explicitly commit to tackling non-communicable diseases (NCDs) in low and middle-income countries as part of the UK Government's global health priorities in 2025.



Derifa, 65, is a survivor of the 2023 Türkiye-Syria earthquakes. She lost family members in the disaster, and now lives in a refugee camp. She received financial support from our partners to buy essentials such as food and medicine.

“I live in this camp all by myself. Before, I used to do everything with my children. We were working and making a decent living for ourselves. But since the disaster, we’ve lost everything. We don’t even have any food or gas for cooking.”

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

The invaluable contributions older people make to their families, communities, economies and societies are routinely sidelined in international development, humanitarian and climate responses.

The UK has a strong reputation as a global leader in promoting fairer and more inclusive societies. The Government’s support for the Sustainable Development Goals acknowledges the importance of prioritising the needs and rights of the most marginalised, and older people are one of the groups recognised as being most at risk of being left behind. Yet older people’s contributions and the unique challenges they face are often ignored in international development priorities and data collection.

The UK Government’s commitment to “Leave No-One Behind” must be firmly embedded across all international development, humanitarian and climate crisis plans. As the Government seeks to strengthen its partnership with the Global South, and as the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals deadline approaches, now is the time to give greater recognition to the role that older people play in society by allocating specific funding to groups most at risk.

EASY ACTION 4: Renew the UK Government’s pledge and commitment to “Leave No-One Behind” as a core part of achieving the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.

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

Older people are largely invisible in international data collection and analysis. Many survey tools fail to capture the diversity of older people's experiences, creating a data gap that affects the ability of governments to achieve the "Leave No-One Behind" pledge.

Effective use of Government funds for international development, humanitarian and climate crisis responses requires evidence about who is affected. By better understanding the specific needs of older people, the UK Government can tailor its assistance more effectively and accurately measure the impact of interventions.

International development, humanitarian and climate crisis initiatives must be designed with age, gender and disability in mind from the outset. Investing in better disaggregated data is crucial for achieving transformational change for people and the planet. Enhanced data collection will also improve transparency and accountability of how Government funds are used.

The Government can strengthen its legacy on data disaggregation by ensuring its own programmes include sex, age and disability disaggregated data as part of their reporting requirements. The Government can also support the UN and international partners to continue the work started by the Titchfield City Group on Ageing to improve the collection and analysis of data on later life.

EASY ACTION 5: Commit to disaggregating data by sex, age and disability within the UK Government's work and that of its partners.

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

1. On average based on data across 30 countries, analysed by the Overseas Development Institute Between work and care: older women's economic empowerment | ODI: Think change. www.odi.org/en/publications/between-work-and-care-older-womens-economic-empowerment/
2. www.thelancet.com/actions/showPdf?pii=S2589-5370%2823%2900037-8

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