

# Age Demands Action: Hear Our Voices

*Toolkit to challenge ageism in the time of COVID-19*

## Contents

1. Why should we campaign?.....	2
2. Campaign objectives.....	2
3. What is in this toolkit.....	2
4. What is ageism.....	3
5. What to look for.....	3
6. How to know if an action is age discrimination.....	5
7. Steps to plan your campaign.....	6
a) Analyse the issue.....	7
b) Write your objective.....	7
c) Decide who you are targeting.....	7
d) Write your key messages.....	7
e) Tactics.....	8
f) Monitor the situation and your progress.....	8
8. Useful information.....	9

## 1. Why should we campaign?

The evidence is clear that people in older age are among those most at risk of complications from COVID-19<sup>i</sup>. But as we grow older our lives do not become disposable. Older people are us. They are our family members, our caregivers, our workers and neighbours.

It's not just older people's health that is at risk in this pandemic. Responses from governments and agencies risk the enjoyment of older people's rights too.

[Like the UN Secretary General said](#), "Beyond its immediate health impact, the pandemic is putting older people at greater risk of poverty, discrimination and isolation."

This pandemic has exposed ageism and we have a window to campaign against it and defend older people's human rights.

This is a critical moment. We need governments to listen to what older people have to say, and ensure they have equal access to prevention measures, support and services, wherever they live.

**We call on our Age Demands Action partners to stand together to identify and challenge ageism during the COVID-19 pandemic, give a platform to older people to have their voices heard by decisionmakers, and ensure older people are treated as equals.**

## 2. Campaign objectives

Together, by September 2020, we want to make sure:

- Ageism within COVID-19 responses is exposed and challenged by older people
- Decisionmakers have heard older people and acted on their requests
- Older people have equal access to prevention, support and services wherever they live

## 3. What is in this toolkit

This toolkit provides step-by-step advice on how to analyse the situation and plan a campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes:

- Definitions of ageism
- Examples of stereotypical language, negative attitudes and discriminatory actions towards older people
- Examples of ageism to look out for during the COVID-19 pandemic, and other actions that could negatively impact older people's rights
- How to ensure your campaign is based on what older people say about their experiences
- How to plan a campaign step-by-step

Many of us are adhering to physical distancing measures...but that should not stop us from campaigning! **We have included ideas for campaign actions that you can do from home and how to involve older people.**

## 4. What is ageism

Ageism is “the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people on the basis of their age”<sup>1</sup>. It means treating people unfairly because of their age.

Throughout society, people make assumptions about older people and older age which do not reflect reality. Some of these assumptions include that all older people are frail, dependent or experiencing mental and physical decline. This results in prejudice, and discrimination, and means that individual experiences of ageing are ignored.

## 5. What to look for

Ageism is happening in the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Policymakers, the public and media are stereotyping everyone over the age of 70 as helpless, frail, unable to make decisions for themselves, and unable to contribute to society. See Table 1 in [this paper](#) for examples.<sup>2</sup>
- In Kenya, a Member of Parliament singled out legislators above the age of 58 in parliament and, as a joke, asked they be allowed to leave as they were vulnerable to COVID-19<sup>3</sup>
- In Bosnia and Herzegovina, people over 65 were not allowed to go outside, with no exceptions for grocery shopping, pharmacy visits, or even taking out the garbage. Over 200 older people were fined for leaving their homes.<sup>4</sup>

When you are planning what you want to campaign on, look out for:

### **Ageist language and attitudes, such as:**

- Comments by public figures or politicians that stereotype all older people as frail, vulnerable, unable to make decisions for themselves, or comments which show a negative attitude towards older people
- Reporting by the press that stereotype all older people as frail, vulnerable, unable to make decisions for

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/en/>

<sup>2</sup><https://academic.oup.com/psychsocgerontology/article/doi/10.1093/geronb/gbaa051/5820621>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kenyans.co.ke/news/52063-junet-leaves-parliament-stitches-advice-elderly-mp-video>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/bosnia-and-herzegovinas-coronavirus-curbs-children-and-older-people-are-ill>

themselves, or comments which show a negative attitude towards older people

**Government, local authority, health service, NGO, private sector or other agency policies that are based on age and have a negative impact on older people's rights, such as:**

- Guidelines on how to decide who has access to medical treatment based on age
- Policies on who has to stay at home or under curfew based on age

**Some response measures may not discriminate on the basis of age, but still impact older people's rights:**

- Disruption to social security payments (e.g. pensions)
- Reduction of social care and support services
- Disruption to non-COVID-19 health services
- Information or services only available online or through mobile phones
- Fines or punishments for people who leave their homes
- Decisions about older persons' medical treatment made without their consent
- Loss of income and food shortages due to disruptions to informal trading in local markets and farming.

**Or exclusion of older people from policies and interventions, such as:**

- Domestic violence interventions that do not include older people
- Failure to provide older people with health, social and palliative care – in care homes, at home or in the community

- Humanitarian responses that do not address older people's risks and needs
- Exclusion of deaths in care homes from official data on death rates
- Economic and social recovery measures that exclude older people

## 6. How to know if an action is age discrimination

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a risk that older people will face age discrimination in different areas of their lives. This includes restrictions in access to healthcare, or physical distancing policies that are based on age. So, how do we know if a policy or an action is age discrimination?

To assess whether a policy or an action is age discrimination or not, we need to ask:

1. Is age the basis on which a decision is made, action is taken, or no action is taken?
2. Does this have a negative impact on the person's rights compared to people of a different age?

If the answer is yes to both, then this is direct age discrimination.

If the answer to question 1 is no, but the answer to question 2 is yes, this is indirect age discrimination.

Here is an example:

### *Deciding who gets medical treatment*

As the COVID-19 pandemic intensifies, medical resources may become insufficient. Difficult choices may have to be made about who receives medical treatment. Deciding how to allocate resources among large numbers of patients is called 'triage'.

A triage policy that uses an upper age limit, e.g. 80 years old, to decide who gets medical treatment is:

1. Based on age

2. Denies anyone over the age of 80 medical treatment and therefore denies them their equal right to access healthcare services alongside anyone under the age of 80 years old. It may also infringe upon their right to life.

This is direct age discrimination. Triage policies must be based on clinical assessment, medical need, scientific evidence and ethical principles, and not on non-medical characteristics like age or disability.

## 7. Steps to plan your campaign

We understand it is difficult to plan a campaign in rapidly changing context. You may plan your campaign, but something may change, and you may need to respond. As campaigners, we need to be flexible and react to events as they happen.

**Remember, you can always ask us for support! We are here to support you throughout your campaign. We can help you identify instances of ageism (or where it might happen) if you are unsure, and help you plan what to do about it.**

### Older people's voices

It is critical for those affected by a crisis to be the leading voice within any advocacy or campaign. Older people have first-hand insight into the effects of the pandemic as well the impact of discriminatory responses or stigma they may be experiencing. We must make sure that we put older people's voices at the front and centre of our campaigns.

Principles that should underpin your campaign:

1. Older people's unique perspectives should be central to the design of your campaign.
2. Older people's stories and voices should be central to your campaign communications.
3. Older people's self-advocacy should be supported so their participation is not tokenistic.

Speak to older people about their experiences, worries and hopes for the future. Listen to older people from different backgrounds including older women, older men, people with disabilities, and people living in different settings. Their experiences should inform what you want to campaign on, and what your key messages are. Consult with older people about the issue you wish to campaign on and ask them to lead on or take part in campaign actions where it is possible.

**Speak to older people online or over the phone, so that you do not spread or contract the virus.** If they have had experiences of discrimination or have experienced something traumatic, make sure you can advise them on where they can go to seek support or make a complaint. For instance, they can complain to your national human rights institution, equalities commission or ombudsman.

You still need the person's explicit consent to use their story in your campaigning. If you wish to share the story with HelpAge, you must get consent from the older person themselves – otherwise we cannot share it. This means informing the person of what is written in this [Privacy Notice](#) and [consent form](#), and explicitly asking them if we can use their stories and photos in our communications.

### a) Analyse the issue

- Find out your government's proposed response to COVID-19. What has the government response been so far? What is the impact on older people?
- Identify the political, cultural, social and environmental trends surrounding your government's response to COVID-19. This will help you to better understand what is happening now, and what might happen in the future. Here is a [context map](#)<sup>5</sup> to help you
  - How might these trends change over the course of the pandemic?
  - What has the government response to COVID-19 been so far? How might the government's response to COVID-19 change?
  - What will the impact on older people be?
- Assess the impact of the response so far on older people's rights. See sections 2 and 3 for support with this.
- Listen to what older people are saying about their experiences of COVID-19 so far. Speak to them **over the phone or online** to so that you do not spread or contract the virus. [Check out our case study guide here](#) and [how to ensure informed consent](#).<sup>6</sup>
- Use the information you have collected to inform your campaign objective.

### b) Write your objective

Use the results from your context analysis to decide what you want to achieve from your campaign. By [September] 2020,

what do you want to have achieved? Your objective must be relevant to the overall campaign objectives outlined above.

### c) Decide who you are targeting

Who can make the change that you want to see? You need to identify who is your primary target – this the person who can ultimately make the change you want to see. [This Power Mapping resource](#)<sup>7</sup> can help you map your stakeholders by how influential they are and how much they agree with your issue, and help you map out the routes to influence your primary target (it is available in different languages).

Be specific about your primary target. Name a person within an organisation or body – don't only name the organisation or body itself. For instance, your primary target may be Mrs J Smith, Ministry of Health or Mr S Jones, ageing correspondent at The Daily Star.

### d) Write your key messages

Key messages are the core messages you want your target to hear and remember. Use key messages in all of your tactics. You may find you need to respond to emerging issues, so you may need a set of key messages to each issue you want to respond to.

Make sure these are clear, precise, memorable and backed up by the evidence you have found in your analysis. Here is a template to help you:

1. What you are asking for - a brief statement of what you want to change. It should be positive and inspiring.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://mobilisationlab.org/resources/context-map/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://helpage.box.com/s/u3qzez5jfs01nxtfbf5dhndlhozzmjha>

<sup>7</sup> <https://beautifulrising.org/tool/power-mapping>

2. The reason for the “ask” - why the campaign wants to achieve this, why something has to change, or the reason behind the campaign action
3. What is at stake - what will happen if this change does not happen
4. The action you want your target to take. Make it clear and specific.

*Adapted from <https://www.endvawnow.org/>*

### **e) Tactics**

Which tactics will get the attention of your primary and secondary targets? First, think about what you want to say, who you want to say it to, and the best way to reach them.

Remember you need to employ more than one tactic over the course of the three-month campaign. You may need to employ different tactics at different times, in response to events as they happen. Map out a timeline for when you will implement each tactic.

**Ask older people to lead and take part in campaign actions where it is possible to do so, without putting them at risk of contracting the virus.**

This is a difficult time to act, because many of us are under distancing measures. But this is a time to be creative! Here are some ideas for tactics that can be done from home:

- Online meetings with targets
- Think about where your target has an online presence and which channels to prioritise. Some may be active on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).

- Use your social media to get your key messages out. Keep checking [Box](#) for HelpAge social media assets, which are updated weekly.
- Write letters to targets. Ask older activists to write letters too
- Write an open letter to targets and post it online. [See this example](#) from ageing organisations in the UK
- Set up a petition using a tool like change.org (**be sure to read their guidance first to make your petition effective**).
- Make complaints about instances of discrimination to your national human rights institution, equalities commission, or ombudsman
- Engaging with radio to get messages out. [Check out our guidance here](#)
- Write press releases or statements in reaction to policy decisions or events. Write opinion editorials, or letters to newspaper editors
- Engage with journalists to ask decisionmakers questions on your behalf at press conferences with decisionmakers or other forums. Email them, call them, or find them on social media like Twitter.
- Work in coalition with other organisations to amplify your messages and reach a wider audience. Think creatively! Are there other civil society organisations you could join forces with?

Keep us up to date with when you will take campaign actions, so we can support you through our communications channels.

### **f) Monitor the situation and your progress**

Constantly monitor the situation. Go back to your context analysis. Has anything changed? Keep monitoring instances of



ageism and the impact of responses on older people's rights. You may need to change your target or come up with new campaign tactics, depending on developments during the pandemic.

### How to communicate during COVID-19

We want to communicate that older people are at heightened risk of the impacts of COVID-19, but at the same time we don't want to reinforce stereotypes of vulnerability ourselves. Whilst older people are among those most at risk of complications from COVID-19, this is not an 'older person's disease'. Everybody is at risk of being impacted by COVID-19, and everyone can help stop transmission

[The Frameworks Institute](#) has useful guidance on how to ensure we are effective and inclusive in how we communicate.

## 8. Useful information

- [HelpAge Brief - Everyone Matters](#)<sup>8</sup>
- [HelpAge's COVID-19 hub](#), which has technical guidance and links to upcoming webinars<sup>9</sup>
- [World Health Organisation](#)<sup>10</sup>
- [John Hopkins University Coronavirus Resource Centre](#)<sup>11</sup>
- [Devex: How to advocate in the age of COVID-19](#)<sup>12</sup>
- [COVID-19 and Human Rights: We are all in this together](#)<sup>13</sup> (United Nations)
- [Policy brief: The Impact of COVID-19 on Older Persons](#) (United Nations)

**If you need any support planning your campaign, or you need technical advice, please let us know at [campaigns@helpage.org](mailto:campaigns@helpage.org).**

**Stay safe! With hope and in solidarity**

Ellie and Jemma

**[www.helpage.org](http://www.helpage.org)**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/covid19-everyone-matters/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/coronavirus-covid19/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<sup>11</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.devex.com/news/opinion-how-to-advocate-effectively-in-the-age-of-covid-19-96812#.XnofohcBGb0.twitter>

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_human\\_rights\\_and\\_covid\\_23\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf)