

# Out of sight, out of mind:

## *The inclusion and use of data on older people in the humanitarian programme cycle*

**HelpAge**

**International**



El-Medad Society for Community Rehabilitation

### Contents

- 2 Older people excluded from data
- 4 Barriers to including older people in data
- 4 Humanitarian Programme Cycle
- 7 Inclusion in HPC *Step by Step Guide*
- 8 Humanitarian and data contexts
- 10 Our world is changing
- 12 Recommendations

### Key messages

- As the world's demographics change and the global population ages, older people will increasingly make up a substantial part of crisis affected populations. We need our humanitarian system to adapt to ensure all older people access their basic rights to protection and dignity.
- Despite improvements in the visibility of older people in humanitarian contexts, there is still a long way to go to bridge the gap between existing guidance and policy and implementation.
- There is significant variation in where and how data on older people is disaggregated and information on older people included in Humanitarian Needs Overviews (HNOs) and Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs).
- Until there are appropriate levels of intersectoral and intersectional analysis and response, it is important that older people are included within specific objectives in HRPs. Otherwise, they will simply be forgotten.

Data and information collected and analysed in humanitarian settings, including through Humanitarian Needs Overviews, inform priorities for donors, the UN and individual agencies. It is presented and used throughout the Humanitarian Programme Cycle (HPC), and impacts upon funding decisions for Humanitarian Response Plans.

Humanitarian data is a key part of the whole humanitarian system. If you are missing in the data, it is likely you will be missing in the response.



This briefing is taken from the technical report, *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: The inclusion and use of data on older people in the humanitarian programme cycle* →. It is based on analysis of 27 HNOs and HRPAs from 2021 and 26 interviews with those involved in HPC data collection and analysis. The briefing contains recommendations for strengthening the understanding of older people's rights and needs within humanitarian response and the wider humanitarian system.



Peter Catoni/Age International

Kiir waits patiently for the cash distribution provided by Humanitarian Development Consortium (HelpAge partner organisation) in Protection of Civilians camp 3 in Juba, South Sudan.

In 2019:

**1 in 3**

aid agencies collected age-inclusive data in their emergency response



**1 in 4**

needs assessment reports mentioned older people



## Older people are regularly excluded from humanitarian data

Humanitarian principles and human rights law afford everyone the right to safe and dignified access to assistance and protection on an equal basis with others. Yet, despite being among those most at risk in humanitarian crises, older people's rights are frequently denied and they receive little targeted attention from governments, donors, or humanitarian agencies.

HelpAge International's 2018 study, *If not now, when?*<sup>1</sup> →, highlighted significant failings in how the humanitarian system includes older people when responding to crises, including in the absence of data about older people. Research in 2019 found that only one in three aid agencies collect age-inclusive data in their emergency response, and only one in four needs assessment reports mention older people.<sup>2</sup> This lack of visibility for older people and the lack of understanding of their rights and needs has a direct impact on the support available to them when humanitarian crises take place.

As the impact of Covid-19 continues to reverberate around the globe and the 'oldest' humanitarian crisis in the world unfolds in Ukraine, there has never been a more important time to look again at whether older people are properly included in humanitarian response, and whether our humanitarian systems, including the HPC, are up to the task of ensuring no older person is left behind.



*“I used to be a teacher and after retirement I tutored classes for older people. We had a club for retired people at the library and we would talk or discuss books, exhibit handicrafts and it was called ‘Ladies’, which in Russian also sounds like ‘yes, us’. We wanted to affirm that we exist and we treat life with interest.”*

**Valentina, 81, Ukraine**

Emre Caylak/HelpAge International



## Barriers to including older people in humanitarian data

Findings in the *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* report show that there have been some improvements in the visibility of older people in humanitarian contexts. There is, however, still a long way to go to bridge the gap between existing guidance and policy and implementation on the ground. This includes the need to ensure consistency and quality of data to ensure that older people are fully included.

*“There was an older lady who was left at home without food or medicine on the seventh floor of our apartment block. Volunteers couldn’t get inside. The emergency services came and they broke the door down, but they found her dead already. Her relatives had been trying to enter the city to visit her.”*

62-year-old woman, Ukraine

## The Humanitarian Programme Cycle

The *Step by Step Guide* → issued each year by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) alongside the the HPC states that the number of people in need, the strategic objectives of plans, and the number of people targeted should be disaggregated by age, and that data on older people should be consolidated and analysed in assessments, HNOs and HRPs. We found that of the 2021 HNOs that were reviewed for this report:

- all mentioned older people as a group particularly affected by conflict and all but one of the HRPs do the same.
- almost all of the HNOs also mention the specific needs of older people and how their needs differ from other segments of the population (91 per cent), and/or mention older people in the sector analysis of needs (87 per cent).

Despite the guidance and these results, closer analysis of the documents reveals significant variation in where and how data on older people is disaggregated, and information on older people is included. HNOs and HRPs use a range of data sources and although they are mandated to present disaggregated data where available, across most of the HNOs and HRPs we reviewed, the attention given to older people is generally brief and sporadic.<sup>3</sup>

**In particular, there is a lack of consistency in the extent to which older people are included in descriptions of humanitarian conditions, sectoral analysis, or strategic and sector objectives.**

For example:

- Fewer than half of the HNOs included any specific analysis of the needs of older people (Figure 1, next page).
- Only a third of the HNOs included intersectional analysis with attention to older people (Figure 2, next page).
- Over half of the HRPs contained no specific and/or no percentage-based sector objectives for older people (Figure 1, next page).

We recognise that responding to lots of different sectoral objectives for different at-risk groups is challenging. However, until we have appropriate levels of intersectoral and intersectional analysis and response, it is important that older people are included within specific objectives in HRPs.

Otherwise, they will simply be forgotten.



**Figure 1: Inclusion of older people in 2021 humanitarian needs overviews**

Older people mentioned as a vulnerable group in the narrative (alongside other groups)	100%
Information on the specific needs of older people, and where they differ from other segments of the population	91%
Older people mentioned in the sector analysis of needs	87%
Barriers to access to assistance for older people mentioned	70%
Analysis of the needs of older people (specific)	43%
Intersectional analysis that includes older people	35%
Reference to HelpAge or other assessments of older people	22%

**Figure 2: Inclusion of older people in 2021 humanitarian response plans**

Older people mentioned as a vulnerable group amongst other groups	96%
Older people referred to in sector response plans	88%
Needs of older people are referred to specifically as a priority	63%
Specific and percentage-based sector objectives included for older people	46%



Ali A. Abu Shanab

**Older woman taking part in COVID-19 Emergency Response Needs Assessment carried out by El Wedad (HelpAge partner organisation) in Gaza, Palestine, 2021.**

Analysis of 2021 HRPs found that 10.5 million older people around the world were in need of humanitarian assistance – that is approximately five per cent of the total number of people in need. Our research has found that despite this level of need:

- Older people are – in most cases – listed as a vulnerable group in HRPs but this is often where inclusion ends. This listing is rarely accompanied by an analysis of the reasons why they experience disproportionate needs and their capabilities for dealing with them.
- Accurate data on their specific needs and detailed analysis of that data is currently lacking within the HPC processes.
- Intersectional analysis in the HPC is lacking and where it does exist it is rarely age sensitive, despite the needs and vulnerability of older people intersecting with gender, disability, and other factors.
- There is a lack of consistent methodology for calculating the number and proportion of older people in need of, and targeted for, assistance, making it hard to employ a consistent approach to ensuring their inclusion.
- While HelpAge International’s presence in some crises has helped improve the collection and analysis of information on the needs of older people, the lack of a specialised agency working on the issue in most contexts is a serious barrier to older people being better addressed in the HPC.
- Sector or agency specific assessments can and do offer a very practical way of increasing data collection and analysis on the needs of older people within the HPC; however, currently few of these take place and where they do, provide little attention to the needs of older people in most contexts.

Our analysis of each stage of the HPC *Step by Step Guide* highlights areas where data prioritisation, collection, analysis and usage could be improved to be more inclusive of older people in HNOs and HRPs. To support developments already made within the HPC, the following specific practical actions could be taken:

## **Ensuring the full inclusion of older people in the HPC *Step by Step Guide***

### **Step 1**

- Include collection and analysis of older people's needs as a clear instruction in the HPC guide – like gender is currently included.
- Change the requirement that age disaggregation is only required 'as much as feasible'; make it clear this is an essential part of inclusive humanitarian response.

### **Step 2**

- As a way of addressing some of the challenges in lack of data, agree a methodology and appropriate data source(s) for calculating the population figures for older people in need as part of the secondary data review in the HNO. This secondary data review should include needs-based data in existing assessment data.

### **Step 3**

- Strengthen Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs) by using them alongside agency or cluster-specific assessments (not as the only tool used to determine need) with respect to older people; needs of older people should be included in primary data collection for HNOs via whatever assessments are being used.
- Strengthen relevant government ministries and departments knowledge, capacity and understanding on older people and data collection systems.
- Ensure Global Protection Cluster's (GPC's) monitoring data is disaggregated by age and that the GPC's guidance to field protection officer provides concrete instructions as to how to collect and analyse data on older people.

### **Step 4**

- Strengthen capacity within clusters to understand risks older people face and analyse their needs, as well as cluster knowledge and understanding of how disability and older age intersect.

### **Step 5**

- Ensure older people are included in sector objectives where appropriate.

### **Step 6**

- Ensure that older people are included in the response analysis to address their specific needs and, where appropriate, include them in the strategic objectives of HRPs and their respective sector plans.

### **Step 7**

- Ensure older people are included in indicators related to interventions that address their specific needs in HRPs.

### **Step 8**

- Include projects/activities that either directly target the needs of older people or ensure that they are considered in broader programmes.

### **Step 9**

- Ensure that action reviews address inclusion; including the extent to which older people's needs have been addressed.

### **Step 10**

- Ensure that older people are included in monitoring plans for HRPs and that results are reported on accordingly.

## The wider humanitarian and data contexts

The gaps we found within the HPC reflect the wider data context in which all agencies are operating. Throughout the humanitarian system, including but not limited to the HPC, there are a number of common themes which act as consistent barriers to the inclusion of older people in humanitarian data:

### Lack of specificity in some existing guidance and tools on older people

In the *Step by Step Guide*, there is only one direct reference to older people (step four). The first step does not specifically call for age sensitive analysis when considering what to prioritise and whilst step two mentions age, it suggests gender analysis is essential, with consideration of age and disability as well. The *Step by Step Guide* has a glossary where disability, population and gender are all given specific focus. Age is mentioned under a number of headings but no definition is given to older age or age disaggregated data. Age disaggregation is asked for 'where possible' and explanations of older age or what age disaggregation should look like are not provided. All of this means that there is a lack of clarity and priority given to the inclusion of older people within the HPC (and associated documents and processes) which acts as a barrier to this inclusion.

*“He wasn’t given any clothes because he had to go there himself. He can’t get out of the house so he can’t get his share.”*

**Family member of older person with disabilities in Tanzania highlights that the requirement for people to go in person to distribution points means that some are denied their right to receive humanitarian aid**

### Lack of incentives and accountability for those working on the ground

It’s clear that in a context of declining resources and increasing needs, humanitarian actors are under enormous pressure to ‘prioritise’. This can result in increased focus on populations that are larger in number, and/or more visible and easy to identify. Where older people are known to comprise a relatively small percentage of people in need, or are less visible (for example, not able to travel to refugee camps or aid distribution points) humanitarian actors involved might not see them as warranting specific attention.



Often, prioritisation comes down to practical factors like numbers – but everyone, whether in a group of one million or standing alone, is entitled to enjoy their rights and receive protection and assistance.

The number of people in an at-risk group should not be the only driver when deciding on humanitarian priorities. If a group faces particular limitations to the enjoyment of their rights and wellbeing this needs to be taken into account. At present, there is no process within the HPC to review the extent to which at-risk groups have been included appropriately and hold actors within the system to account. It is also impossible to know the extent to which projects target older people in HRPs, another way in which it is difficult to ensure accountability.



## **Lack of leadership, including in policy focus on older people at global level, across the humanitarian system**

While HNOs have increasingly incorporated data on gender and disability, there has been far less attention to older people's rights and needs. The only Inter Agency Standing Committee (IASC) guidance document on older people is a 2008 briefing note, which is very outdated and provides limited direction for HPC processes.<sup>4</sup>

**While IASC and UN policies and guidelines on gender equality and people with disabilities require that these considerations be addressed within the HPC, there are no such similar requirements for older people.**



Learning lessons from the growing inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian response, and the processes and policy backdrop behind this, it is clear that UN and IASC conventions, policies and guidelines are an important contributing factor in raising the visibility and understanding of a specific group, and accountability in ensuring they are included.

Growing donor demands have driven improvements in data collection on disability and disability-inclusive programming, as policies and guidelines provide a tool for accountability and a framework for donors to promote inclusive humanitarian programming. This has translated into guidance and training on disability inclusion in HRPs, and has led to a range of training and capacity building initiatives across all humanitarian actors, designed to improve inclusion of people with disabilities. Without this same level of policy change and donor and UN agency leadership to promote accountability and an increased focus on older people, it is unlikely we will see significant changes in the inclusion of older people in HPC and humanitarian data more broadly.

## **Lack of background data to support humanitarian actors in other global data collection processes**

We know there are big gaps when it comes to older people in a range of data sources, which has a major impact on the HPC process. Interviews and reviews of HPC documents carried out for the *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* report indicate that without pre-existing data and information on the needs of older people, they are unlikely to be prioritised within the HPC. The lack of available and reliable national data and statistics are not something that the HPC can fix; this is a wider issue that needs to be addressed. However, these gaps are exacerbated when there is no specialist agency working on older age across development and humanitarian spheres.



Brook Admasu/HelpAge International

**HelpAge staff consulting with older people affected by drought in Borena region, Ethiopia 2022.**

## Older people in Ukraine – building an inclusive humanitarian system response

Millions of older people in Ukraine are currently facing violence and displacement. In a country where one in four people is over age 60, the impact of the conflict has been dramatic. Older people are performing crucial roles in the response to the current crisis, whether as volunteers or as caregivers for other older adults and/or children. However, depending on their circumstances, many are experiencing specific and significant challenges. Those who have remained in their homes in areas of intense fighting face challenges in accessing shelter as well as essential supplies and services. Separation from families has left many exposed and isolated. For older people who have been evacuated to other areas in the country, the journey is arduous, often taking several days in cramped and over-crowded trains, buses and on foot. Older people are also among the more than five million people who have managed to cross the borders to relative safety but face the uncertainty of where they will go and when they will be able to return home.

Ukraine has suffered a protracted crisis since conflict broke out in the east of the country in 2014. Prior to the escalation into an international armed conflict in February 2022, 1.3 million of the 3.4 million people estimated to need humanitarian assistance were older people (aged 60 years and above). Comprising 41 per cent of the target population in the HRP, older people in Ukraine were, fortunately, already a priority throughout the HPC. The numbers of older people now in need of humanitarian assistance, and the severity of that need, have increased since the escalation of conflict across the country.

Ukraine was one of the few countries reviewed where collecting data on the needs of older people was a priority, with a dedicated rapid needs assessment conducted by HelpAge International as part of the Humanitarian Needs Overview. The MSNA for Ukraine included specific indicators and modules to provide some data and information relevant to older people. A Working Group on Disability and Older People already existed, and data collected on older people translated into specific interventions tailored to their needs within the HRP, with dedicated resources provided through the pooled Humanitarian Fund. This was before the conflict escalated on 24 February 2022. The prioritisation of older people prior to live conflict breaking out across the whole country provided an opportunity for the ongoing humanitarian response to be more inclusive. The right things were in place, however the follow through in the live humanitarian context has not lived up to the potential, with organisations in the response resorting to business as usual. You can read more about our recommendations for a fully inclusive humanitarian response in Ukraine here →.



Emre Caylak/HelpAge International

**Iryna, 60, travelled to Dnipro from Kramatorsk, Ukraine, with her 81-year-old mother and her 41-year-old son. Iryna was diagnosed with breast cancer, but when the war started the chemo department was evacuated from her hospital, and volunteers in Dnipro are helping her with treatment.**

## Our world is changing; our humanitarian responses must too

As the world's demographics change and the global population ages, older people will increasingly make up a substantial part of crisis affected populations, as we are seeing right now in Ukraine. We need our humanitarian system to adapt to ensure all older people access their basic rights to protection and dignity.

There are signs of hope. There are lessons we can learn from the increasing meaningful inclusion of people with disabilities in humanitarian response; we have seen significant improvements in the data on people with disabilities in the HNOs which *de facto* has improved data on older people given that many people with disabilities are also older people. Guidance and tools do exist to promote the inclusion of older people and many sectors do already include mention of older people in their sector plans in the HRPs, with the protection cluster taking a clear lead on the issue. These are important developments, but it remains unclear how or whether these are leading to targeted interventions for older people. Current implementation of guidance and tools is also not systematic.

We recognise that humanitarian actors are hugely stretched and that a considerable shift in understanding and thinking is required to change the dial. We also know how important it is that our humanitarian system is truly inclusive.

**We are calling for that system to be accountable to all it professes to serve.**



*“We spent all the time in the corridor of our apartment because the basement is down a set of stairs and I have a back problem. Younger people could run down and hide whenever there was shelling, but I was not ready for those runs. We could have stayed in the basement all the time, but it was cold and damp down there. I couldn't take it.”*

**Raisa, 71, and Alexander, 71, fled from Severodonetsk to Dnipro in Ukraine**



## Recommendations



### Members States should:

- Improve the quantity and quality of ageing related statistics and age disaggregated data including by investing in administrative data systems, ensuring surveys include older people in their samples and include age sensitive analysis, and engaging with the Titchfield City Group on Ageing-Related Statistics and Age Disaggregated Data.

### Humanitarian donors should:

- Commit to the further and better inclusion of older people in humanitarian contexts as they have done in relation to the inclusion of people with disabilities – through funding allocations and provision of guidance on data collection and use.
- Require humanitarian appeals that they fund to provide age disaggregated data on older people and an analysis of their needs to ensure transparent and targeted programming.
- Include indicators on older people in their monitoring frameworks with partners funded through the HPC process.

### The IASC should:

- Develop guidance on how to address older people within the HPC.
- Advocate for all humanitarian actors to address older people's needs in the elaboration of humanitarian appeals.
- Assign a clear focal point within the IASC structures to improve inclusion of older people in humanitarian actions in general and in HPC processes in particular.

### Alongside the recommendations made in relation to the HPC Step by Step Guide, UN OCHA should:

- Provide guidance on the collection and use of data on older people and ageing, to ensure consistency across HNOs and HRPs.
- Clarify that age disaggregated data collection and analysis for HNOs and HRPs requires addressing all age groups and including the specific needs of older people and work with specialised agencies (like HelpAge) to drive this work forward.
- Review HNOs and HRPs on an annual basis to ensure that older people are more meaningfully included in the collection, analysis and presentation of data and that improvements are seen year on year.
- Work with specialised agencies to ensure that data on older people is included in future HPC guidance including content on collecting data on their needs.
- Introduce an indicator on older people in the annual Quality Review process for HNOs and HRPs.

### The Global Protection Cluster should:

- Continue to strengthen guidance and training on HNOs and HRPs to improve how they address older people's needs.
- Provide support to the field Protection Clusters to improve data collection and analysis on the needs of older people, including through its protection monitoring.
- Task its seconded staff with expertise on older people to provide technical support to field operations in this area.

*continued over >*



### **REACH should:**

- Ensure age disaggregated data is included in standardised MSNAs.
- Include questions and / or sub questions on older people within the standardised MSNA methodology.
- Ensure that all MSNAs include an analysis of older people's needs and how they intersect with gender, disability and other forms of vulnerability OR ensure a sector or cluster specific assessment is used in conjunction with the MSNA in specific contexts so that older people are included.

### **Humanitarian Country Teams should:**

- Ensure that age disaggregated data that includes older people is mainstreamed throughout the HNO and HRP.
- Ensure that HRPs include clear objectives and indicators to support and monitor the inclusion of older people in the response.

### **Other agencies / INGOs:**

- Improve intersectional analysis and response to ensure older people are not excluded from responses that are not delivered by those specialising in working with older people. Whilst other agencies are now responsible for the HPC or tools within it, there are data, tools and guidance that can be used now to deliver more inclusive humanitarian response programmes.

### **HelpAge International should:**

- Work closely with OCHA to support them in providing technical guidance, tools and capacity building across clusters and within the HPC, to ensure older people are better included in HNOs and HRPs.
- Provide training and capacity building for those carrying out HNOs and HRPs.
- Continue to collaborate with organisations of people with disabilities and with a strong focus on gender, to advocate for improved MSNA terms of reference and standardised methodologies that ensure the collection, analysis and disaggregation of data on older people and intersecting needs.
- Advocate for the inclusion and use of HelpAge's data and other data collected about older people as an important source of information relating to older people in the HNOs.



Azzam al-Zubairi/DEC

**Fighting in Yemen has displaced thousands of families who are now having to live in camps.**

## Endnotes

1. Verity McGivern, and Ken Bluestone, *If not now, when? Keeping promises to older people affected by humanitarian crises* →, HelpAge International, 2020
2. HelpAge International Asia, *More at risk: how older people are excluded in humanitarian data* →, HelpAge International Asia Pacific Regional Office, 2019
3. The countries for which the HNO included more detailed analysis of older people's needs were Cameroon, Haiti, Mali and Myanmar.
4. *Humanitarian action and older persons: An essential brief for humanitarian actors* →, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2008,

## Glossary

- GPC** Global Protection Cluster
- HNO** Humanitarian Needs Overview
- HPC** Humanitarian Programme Cycle
- HRP** Humanitarian Response Plan
- IASC** Inter Agency Standing Committee
- MSNA** Multi-Sector Needs Assessment
- UN OCHA** United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



Michael Goima/Fairpicture/HelpAge International

Older men playing a traditional game of Bao, Tanzania.

**HelpAge International works with older people in low- and middle-income countries for better services and policies, and for changes in the behaviours and attitudes of individuals and societies towards older age. It is a leading humanitarian response organisation, working to ensure that older people are included in immediate and long-term humanitarian relief efforts on the ground and in humanitarian policies and guidelines.**

**HelpAge International works with a diverse global network of more than 150 organisations across 85 countries.**

**Together we promote the rights of older people to lead safe, dignified and healthy lives. The HelpAge Global Network has more than 35 years' experience of working with older people in emergencies.**

Published by HelpAge International  
PO Box 78840, London SE1P 6QR, UK

Tel +44 (0)20 7278 7778  
info@helpage.org

**www.helpage.org**

Registered charity no. 288180

Written by Madeleine McGivern, independent consultant, based on a technical report by Damian Lilly and Sarah Collinson, independent consultants.

For more information about the content of this briefing please contact Hester Clark, Humanitarian Advocacy Adviser at HelpAge International  
hester.clark@helpage.org

Design by TRUE [www.truedesign.co.uk](http://www.truedesign.co.uk)



@HelpAge



HelpAge International

Copyright © HelpAge International September 2022

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License,  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0>

Any parts of this publication may be reproduced without permission for non-profit and educational purposes.  
Please clearly credit HelpAge International and send us a copy or link.