

# Ageing & Development

News and analysis of issues affecting the lives of older people  
Issue 26 / September 2009



Older people will soon outnumber young children for the first time.

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## Invest in older people now

The publication of the latest US Bureau of the Census global ageing report *An Aging World: 2008*, has provoked a flurry of media interest.

The report draws attention to the historic transition that is taking place during the 21st century. In less than ten years, there will be more people aged 65 and over than children under five.

Although the report describes population ageing as “a human success story” it also cautions on the challenges this will bring. It spells out some of these – the rapid growth of the oldest-old, changing family structures and working patterns, ageing workforces and the rise of non-communicable diseases.

Perhaps predictably, the media has seized upon the challenges. In the UK, *The Guardian* interpreted the report as “sounding the alarm” over the consequences of demographic change. This fits with the often apocalyptic language used to describe global ageing. *The Washington Post* earlier this year warned of fiscal crisis, economic stagnation, and for many

poor countries “massive age waves that they can't afford”.

In fact, the Bureau of the Census takes a more measured approach. It argues for action now to take advantage of the window of opportunity provided by large numbers in active workforces across the world, and the strong economic growth achieved by many countries.

It recognises the “substantial contributions to family wellbeing” made by older people in developing countries, although it ignores the key economic resource provided by older people. Developed countries are beginning to recognise a reality understood by older people across the developing world – the need to extend years of productive activity into old age.

The Bureau of the Census highlights gains in life expectancy as a key reason for growing numbers of older people globally. What it omits to point out is that living longer now needs to be matched by extending healthy working lives. This will require substantial investment in healthcare – and crucially in preventative health.

It will also require investment in enabling older people to work – in jobs that are appropriate and secure, as laid out in the ILO's Decent Work Agenda. Social protection, for example in the form of basic pensions that supplement work income and provide basic security to older people, is another important policy lever.

The ageing of humanity is a triumph. It need not be a crisis. As *An Aging World* indicates, in order for us all to benefit, the time to act is now.

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**An Aging World: 2008**  
Kinsella K and Wan H, US Census Bureau, 2009  
[www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p95-09-1.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod/2009pubs/p95-09-1.pdf)

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# What work means in old age

Older people in developing countries must be included in policies and programmes towards decent work and provided with social pensions, urges a new report.

*Working for life: making decent work and pensions a reality for older people*, published by HelpAge International, points out that older people who are poor have no choice but to work. However, their needs and contributions are often ignored by policy makers. This is especially apparent from the lack of data on poverty and old age.

To address this gap, HelpAge worked with partner organisations in Bangladesh, Peru and Uganda to examine the key issues facing older workers.

The report shows that older men and women mostly work in the informal sector, in irregular, seasonal, low-paid jobs that are often strenuous. They face age and gender discrimination and have little or no access to social protection, income security, legal protection for their rights as workers, or formal support networks.

## "A pension would help"

In Peru, for example, Civilia Montoya Huaman de Lopes, 63 (pictured above), embroiders scarves for a local company. She works eight hours a day and is paid 1.5 soles (US\$0.5) for each scarf. She buys the wool herself.

"It's a struggle to buy enough food on the money I make and we owe money for water and electricity. If I had a pension

Antonio Olmos/HelpAge International



I would set up a cooperative with other women," she says.

The report stresses that older men and women have the right to decent work, which was recognised by more than 150 countries at the UN World Summit in 2005. It calls for the European Union to include older people in poverty

reduction interventions, including the implementation of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda.

## Working for life: making decent work and pensions a reality for older people

HelpAge International, 2009

Can be downloaded in English and Spanish:  
[www.helpage.org/resources/policyreports](http://www.helpage.org/resources/policyreports)

# Social transfers course

**A two-week course on designing and implementing social transfer programmes will be held in Thailand in November.**

The course is aimed at policymakers, government officials and practitioners around the world. It is offered by the Economic Policy Research Institute (EPRI) and HelpAge International, in partnership with the University of Maastricht and the Institute of Development Studies. It runs from 25 October to 7 November 2009 in Chiang Mai.

Topics include the role of cash transfers in social protection, identifying

appropriate social transfer instruments, designing programmes, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and case studies of successful programmes around the world.

The fee is €2,880 for tuition and €1,730 for accommodation, meals and in-country travel, including visits to social transfer schemes. The course is funded by the UK Department for International Development.

To apply online visit the EPRI website:  
[www.epri.org.za/course06ChiangMai2.htm](http://www.epri.org.za/course06ChiangMai2.htm)

## More information:

Email: [asiacourse@helpageasia.org](mailto:asiacourse@helpageasia.org)

## Comment

### Wake up to ageism

This issue's briefing on page 6 focuses on older people's rights. It refers to "age discrimination", when someone is treated differently because of their age. Age discrimination continues to result in violation of older people's rights. Laws prohibiting age discrimination exist in some countries, but are often limited to employment.

"Ageism" is also mentioned in the briefing. Ageism is the stereotyping and prejudice against older people that can lead to age discrimination. Ageism continues to be acceptable, tolerated or ignored across the world.

At one extreme, older women and sometimes men are branded as witches, forced out of their homes or even murdered. At the other end of the scale, older people are patronised and mocked on TV, in films and in advertising. Even this can be

dangerous. Research by Yale University showed that negative stereotypes of older people in the US had a harmful impact on older people's memory, balance and even length of their life.

A new UN convention on the rights of older people will help combat ageism – but it is up to all of us to challenge and speak out against ageism and age discrimination in our everyday lives.

Bridget Sleaf, Rights Policy Adviser,  
HelpAge International

## Pension watch

### Social pensions to ease economic crisis

Several countries are expanding social pension schemes to mitigate the effects of the economic crisis.

In May 2009, **Russian** prime minister Vladimir Putin announced plans to raise the level of both the labour pension and social pension by 45 per cent. In 2010, the average monthly labour pension should be 7,946 roubles (US\$251) and the social pension 4,917 roubles (US\$156), he said.

Putin said that despite the impact of the economic crisis and the high costs of increasing the pension, it would be inadmissible to postpone the reform. He outlined the economic benefits: "It spells growing demand, more money in people's pockets to spend on basic necessities. That will create more jobs in retailing and in the services."

### Action in Asia

The Government of **Thailand** has announced the continuation of a temporary extension of the Old Age Allowance, which it introduced in April 2009 in response to the economic crisis.

For a three-week period, everyone over 60 who was not in receipt of a state pension or other state benefit was eligible

to register for the Old Age Allowance, which had previously been means-tested. Nearly three million people registered – around 63 per cent of those eligible.

In July 2009, the Government of the **Philippines** announced that it would introduce a non-contributory pension of 500 pesos (US\$10.5) a month to people over the age of 70 living in poverty. The announcement follows persistent lobbying by the Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE), a partner of HelpAge International.

### Advances in Africa

In June 2009, **Kenya** announced an allocation of 200 million Ksh (US\$2.6 million) to a new poverty-targeted pension, which is due to start in September. The amount budgeted has since increased to 550 million Ksh (US\$7.2 million).

The pension will be distributed to those over the age of 65 who are chronically ill, living with a disability or caring for orphans and vulnerable children. Around 30,000 people – 3 per cent of the population over 65 – will receive it.

In **Lesotho**, the government increased the non-contributory pension from 200 maloti (US\$25) to 300 maloti (US\$38) a month in February 2009. This has doubled the level of the pension since it was introduced in 2004, and increased it by about 50 per cent in real terms (taking account of inflation).

The pension is distributed to everyone over 70 who is not receiving any other pension.

### Latin American proposals

The Government of **Ecuador** is considering how to deliver the right to a universal pension. This right is included in a new constitution that was approved in September 2008. Around 300,000 older people – a quarter of the population over 65 – receive the poverty-targeted *Bono de Desarrollo Humano* (the Human Development Grant). One suggestion is to extend coverage of this.

In **Paraguay**, the Senate is considering a proposal for 257,000 of the poorest older people to receive a non-contributory pension of 335,000 guarani (US\$65) per month, worth one-quarter of the minimum wage. This would replace the current means-tested pension.



Dirección General de Adultos Mayores, Paraguay

Older people demonstrate in favour of a pension in Paraguay.

# Convention movement gains ground

The movement for a convention on older people's rights is gaining widespread support from governments and non-governmental organisations in Latin America.

In May 2009, representatives from 22 countries across the region discussed a potential regional convention at the second follow-up meeting on the Brasilia Declaration, hosted by Argentina.

Some of the principles agreed were full and effective participation of older people in society, equal opportunities, and recognition of the links that draw people together as members of a community.

James Blackburn, HelpAge International's Latin America regional representative, highlighted the situation of displaced older people in Colombia as an example of how state policies were not fulfilling the needs of older people.

Governments agreed to meet again in Chile in November 2009.

### Steps to protecting rights

Steps to protecting older people's rights are also being taken by leading UN bodies.

The newly established Advisory Committee to the Human Rights Council agreed at its third session in August 2009 to give priority to the rights of older people. Committee member Chinsung Chung from the Republic of Korea will present a report to the Human Rights Council in June 2010 on the need to study older people's rights and make practical recommendations on how to better protect them.

In July 2009, a working group set up by the committee that monitors the implementation of the Convention on

the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), met to start drafting a new general recommendation on older women's rights.

Thirdly, the UN Secretary General, in his report to the 2009 General Assembly on implementation of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA), suggests that member states consider new international instruments to better protect older people's rights.

"HelpAge International welcomes this increased attention on older women's and men's rights. We are working with the UN to ensure that older people's rights are better addressed by the UN human rights system," says Bridget Sleep, HelpAge International's Rights Policy Adviser.



# Nargis: targeted aid is better

**Older people affected by last year's cyclone in Myanmar need more support to rebuild their livelihoods, a study shows.**

Cyclone Nargis struck Myanmar's Ayerwaddy Delta in May 2008, destroying homes and crops and leaving more than 84,000 people dead. A study by HelpAge International in three affected townships in February 2009 shows that only a quarter of respondents who had lost cattle had replaced them, and only half of those who had lost farmland were growing crops again.

Older people's opportunities for paid work had also diminished. Of 69 per cent of older people who said they were working for an income before Nargis struck, only half reported doing so at the time of the study.

Loss of livelihoods has led to food insecurity. Almost three-quarters of respondents said they were not eating enough staple foods.

"The international community has delivered substantial aid to affected communities, yet this research shows that further support is needed in order for older people to fully recover from Cyclone Nargis," says Eduardo Klien, regional representative for HelpAge International in Asia Pacific.

The research found that older people who had received targeted support had greatly benefited, particularly in area of health. In the two townships where HelpAge mobile medical units were operating, 94 per cent of older people interviewed said that health staff were aware of their needs, compared with 49 per cent where older people were part of the general humanitarian response.

The research was funded by the UK Department for International Development and the Disasters Emergency Committee, of which HelpAge International's partner, Help the Aged, is a member.

**The situation of older people in cyclone-affected Myanmar: Nine months after the disaster**

HelpAge International Asia/Pacific, 2009  
[www.helpage.org/resources/researchreports](http://www.helpage.org/resources/researchreports)

**Read more:**

[www.helpage.org/news/latestnews/@76484](http://www.helpage.org/news/latestnews/@76484)



**Older people affected by Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar need more help to restore their livelihoods.**

HelpAge International

## Pressing for change in BiH

**A study from Bosnia and Herzegovina examines older people's situation and calls for their inclusion in development policies.**

OSMIJEH, a voluntary organisation based in Gračanica, and the national older people's rights network, For Ageing with Dignity, conducted a survey of 135 men and 186 women over the age of 65 in four communities in 2008 with funding from Help the Aged. Older people represent 15 per cent of the total population.

Many of those surveyed live alone – 20 per cent of those aged 65-75 years, and 34 per cent of those aged 75 and over. Many said they felt lonely (40 per cent), socially isolated (29 per cent) or excluded (28 per cent).

Income security was a major issue. More than one-third had no regular income.

Only one in five received a pension and just under one in seven worked to earn an income. Health was another concern. About half of those surveyed described their health as poor or very poor.

The findings will be used to advocate for ageing to be included in national policies and development plans.

Older people themselves are active in improving their situation. With support from OSMIJEH, self-help groups have been established in four cities. Through these groups, older volunteers assist their peers and advocate for their rights by meeting with government representatives and presenting their issues, appearing in media and organising public campaigns.

**More information:**

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### Sato: surviving an attack

Sato, 72, is a widow who lives alone in northern Tanzania. She survived a vicious attack on her life.

**"I was sleeping at night and heard someone coming in. I stepped to the door to find out what was happening. Someone shone a torch into my eyes so I couldn't see properly. When I tried to touch the wall, my hand was cut off. The assailant attacked me again and my head was seriously injured. I started screaming. He cut my right hand while I was trying to save my head. My daughter, who was living next door, came to my room, but the man had gone.**

**"I don't know who attacked me. There was a sick person in a neighbouring house and the family said I had bewitched her. A suspect was arrested but one of his relatives was a policeman so he was released.**

**"It's painful when people are accused of being a witch. Just because we're old and live alone doesn't mean that we are witches, but people think we must be to be able to survive. I've been supported by HelpAge International and MAPERECE. They built my house and the community helped. I'm part of the community here and I feel more secure."**

Interview and photo: Emma Judge/HelpAge International

## Challenging witchcraft

The brutal treatment of older women and men accused of witchcraft has been making the headlines.

In Kenya, *The Daily Nation* recently reported that in Kisii district alone, an average of six people are lynched every month for allegedly practising witchcraft.

HelpAge Kenya and HelpAge International estimate that 42 older people accused of witchcraft were killed in Kisii district in 2008. In Coast, Rift Valley and Nyanza provinces, 23 have been killed in 2009.

Belief in witchcraft is strong in Kenya. A range of factors can lead to accusations, including unexplained deaths or illnesses. Accusations may have an economic motive, where younger relatives want older people's land or property.

Similar practices occur in other countries. In nine districts of northern Tanzania, 317 older women and 28 older men were killed as a result of witchcraft accusations between 1999 and 2003, according to HelpAge International estimates.

HelpAge International and partners are working with local communities in these countries, and at national and international level, to address these issues in a holistic way. In 2007, the number of witchcraft-related killings of older women in northern Tanzania had fallen to two.

"Entrenched cultural practices are difficult to change. For this reason, HelpAge Kenya – together with the community – is seeking ways through which witchcraft can be demystified, and misfortunes in the community explained," says Marion Ouma, programme officer, HelpAge Kenya.

## "Skipped generations" study

The impact of emergencies on skipped-generation households in east and southern Africa is being studied by HelpAge International.

A literature review and interviews with members of skipped-generation households, service providers and emergency response organisations in Uganda and Zimbabwe will examine the vulnerability of these households in emergencies and their coping mechanisms. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI) is providing technical support.

Funded by UNAIDS and UNICEF, the study will be used to develop recommendations for the humanitarian and HIV and AIDS sectors on how to identify and support households consisting of children and older people. A report will be published by ODI at the end of 2009.

### More information:

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## In brief

- The latest UN population statistics show that by 2010 there will be 760 million people over 60 worldwide. Of these, 65 per cent will live in less developed countries. By 2050, this proportion will have risen to 80 per cent. *World population prospects: the 2008 revision* is at:

<http://esa.un.org/unpp>

- In more than 40 countries across the world, older people are planning to lobby their governments on and around 1 October as part of the 2009 Age Demands Action campaign.

The photo shows older people's leaders at a planning meeting with the Coalition of Services for the Elderly in the Philippines. To support the campaign visit:

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



COSE

- One of the young stars recently identified by *The Economist* as potential Nobel prizewinners is Esther Duflo of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Her research in South Africa found that girls born in households with a grandmother in receipt of a pension were taller than those living in non-recipient households – suggesting that pensions received by women translate into better nutrition for girls.

- In Uganda, many of the million-plus children orphaned by AIDS now live with their grandparents. Making a "memory book" and leaving a will can improve children's sense of belonging and future security. Uganda Reach the Aged Association has been providing guidance. You can see how in the BBC's photogallery at:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/8205860.stm>



# Why it's time for a convention

The world is ageing, age discrimination is rife and existing human rights mechanisms do not protect the rights of older people. *Bridget Sleap* explains how a convention would help governments, business and civil society respond to population ageing.

## What are older people's rights?

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." This equality does not change in old age.

The UDHR and subsequent international human rights conventions set out rights that apply to everyone. They cover a wide range of issues, including the right to freedom from violence, equality before the law, property, information, social security, work and health.

Yet despite having the same rights as everyone else and the huge contribution they make to their families and communities, older people are discriminated against at all levels of society. Research by Age Concern England revealed that ageism (prejudice against an older person because of their age) is more common than any other form of prejudice.<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes age discrimination is subtle: lack of transportation may prevent older people from taking part in social activities, which is a right everyone shares. At the other end of the scale, there are appalling cases of neglect and violence against older people.

Older people are not a homogenous group. They may be discriminated against on several different grounds as well as their age, including their gender, ethnic origin, where they live, disability, poverty, sexuality or literacy level.

## How rights are being violated

**Freedom from violence** Many older people, especially older women, experience violence. Kenya has seen an upsurge in the number of brutal killings of older people, mostly women, accused of witchcraft (see page 5).

**Equality before the law** Lack of identity papers is one of the main barriers preventing older people from realising their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. In Bolivia, census data showed that one in six older people

had no documents for claiming the non-contributory pension.<sup>2</sup>

**Property** In many parts of the world, inheritance laws deny women the right to own or inherit property when their husband dies. Family members often evict them. In Tanzania, denial of inheritance and property rights is a major cause of disputes, particularly for older women.

**Right to information** Information is often unavailable to older people. In Moldova, only one in ten of 500 grandparents caring for grandchildren had information about state provisions such as childcare services and free medical insurance.<sup>3</sup>

**Social security** Millions of older people have no pension or other regular income. In three communities in Zambia, only 4 per cent of older people received a pension, the majority of them men.<sup>4</sup>

**Work** Sometimes older people cannot get a job because they are considered too old. They may be forced to take low-paid jobs that are unsafe or demeaning. In Peru, older people said that job advertisements often specified that applicants must not be older than 35.<sup>5</sup>

**Health** Sometimes health services are out of reach to older people, or health workers refuse to treat them. In 15 communities in Mozambique, nearly nine in ten older people had to pay for healthcare that was legally free.<sup>6</sup>

## Human rights – a helpful approach

Across the world, populations are ageing. There is no denying that this phenomenon presents huge challenges. How do you protect the rights of an ageing population? How do you build stronger, more inclusive societies?

Taking a human rights approach can help. Protecting older people's rights, treating them with respect and on an equal basis with younger people will enable them to lead dignified, secure lives, as equal members of society, as is their right.

Human rights and development go hand in hand – respecting people's rights results in better development, where respect, dignity and having a say are recognised alongside material security as important to people's wellbeing.

Increased protection of older people's rights creates the conditions which enable them to contribute to their own development and that of those around them.

Older people often lack identity cards that help them realise their rights.



Older people's  
are

The human rights system, with its international law, underlying principles and implementation mechanisms, provides a framework to guide policy decision-making.

Importantly, a rights-based approach would help change the view of older people from recipients of welfare to individuals with knowledge, power and experience. Increased respect for older people will improve relationships between different generations and make societies more cohesive.

Of course, governments, the business sector and civil society have to confront the difficult issue of how to allocate limited resources to competing priorities. Using a human rights framework can help guide these decisions by ensuring a focus on those who are most marginalised and discriminated against.

## Are existing laws adequate?

The UDHR and other international rights conventions apply to everyone regardless of age. However, with the exception of one of these (on migrant workers), age is not listed explicitly as a reason why someone should not be discriminated against. There are a number of regional conventions that protect the rights of older people, but not systematically or comprehensively. This lack of specific provision in human rights law is known as a "normative gap".

In practice, too, the rights of older men and women are not being adequately protected or monitored. Older people's

rights

human rights

## Older people's stories

**"Some cars came by and just threw the packets [of relief aid]. The fastest get the food, the strong one wins. The elderly and the injured don't get anything. We feel like dogs."**

*Perumal, 75, India*

**"I find it difficult getting people to employ me. The boss will often say I'm too old. It's difficult to hear people laughing and saying I should go home. If I had a regular income I would set up a business making tools from home."**

*Eusebio, 71, Peru*

**"I could not claim my pension because my birth certificate had been registered twice with different dates of birth. The socio-legal centre helped me update my documentation. I now have my pension which means I can eat."**

*Flora, 75, Bolivia*

**"Staff at the district hospital made older people wait longer than younger patients. They said it was a waste of time seeing older people. We arranged to meet the medical officer in charge. Since the meeting, health staff have treated older people with more respect."**

*Mukima, 76, Kenya*

HelpAge Ghana

rights continue to be violated, and treaty bodies whose role it is to monitor how international conventions are being implemented rarely ask countries to include older people in their reporting. This lack of practical action is known as an "implementation gap".

There is also a body of "soft law" guiding the treatment of older women and men, which is underpinned by human rights. Most notable are the UN Principles for Older Persons (1991) and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA, 2002). However, these soft laws are not legally binding and so they are having little effect. A review of MIPAA in 2007 showed government commitment to be inconsistent.<sup>7</sup>

### What a convention would do

So, gaps exist in the human rights framework when it comes to older people's rights. There is no legal framework to assist governments and

others to make decisions that respond positively to population ageing.

As "hard law", a UN convention would be legally binding on ratifying states. It would have its own implementation and monitoring process, and would provide a level of accountability and redress that does not currently exist.

A convention on the rights of older people would help governments, business and civil society to act on population ageing. It would require them to collect data broken down by age to help inform policy decisions. It would encourage them to design age-sensitive programmes, and to train service providers, such as health workers, on age-related issues. It would oblige governments to adopt non-discriminatory legislation and allocate resources more fairly across different age groups.

A convention would also prompt more development aid to be allocated to

programmes that benefit older people or respond to population ageing.

In addition, a convention would help raise the visibility of older women and men. It would provide the basis for advocacy, education and awareness-raising which are essential for changing attitudes and eliminating age-discrimination.

On the International Day of Older Persons, 1 October 2008, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said: "Let us redouble our efforts to realise the rights of older persons, and make the dream of a society for all ages a reality." A UN convention would be a major contribution to achieving this.

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### Read more on rights:

[www.helpage.org/researchandpolicy/rights-1](http://www.helpage.org/researchandpolicy/rights-1)

### Petition governments to act:

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

## A convention on the rights of older people would:

- Encourage governments to adopt non-discriminatory laws
- Help governments allocate resources more fairly
- Encourage data to be collected to inform policy decisions
- Promote age-sensitive development programmes
- Support training of service providers in age-related issues
- Encourage development aid for older people's programmes
- Guide the private sector to protect older people's rights
- Help eliminate age discrimination.

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## Conference

Rebuilding Sustainable Communities with the Elderly and Disabled People after Disasters

12-15 July 2010, University of Massachusetts, Boston

Email: [crscad@umb.edu](mailto:crscad@umb.edu)

[www.rebuilding.umb.edu/rscepd](http://www.rebuilding.umb.edu/rscepd)

\* Free access on the web

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