

Implementation Tips for USAID Partners

Sharing Resources and Knowledge Among the Global CSO Community

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Definitions

Older People: A term used to describe someone in later life, which can vary depending on a country's life expectancy. For statistical purposes, age 60 and over is frequently used to describe older people.

Older People's Associations (OPAs): Community-based organizations that mobilize older people to improve their own lives and to contribute to the development of their communities across multiple domains.

Older Citizens Monitoring (OCM): An activity in which groups of older people monitor access to essential services and advocate for improvements based on their findings. It promotes dialogue among older people, civil society, governments, and service providers.

Ageism: Stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel), and discrimination (how we behave) with regard to older people and the process of aging. Ageism can be directed at others or ourselves.

The Rights of Older People

Q How are the human rights of older people at risk, and how can we protect their rights?

A The Universal Declaration on Human Rights holds all people equal in terms of dignity, rights, and freedoms. However, fundamental human rights—such as the right to health care, social protection, and equal protection from discrimination and abuse—are routinely violated in later stages of life. Millions of older adults endure ageism (see Definitions) in the workplace, are denied access to health care, and face abuse in their homes and institutional-care settings. Elder abuse (psychological, financial, physical, and sexual) affects one in six people age 60 and over globally.¹ Intersectional or multiple discrimination (see Definitions) against older people who are women, have a disability, or have lost a spouse generates even greater threats to basic human rights for these groups.

Gaps in Existing Human Rights Frameworks

Existing human rights mechanisms and legal frameworks leave gaps where older people's rights can be denied. For example, only one of nine existing international human rights instruments explicitly prohibits age discrimination.² Specific provisions on issues that are critical to fundamental rights and freedoms in old age—including prevention of elder abuse and provision of long-term care and palliative care—also are absent from existing international human rights standards. Inadequate attention to older people's rights at the global level has led to failures at the national level to protect older people's rights via legal systems and public policies. According to survey data from 133 countries, only 41 have fully enforced national laws to prevent violence, abuse, and neglect of older people.³

While the rights of women, children, prisoners, and people with disabilities are all protected through special international conventions or standards, no such human rights instrument exists for older people, despite their specific vulnerability to violations. A United Nations (UN) convention that codifies the rights of older people in a universal human rights framework is necessary to ensure that human rights are protected for everyone in later stages of life. As

1 *The Lancet Global Health*, [Elder abuse prevalence in community settings: A systematic review and meta-analysis](#)

2 HelpAge. [As the Universal Declaration of Human Rights approaches 70, it is about time to address ageism](#)

3 WHO, UNODC, UNDP, [Global Status Report on Violence Prevention](#)

Definitions, cont.

Multiple Discrimination: Discrimination based on more than one characteristic, such as gender and age (referred to as intersectional discrimination) or taking place on more than one occasion over time (cumulative discrimination).

Voice: Older people with voice can access information, participate in decisions that affect their lives, express their opinions and have those opinions heard, and meet and debate with others.

Case Study

In Uganda, HelpAge has worked with Uganda Reach the Aged Association (URAA) to train newly elected older people's representatives and leaders of OPAs in 36 districts. Training has focused on advocacy skills and OCM activities. Older leaders have often been elected as chairs for district-level committees. Increased representation of older people in district-level government has resulted in improved delivery of health services and older people's inclusion in multiple poverty-alleviation programs.

Efforts to promote older people's rights to political participation in Uganda led the Ugandan government to allocate 5 percent of its 2019–2020 social development budget to supporting district councils for older people. Opening a platform for older people to engage on matters of public concern is also serving the interests of the community at large—with older people now jointly advocating with youth, women, and disability rights groups for inclusive policy changes.

life expectancy increases globally, more must be done to ensure that everyone has basic rights, regardless of age.

What can my organization do to protect the rights of older people?

Strengthen the protection/inclusion of older people in human rights frameworks

Support a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People

A UN Convention on the Rights of Older People is needed to provide a comprehensive, systematic framework to promote and protect human rights in older age, globally. It would codify older people's rights in a single document and require ratifying governments to collect data, set indicators, and pass laws that protect human rights for older people. Civil society organizations (CSOs) can support a UN Convention in the following ways:

- **Advocate:** CSOs interested in advocating for the rights of older persons should first assess their national government's position on a UN Convention on the Rights of Older People and determine which department(s) is responsible for engagement at the UN. For more guidance on advocating for a UN Convention, please see the FAIR Guidelines (see Resources).
- **Consult and involve older people:** Contact Older People's Associations (OPAs)—community-based groups that are founded and led by older people—to better understand the human rights situation of older people in your country and work with their members to map stakeholders and determine an advocacy approach. A UN Convention on the Rights of Older People presents an opportunity to engage older people who are present in your organization's network—whether they are constituents, beneficiaries, or partners. One example of how CSOs and OPAs have come together to advocate for a UN Convention is [Age Demands Action](#), a grassroots campaign spanning 60 countries.
- **Build the advocacy capacity of OPAs:** Determine common priorities and activities that are mutually beneficial both for your CSO and OPAs. For instance, CSOs with strong advocacy expertise can provide training to OPAs on how to develop advocacy goals, engage with government officials, and measure progress. Improving the advocacy skills of OPA members not only increases older people's political participation in the movement for a UN Convention and as civic actors generally, it can also mobilize them to advance inclusion and equality.

Leverage Existing Regional Human Rights Treaties

Regional human rights instruments have been developed in Africa (African Union [AU] Protocol on the Rights of Older People) and the Americas (the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Rights of

Resources

Older People and Existing Human Rights Treaties

[Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#)

[Inter-American Treaty on the Rights of Older People](#)

[African Union Protocol on the Rights of Older Persons](#)

On a UN Convention for the Rights of Older People

[Strengthening Older People's Rights: Towards a UN Convention](#)

[FAIR Guidelines: How to participate in advocacy for older people](#)

[UN Open-Ended Working Group](#)

Organizations

[The Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People](#)

[HelpAge International](#)

Older People). Both explicitly articulate older people's rights and lay out obligations for governments to uphold them.

However, the levels of protection set forth in these instruments differ and are only binding if ratified by national governments. Only seven of the 35 countries in the Organization of American States have ratified the Inter-American Convention.⁴ In Africa, 12 countries have signed the AU Protocol on the Rights of Older People, but only two have ratified it.⁵ Despite the challenges inherent in these regional frameworks, CSOs can utilize them to advance older people's rights in the following ways:

- **Monitor the implementation of regional treaties in countries where they have been adopted.** In Latin America, for example, long-term policies that protect older people's rights have been hindered by election cycles and changing administrations. Civil society is instrumental in building and sustaining political will to pass and enforce legislation on older people's rights. Through Older Citizen Monitoring (OCM) (see Definitions), older people can be integral partners in these activities, from monitoring adoption of social protection policies to documenting human rights abuses.
- **Spur dialogue on older people's rights, even in countries that have not yet ratified a regional human rights instrument.** Civil society actors should assess ways to foster exchange between countries and regions on best practices for advocacy, evidence-gathering, partnering with older people, and mobilizing broad coalitions of support. The experiences of organizations that have successfully advocated for ratification of a regional treaty can serve as valuable case studies for civil society actors that are still in earlier stages of advocacy.
- **Engage people of all ages.** The rights of older people should concern everyone, as we all hope to be old someday. The youth of today have a right to a sustainable pension system that will be there for them as they age.

Equality and non-discrimination in old age will not be possible unless older people themselves are a central, driving force in the global movement for their human rights. CSOs can elevate the voice of older people in the following ways:

- **Review your human rights advocacy agenda and network of stakeholders to assess how older people fit in.** For example, if your organization advocates on behalf of women, consider the needs of older women and how their voices are being included in your work. Older advocates can also serve as strong partners to

⁴ Organization of American States, [Inter-American convention on protecting the human rights of older persons \(a-70\)](#)

⁵ African Union, [List of countries](#) which have signed, ratified/acceded to the protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons.

For More Information

For this or other issues of *Implementation Tips*, please visit [NGOConnect.net](https://ngoconnect.net).

The website is a dynamic and interactive portal dedicated to connecting and strengthening CSOs, networks, and CSO support organizations worldwide.

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engage government ministries or departments on policy change that benefits all generations.

- **Foster collaboration between OPAs and civil society actors involved in securing rights for women, youth, and the disabled.** Identify common advocacy interests and set agendas that push for government policies and accountability mechanisms that are inclusive of all.
- **Create and fund platforms for older people to represent themselves on issues directly affecting their health, wellbeing, and security.** This can involve inviting representatives from a local OPA to speak at an upcoming meeting with district-level representatives; organizing round tables with public health administrators for older people to recount experiences of ageism in health clinics; or advocating alongside older people for a dedicated government representative or office that is accountable to serving older constituents. Being heard is a fundamental part of equality and human rights. Look for ways that your organization can elevate older people's voices in public spheres.
- **Ensure information your organization provides about rights and entitlements is accessible to older constituents.** If your organization delivers human rights education or increases awareness of public services, review your materials and communication channels to identify potential barriers to older people receiving this information. For example, information about support services for victims of sexual and gender-based violence may only be provided at forums frequented by younger people or distributed by health providers who assume older people are not affected. Another barrier would be the distribution of information in a format that an older person with a disability can not access.

