

Market Impact

Digital Solutions Ltd.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE EVALUATION REPORT

HelpAge International

Humanitarian Capacity Strengthening (HCS)

Programme (2021–2025)

Commissioned by:	HelpAge International
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Disclaimer

- This evaluation was conducted by MarketImpact Digital Solutions Ltd. as an independent external assessment. The views expressed in this report are those of the evaluators based on information shared by HelpAge International staff or its network members.
- All data was collected remotely. Findings are based on triangulated evidence from document review, key informant interviews, and an online survey.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

AAP	Accountability to Affected Population
AIHI	Age-Inclusive Humanitarian Intervention
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standard
DAC	Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
EPP	Emergency Preparedness Plan
EQ	Evaluation Question
ERT	Emergency Response Team
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
HCS	Humanitarian Capacity Strengthening
HIS	Humanitarian Inclusion Standards
HLG	Humanitarian Learning Group
HOPE	Humanitarian Operations Programme for Emergencies
HR	Human Resources
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IRC	International Rescue Committee
KII	Key Informant Interview
LPMF	Localisation Performance Measurement Framework
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
NEAR	Network for Empowered Aid Response
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OP	Older Person(s)
PLP	Partner-Led Programming
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
SADDD	Sex, Age and Disability Data Disaggregation
SHAPE	Strengthening Humanitarian Action through Participatory Engagement
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
ToT	Training of Trainers
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
Unicef	United Nations's Children Fund
WFP	World Food Programme

Executive Summary

Evaluation Purpose and Scope

This independent evaluation assesses the quality, effectiveness and relevance of HelpAge International’s Humanitarian Capacity Strengthening (HCS) programme (2021–2025) in delivering on its two strategic objectives: providing a consistent approach to humanitarian capacity strengthening across the HelpAge network, and strengthening network members to develop and deliver quality, age-inclusive humanitarian responses. The evaluation also generates actionable recommendations to inform the design of the next HCS strategy chapter.

The evaluation framework integrates OECD-DAC criteria (relevance, effectiveness, coherence, sustainability), Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) principles (inclusion, accountability), and selected dimensions of the NEAR Network’s Localisation Performance Measurement Framework (LPMF) to assess equitable partnerships and locally led capacity strengthening. All data was collected remotely through desk review, 19 key informant interviews (in English, Spanish, Arabic), a multilingual online survey (48 respondents), four written testimonies (in English, Spanish and Ukrainian), and three case studies spanning Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Eastern Europe.

Evaluation Criteria Overview

Evaluation Criteria	Score	
Coherence	High	HCS activities were well aligned with strategic objectives and programme components complemented each other effectively within a consistent yet flexible methodology.
Relevance	High	HCS addressed priority gaps to a high or very high extent; the demand-driven SHAPE ensured activities matched organisational needs.
Impact	Moderate/High	Partners report enhanced advocacy, new partnerships and contributions to national policies; longer-term impact on older people’s lives is plausible but not yet systematically measured. Changes in policies are clear, while changes in practices are less systematic.
Efficiency	Moderate	Blended learning model and light reporting requirements maximised partner time for implementation; post-restructuring staff constraints and limited in-person delivery reduced programme delivery efficiency.
Effectiveness	High	90% of SHAPE participants reported organisational change; significant policy and

Evaluation Criteria	Score	
Inclusion		systems improvements across governance, MEAL, inclusion, and emergency response.
	Moderate	Significant improvements in inclusion of older with concrete policy changes. Older people were not meaningfully involved in HCS programme design itself.
Accountability	Moderate/High	Improved accountability to affected populations; diversified feedback mechanisms, CHS standards adoption, and improved donor compliance. Feedback/complaint mechanisms for older people showed moderate improvement in survey.
Sustainability	Moderate	Policy and strategic document changes are likely to endure, however significant risks from staff turnover, funding uncertainty and limited policy-to-practice translation remain.
PLP/ Localisation	High	Equitable partnerships, high-quality relationships, and mutual trust between HelpAge and its partners. Partner-led design shifted power dynamics within the programme and influenced partners' own understanding of what equitable partnerships should look like.

Key Findings

Coherence and Alignment (EQ1, EQ3)

The HCS programme demonstrated strong strategic coherence. Activities matched the strategy's intent through a consistent, yet flexible methodology anchored in the SHAPE framework, complemented by e-courses, webinars, regional trainings, ToT pathways and coaching. Programme objectives were commonly understood by staff and partners alike. The integration of multiple training formats—with SHAPE identifying gaps, Kaya and online live sessions providing foundational learning, and regional workshops enabling practical application—proved a particularly effective combination. SHAPE was rated the most impactful component (79.2% of survey respondents), followed by Kaya e-learning (58.3%) and regional workshops (50%).

Relevance and Responsiveness (EQ4)

The programme was highly relevant to partners' needs, largely because capacity strengthening priorities were identified and owned by partners themselves through the SHAPE self-assessment. The quality of facilitation and the field-based expertise of trainers were consistently praised. Challenges included limited multilingual content, time-zone barriers for Latin American partners (with some sessions scheduled at 5:00 AM), connectivity issues for frontline staff outside capitals, and the volume of activities relative to partners' operational workloads.

PLP, Localisation and Equitable Partnerships (EQ2, EQ7, EQ12, EQ13)

Partners reported high autonomy within the SHAPE framework and described their relationship with HelpAge as equitable, trust-based and genuinely partner-led. Decision-making on priorities, implementation and spending was owned by partners, with HelpAge playing a supportive and advisory role. The peer-to-peer accompaniment model—where experienced partners mentored newer organisations across countries—emerged as a strong example of local-to-local, partner-led capacity strengthening. However, partners had limited influence over the initial HCS strategy design, and the September 2025 restructuring reduced mentor availability and created communication gaps.

Inclusion and Accountability of Older People (EQ6)

HCS contributed significantly to partners adopting more inclusive policies and practices: needs assessments, age-disaggregated data, revised response manuals, and dedicated inclusion staff. Partners also strengthened accountability mechanisms, diversifying feedback channels and adopting CHS standards. Advocacy gains were notable, with partners influencing national policy processes in Zimbabwe, Venezuela and El Salvador. However, older people were not meaningfully involved in HCS programme design itself, and a gap persists between policy adoption and full operational practice.

Effectiveness (EQ5, EQ8, EQ9)

The programme delivered substantial organisational performance improvements across SHAPE’s three domains (governance and leadership, influence, and preparedness and response). Partners developed or revised strategic plans, HR and finance manuals, emergency preparedness plans, MEAL frameworks, and safeguarding policies. Several partners secured new partnerships (UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, Start Network) and gained recognition as credible humanitarian actors. 74.4% of survey respondents reported improved ability to respond to shocks. The main gap identified was a lack of systematic mechanisms to track knowledge retention and policy-to-practice translation.

Sustainability (EQ10)

Policy and strategic document changes are likely to endure, and the ToT model offers a pathway for sustained knowledge transfer. However, embedding changes beyond documentation remains a challenge. Partners expressed concern about losing HelpAge advisory support, and the restructuring exacerbated anxieties about continuity. Sustainability risks include staff turnover and ‘poaching’ of trained personnel, loss of SHAPE-funded positions, and the deteriorating global funding landscape. Financial sustainability was cited by 90.7% of survey respondents as the hardest area to strengthen.

Conclusion

The evaluation finds that the HCS programme has been a well-conceived, strategically coherent and highly relevant investment in the capacity of HelpAge’s network to deliver quality, age-inclusive humanitarian action. Its flagship SHAPE framework, blended learning model, trust-based partnerships and emerging peer-to-peer mentoring approach represent genuine good practice in partner-led capacity strengthening—and align closely with the principles of the Grand Bargain localisation agenda, the NEAR LPMF and the CHS.

The programme has delivered demonstrable results: partners have adopted more inclusive policies and systems, strengthened governance and preparedness structures, improved their standing in national coordination mechanisms, and—in several cases—translated these gains into more effective, age-sensitive humanitarian responses. The quality of the HelpAge–partner relationship,

characterised by flexibility, mutual respect and genuine autonomy, stands out as an exemplar of equitable partnership practice in the sector.

At the same time, the evaluation identifies a critical transition point. While policy-level change is well advanced, the embedding of these changes into day-to-day operational practice remains incomplete for many partners. Sustainability is the programme’s most significant vulnerability: staff turnover, funding fragility, the loss of SHAPE-funded positions, and the reduced availability of HelpAge companions following HelpAge September 2025 restructuring all threaten to erode hard-won gains. The limited involvement of older people in programme governance and design also represents an area where the programme’s practice has not yet matched its ambition.

The next HCS strategy chapter therefore has a clear mandate: to protect and deepen the gains achieved, while addressing structural gaps that could undermine them. This means co-designing the strategy with partners, investing in implementation accompaniment beyond policy development, formalising peer-to-peer exchange as a core localisation mechanism, building partners’ financial resilience, and institutionalising the participation of older people as a programme principle rather than solely a thematic focus. If these shifts are made, the HCS programme is well positioned to serve not only as HelpAge’s primary vehicle for network strengthening, but as a credible, evidence-based model for locally led, age-inclusive humanitarian capacity strengthening in the wider sector.

Key Recommendations

The evaluation produced 18 recommendations (8 strategic, 10 operational) to inform the next HCS strategy chapter. They are grounded in evaluation evidence, aligned with DAC/CHS/NEAR standards, and organised below by thematic category.

#	Recommendation	Priority
Strategy and Design		
S1	Revise the HCS Theory of Change to differentiate individual and organisational capacity pathways and articulate contribution to localisation outcomes.	High
S2	Co-design the next strategy chapter with partners and older people’s representatives from inception, through a Partner Advisory Group with decision-making authority.	High
S3	Develop a sustainability and transition framework with phased exit criteria, graduated support tiers, peer network models and restructuring protocols.	High
S8	Position HCS explicitly within the localisation architecture (Grand Bargain, NEAR LPMF, CHS) and articulate HelpAge’s distinctive contribution to locally led humanitarian action.	Medium
Capacity Strengthening Model and Delivery		
S4	Scale and formalise peer-to-peer exchange as a core component with dedicated resources, structured matching criteria and quality assurance.	High
S6	Develop a dedicated resource mobilisation and financial sustainability component, including training on donor engagement and diversified funding strategies.	High
O1	Increase the proportion and geographic coverage of in-person/regional training—the most effective modality for skills transfer and networking.	High
O4	Extend SHAPE engagement timelines or introduce an implementation accompaniment phase to support policy-to-practice translation.	High

O2	Expand multilingual content and local consultant capacity, prioritising Spanish, Arabic and French.	High
O3	Appoint dedicated SHAPE coordinators at regional level to reduce accompanier-to-partner ratios and ensure consistent follow-up.	High
Inclusion and Accountability		
S5	Strengthen participation of older people in HCS governance, design and monitoring—moving from inclusion as a thematic focus to inclusion as a programme principle.	High
O9	Set gender and disability inclusion targets for future HCS cohorts, addressing the gender imbalance and underrepresentation of persons with disabilities.	Medium
Learning, MEAL and Knowledge Management		
S7	Strengthen the MEAL framework to track capacity change at organisational level, including policy-to-practice translation, with proportionate, co-designed indicators.	Medium
O5	Introduce structured post-training follow-up mechanisms (reflection sessions, communities of practice, internal cascading) to address knowledge retention gaps.	Medium
O6	Establish a cross-regional knowledge management platform: quarterly thematic exchanges, a digital best-practice repository and an annual learning summit.	Medium
O10	Develop a policy-to-practice tracking tool with a maturity scale and field-level verification.	Medium
Accessibility and Programme Management		
O7	Adjust scheduling of online sessions for time-zone equity and offer asynchronous alternatives for connectivity-challenged contexts.	Medium
O8	Strengthen post-restructuring communication and transition protocols with advance notice, clear contact matrices and structured handover processes.	High

Full report could be accessed here: <https://www.helpage.org/resource/evaluation-report-humanitarian-capacity-strengthening-programme-2021-2025/>

