

Response to the UK Government’s “International strategic framework on women and girls” from Age International

Highlighting the importance of the rights of *all* women and girls, including older women.

Age International welcomes the UK Government’s commitment to championing the rights of all women and girls around the world and the launch of its new [International strategic framework on women and girls on 20th May 2026](#).

The Framework confirms the UK Government’s commitment to place woman and girls at the heart of its foreign policy and provides opportunities for this commitment to be translated into action. We agree with the Government’s vision that *“every woman and girl has the right to live free from violence, discrimination and oppression; to participate fully in her economy, politics and society; and to make the decisions that affect her life.”* This is why we are disappointed that the Framework fails to articulate how these rights apply to all women across the life course, including older women.

The Framework sets out why women’s and girls’ rights matter. It recognises that gender equity drives more peaceful, prosperous and sustainable societies. It sets out how women’s meaningful participation, and the broader achievement of gender equity, supports sustainable peace agreements, action on the climate and nature crisis, and shared economic prosperity. It also shows the cost of inaction: with Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) estimated to cost \$1.5 trillion annually.

The Framework recognises that progress on rights is under threat globally. In complex global crises, like in Sudan and Gaza, women’s rights and bodies are on the front lines. In multilateral spaces progress on gender equality is reversing.

All these issues affect older women, so we regret that the Government’s failure to reference older women means that in practice the Framework may not apply equally to women of all ages.

Why older women’s rights matter

Older women account for more than half of the world’s older population today, the majority of whom live in low and middle-income countries. Women over 60 years represent 15% of the global female population, and this will rise to [nearly 25% by 2050](#), by when one-fifth of the world’s population will be over the age of 60.

The Framework recognises that the intersecting marginalisations of women and girls influence the barriers they face. This analysis though, misses out age!

Throughout their life course, the barriers and challenges that women and girls face change. Gendered inequalities do not disappear with age - they accumulate across the life course. This cumulative disadvantage leads to higher levels of poverty, insecurity and exclusion in later life. Older women live longer than men, but [often in poorer health](#). They are also more likely to [have a disability](#), and to experience [higher rates of poverty](#).

Older women play multiple and essential roles in formal and informal work, in caring roles, and in their families, local communities and national economies. They are leading local initiatives and sharing knowledge across generations. These realities are not visible in in UK Government's new strategic Framework.

The need to address the rights of older women was recognised at the 70th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, during a dedicated ministerial roundtable, held in March 2026. This Framework should build on the [recommendations](#) from the roundtable to ensure that the Government's implementation of this international strategy genuinely addresses the rights of *all* women and girls.

Four opportunities where the UK can make a difference for older women

The UK's "International Strategic Framework on Women and Girls" sets out four priority pillars to progress gender equality. Unfortunately, none of the pillars reference older women – despite older women being disproportionately impacted. Under each pillar, however, there are opportunities for the UK Government to ensure that older women are not excluded.

Pillar 1: Violence and abuse

Age International supports the UK Government's view that violence against women and girls is a global emergency, and that tackling it, in all its forms, demands action at local, national and international levels. Part of tackling VAWG comprehensively must involve taking a life course approach. Scaling up evidence-based, life course approaches, is one of five priority actions highlighted in the recent paper in the Lancet on ['getting to zero'](#).

Much of the global data on VAWG (such as the Demographic and Health Surveys) only count women of reproductive age and below. [2024 figures from the World Health Organisation](#) (WHO) suggest that older women are represented in just 10% of global data on violence against women. Both the WHO and the UN Independent Expert on Older People's Rights (2023) emphasise a [lack of evidence on violence against women](#) aged 60+. Sexual violence in older age is the least reported and

documented form of abuse. Yet, [recent data](#) from WHO shows that, where data is available, 20.5% of older women aged 65 and above, have experienced violence at similar rates to women and girls of other ages.

In the delivery of this new Framework the UK Government should:

- Ensure that older women are counted in the collection of data on VAWG.
- Integrate a life course approach into the delivery of violence prevention and response programming.

Pillar 2: Growth and shared prosperity

Age International agrees that sustainable economies require the equal participation of all women, and that too many women face substantial barriers to their equal economic participation, including through the unequal provision of care work.

Older women are often neglected in economic discussions that address these inequalities, yet they make substantial contributions to their national economy, their communities and their families. For example, globally, older women spend 4.3 hours a day on care and domestic work, [nearly twice as much time](#) as older men and this work enables other family members to work and reduces the demand on over-stretched health systems.

The Government's Framework outlines that there must be more and better jobs for women, but does not reference older women. Older women are a growing demographic in the global workforce. In low and middle-income countries, pre-COVID-19, around one in seven women aged 65+ were [in the labour force](#). Globally, the youngest and the oldest workers are [more likely](#) than other age groups to be in informal (and unregulated) employment. Informal employment puts older women at increased risk of exploitation, and reinforces economic dependence and vulnerability in later life.

Gender and age-inclusive social protection is an essential component of shared prosperity. Yet pension coverage for older women is deeply uneven. In low and middle-income countries, [pension coverage](#) among women of working age is 8.1 per cent, compared with 20.8 per cent among men. Recent [HelpAge research in Ukraine](#) found that women's pensions are around 30% lower than men's. This is a global phenomenon and one that is replicated in the UK, with the UK Government backed pension's commission recently calling [for action on the gender savings gap](#).

The Framework also recognises that in an increasingly digital world, an essential part of shared prosperity is digital inclusion. This must include older women, who are some of [the least digitally literate demographic globally, and often have limited access to the digital world](#).

In the delivery of this new framework the UK Government should:

- Take action on the poverty women face in older age – including by working with partners globally to tackle the gender pensions gap.
- Recognise and count older women’s essential economic contributions, including to the care economy.
- Ensure that older women’s participation in the workforce is included in efforts to expand work opportunities for women, and tackle the increased risk of exploitation that women of all ages face in informal and unregulated work.
- Ensure that digital inclusion strategies include specific measures for the inclusion of older women.

Pillar 3: Women’s political and civic participation

Age International agrees that every woman and girl should have a voice in the decisions that shape her life. Political and civic participation of women, and of women’s rights organisations, drives forward progress on human rights, peacebuilding and sustainable development.

It is encouraging to see that the Framework recognises that more must be done to ensure that Official Development Assistance (ODA) focused on gender reaches the women’s rights organisations which are on the frontlines of change, and which are chronically under-resourced. Older women’s contributions must be seen as part of this change and funding commitments should extend to women of all ages. [A 2024 HelpAge International study](#) found that out of the US\$ 5.7 billion of aid spent on gender equality projects in humanitarian and development settings, only 0.1% included older women.

It is important that women’s full participation and leadership is championed – ensuring that the voices of women of all ages shape funding, policy and programming priorities. This must be approached with an intersectional lens across the life course. Older women today were the driving force behind establishing and enshrining landmark women’s rights. The older women of today and the older women of tomorrow have essential contributions to make to shaping this agenda going forwards.

In the delivery of this new framework the UK Government should:

- Ensure that more gender-focused ODA reaches women’s rights organisations directly, and that a dedicated percentage of that funding prioritises the inclusion of older women.

- Include older women, and intergenerational approaches, in any strategy for women’s participation and leadership.

Pillar 4: Health and education

Age International agrees that all women and girls should be able to access quality and comprehensive health and education services, and that too often there are significant restrictions and barriers to access.

These barriers also exist for older women and are often exacerbated by ageism. Ageist and sexist norms significantly restrict older women’s independence, dignity, and access to essential services. For example, in healthcare settings, older women across the world have [reported](#) that they feel dismissed or are inadequately attended to by health workers, citing disrespectful behaviour, ageism and systemic barriers within health systems.

Women live longer than men, but spend more years in poor health (approx. 9.4 years) than men (7.8 years). They often struggle to access quality care for chronic conditions like dementia, diabetes, and hypertension. Yet when older women’s health is supported, they can maintain their functional abilities and independence for longer. When older women’s health and wellbeing is prioritised, they are better able to continue contributing to their families, communities and economies.

In the delivery of this new framework the UK Government should:

- Ensure that the transformation in service delivery to reach those most excluded includes tackling the lack of equal access to services for older women.
- Invest in health system strengthening that prevents and addresses the ever-increasing impact of chronic illnesses across the life course.
- Prioritise investments in lifelong education, learning, and healthy ageing.

Conclusion

While Age International welcomes the UK Government’s renewed commitment to advancing gender equality through its “International Strategic Framework on Women and Girls”, the absence of an explicit focus on older women represents a significant gap. Gender inequality is not confined to a single stage of life, it accumulates over time, leaving many older women disproportionately affected by poverty, violence, exclusion and poor health. A truly comprehensive and effective Framework should adopt a life course approach that recognises and addresses these compounding inequalities.

Across all four pillars - violence and abuse, economic participation, political engagement, and health and education - there are clear and actionable

opportunities for the UK Government to ensure that older women are meaningfully included. This includes improving data collection, addressing economic insecurity and pension disparities, supporting inclusive participation and leadership, and tackling systemic ageism in access to services.

By embedding age-inclusive and intersectional approaches in implementation of the Framework, the UK Government could strengthen the impact of its strategy and uphold its stated ambition to ensure that every woman and girl can live free, participate fully, and make decisions about her life. Ensuring that older women are visible, valued and supported is not only a matter of equity, but a necessary condition for achieving sustainable, inclusive and lasting progress on gender equality worldwide.

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Katy Chadwick, Senior Policy Advisor

info@ageinternational.org.uk

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