

“Strengthening the UK Government’s Approach to International Development by Including Population Ageing”

Age International Response to the UK Government White Paper:

“International development in a contested world: ending extreme poverty and tackling climate change”

The UK Government set out its ambitions for International Development in a White Paper that firmly places development objectives back in the heart of the UK’s foreign policy. It shows a welcome commitment to multilateralism, respectful partnerships, and refocuses the Government’s spending for international development on tackling extreme poverty. However, the ambitions that the White Paper sets out falls short of addressing the needs, rights and contributions of all members of society, including older persons. The Government suggests that the White Paper is “an approach that looks ahead to the longer-term challenges we face and can readily adapt to the ongoing global changes confronting us.” Yet one of the most significant transformations the world is undergoing is completely absent from the White Paper: population ageing.

The Government sets out seven priorities as part of its new agenda. Of these, three in particular would be greatly strengthened by explicitly recognising the needs, rights, and agency of older people:

- **“Ensuring opportunities for all, putting women and girls centre stage”** – the contributions older women make to their families, communities and economies through their paid and unpaid economic work needs to be valued alongside that of younger generations. Not only would this release untapped potential in those communities the UK Government is trying to reach, it is also necessary to ensure that the needs and rights of those furthest behind are addressed by the UK’s international development support.
- **“Building resilience and enabling adaptation for those affected by conflict, disasters and climate change”** – older people are among those most at risk in times of emergency yet least likely to get the support they need. Older people can also be pillars of their communities, helping to build and strengthen resilience through their knowledge, experience, and actions. Older people’s agency, experience and contributions must be included in the Government’s plans to build resilience and adaptation at all levels.
- **“Standing up for our values, for open inclusive societies, for women and girls, and preventing the roll-back of rights”** – the protection of the rights of older persons needs strengthening through the creation of a UN convention on the rights of older persons. The UK Government has a pivotal role to play in ensuring that universal, legally binding

standards are in place that ensure that all people, at all stages of their lives, can live with dignity and equality.

The Government's recommitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to the principle of Leave No One Behind (LNOB), which recognises age as a factor, is a welcome step forward, but insufficient on its own to secure greater attention for older people in international development. Missing from the White Paper are a number of key components for achieving the Government's strategy, as discussed below.

Strengthening the collection and analysis of age disaggregated data – the cornerstone of being able to deliver on the LNOB principle – appears to be absent. This is an area the Government can be proud of as it championed improving data when the SDGs were created. As part of this, the Government helped create and chairs the UN Statistical Commission Titchfield City Group on Ageing to specifically improve the quality and use of data regarding older age. If successful, the Group's work should create opportunities for the better collection and analysis of data on older people which could drive more effective development interventions.

We welcome the strong focus on inclusive social protection systems, including the emphasis on increased social protection needed for various groups, including older people. The Government has a strong track record of stimulating social protection that contributes to the financial security of older people, which greatly benefits their whole household, including children. Yet the lack of explicit recognition of the needs and rights of older people in the White Paper creates uncertainty that the pivotal contributions that social protection can make in helping low and middle-income countries support their ageing populations will be prioritised by the Government going forward.

The White Paper continues to reflect the Government's priority to promote and progress the rights of women and girls around the world and social protection plays an important role in addressing the gender inequalities that women experience across their life course. Older women are often disproportionately living in poverty and continue to carry out unpaid work and care roles in later life. Inclusive social protection is a key mechanism to secure better economic, health and social outcomes for older women and their families, as well as helping older women to have greater choice and live with dignity.

The Government's recognizes the impact that the humanitarian crisis is having on older people in Ukraine. This is necessary but does not go far enough. The application of core humanitarian principles requires addressing the needs of those who are most at risk across all humanitarian contexts; older people are often furthest left behind in times of emergency. We would also like to see explicit attention given to the role that older people can play in strengthening resilience to future crises. The announcement of the resilience and adaptation fund, which will be 15% of humanitarian aid provision is also welcome, but only if this is additional money and does not result in ODA cuts elsewhere.

The White Paper rightly recognises climate change as one of the defining challenges to be faced. It recognises that “women and girls, and vulnerable groups” face the worst impacts of climate change and emphasises the significant connections between the climate change, water, health and food security. However, we are disappointed to note that the White Paper does not identify older people as a group most at risk of the impacts of climate change. With population ageing and climate change taking place concurrently, we need climate mitigation, adaptation, and emergency support that takes into account the needs of older people and those most at risk.

Where health is concerned, we welcome the emphasis the Government is placing on long-term partnerships for strengthening health systems, including by expanding quality primary health care, increasing the numbers of skilled, motivated health workers, and better protection against costs that people cannot afford. This is critical to ensuring that everyone, including older people and persons with disabilities, can access affordable and appropriate healthcare that they need.

We are concerned though that the Government’s efforts to strengthen health systems will not include the specific health needs of older people. While it is positive to see the UK promoting health worker training and skills exchange, this could be deepened through ensuring training is sufficient to meet the health needs of populations across the full life course. We were dismayed, too, that there was no mention of the devastating impact that non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are having on low and middle-income countries as the number 1 killer in these contexts.

It is crucial the UK takes forward an international development strategy that is fit for the future. The Government aspires to look forward to tackling the longer-term challenges ahead, but it is not considering the fundamentals of how demographic changes will impact these challenges. Ignoring population ageing as part of the development landscape risks reinforcing ageist stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards older people, as well as making development interventions less effective.

In the delivery of the priorities set out in the White Paper, there is the opportunity for the Government to be more explicit about how it will meet the needs and rights of older people alongside others in society. We look forward to working with the Government as an active partner in achieving this.

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