

All our rights

Hearing from older
people across the world

Voices report



Introduction

What rights matter as we grow older? All of our rights matter! And all older people, wherever they live in the world, should have their rights protected - enabling them to live with dignity, equally alongside others in society. This is why a United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is essential.



The UN Human Rights Council agreed in April 2025 to begin drafting a new legally binding human rights instrument on the rights of older persons. This landmark decision paves the way for changing how we think about older people and ageing, pushing back against the ageism and discrimination that so many older people live with daily, worldwide.

“I am naturally optimistic, if the Convention is drafted and adopted by the States, then our living conditions and those of future generations will change (for the better). We are doing everything we can to make this happen.”

Laurent, 80, Cameroon

Human rights are universal and apply to all people, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, status in society, disability, religion, sexuality or where they live in the world. A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons would send a clear, global message that all older people matter.

**Laurent, 80,
Cameroon**



At the heart of this new human rights treaty must be the lived experiences of older people themselves - in other words, “nothing about us, without us”. This is why Age International and Age UK asked older people in the UK and internationally for their thoughts on what rights matter as we grow older. Here, we capture some of the responses we received and offer some reflections on what UN Member States must consider as they draft the Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

“Every person of whatever age must be treated equally, so any right that is afforded to any individual of whatever age must be afforded to older people.”

Hilary, 81, UK

Let’s put this into context. When we talk about ageing and older people, we must remember that most older people today live in low and middle income countries, and that the majority of older people are women. These numbers are expected to increase, and more than 80 per cent of older people worldwide will live in the Global South by 2050. Strengthening the rights of older people, therefore, is a conversation that has to happen between older people, their families, communities and governments - locally, nationally and internationally.



What do we get from creating a Convention and putting it into practice? All of us having our rights protected at every stage of our lives. Greater economic opportunities for older people and younger generations. Health and social care that works more effectively to prevent and manage disease, that helps older people to remain active and involved in their communities, and costs governments, families and individuals less as a result. We also get communities that are more resilient in response to humanitarian crises, conflict or climate shocks. And crucially, we get societies that treat their members with greater dignity, respect and equality.

Here’s what older people from across the globe and in the UK had to say about what is important to them regarding their rights. As the UK and other governments start writing this new Convention, they need to know that all rights matter.

Being treated with dignity, equality and respect

One of the most powerful messages older people sent to us is that they want to be treated with dignity, equality and respect. This goes to the heart of what a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is trying to achieve. All too often we treat older people differently - as being less capable, as people we can do things to without their permission.



This is the deep and lasting effect that ageism is having across all societies. A Convention gives us a crucial way of reframing our understanding of being older, one that responds to older people's call to be treated with dignity, equality and respect.

"The right to be respected is the most important [for me]. The immediate circle of society that influences an elderly person the most is their family. In reality, older people do not go out frequently, they spend most of their time within the four walls of their home, making the daily interaction with their children and grandchildren profoundly impactful. Therefore, if society exerts a positive influence on the younger generation, those younger generations will undoubtedly treat the elderly with greater care and respect."

Pham, 72, Vietnam



Older people also said they wanted to be protected against ageism and age discrimination, which are unfortunately rife around the world – and there is no universal legally binding protection against age discrimination for older people internationally.



“As we grow older, our need for rights becomes even greater. Older people need companionship so they do not feel lonely or isolated, and their right to participate in decision-making should never be taken away.”

Faiz, 58, Pakistan

“Do not talk down to us but speak to us as any other person - with respect!”

Roger, 79, UK

“Zero tolerance to abuse, neglect, racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, bullying, fraud, disability discrimination.”

Pauline, 58, UK

Dignity, equality, respect and clarity that age discrimination and ageism have no place in our societies are key things we expect a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons to address. A new Convention will have to tackle these head-on.

Accessing health and social care without discrimination

No matter where we are in the world, accessing appropriate and affordable health and social care is one of older people's top concerns. This affects all aspects of our lives - from having to pay huge medical bills, to limiting our ability to earn an income, to undermining how we are treated within the family and the community.



The good news is that, for many of us, it is possible to improve our health as we grow older - providing we have access to appropriate and affordable health and social care. For those whose lives have taken a turn for the worse, we should all have the right to lead a life of dignity, free from pain.

“The right that matters most to us is access to healthcare. When we’re sick, we want to receive treatment without travelling long distances or worrying about whether we can afford health services.”

Godfrey, 67, Tanzania

“Access to appropriate healthcare ... being listened to ... not being pushed into making critical decisions quickly.”

Anonymous, UK

This means not being discriminated against because of our age. It also means helping us to prevent and manage ailments that may affect us more as we grow older, such as heart disease, diabetes and dementia.

The right to health is captured under existing international law, but what may not be clear is how these rights should be applied to protect older people. A new Convention should help provide guidance on what these rights look like in practice, to governments and others providing healthcare and social care to older people.

Having financial security

Poverty in later life is a reality for millions of older people worldwide. Most older people globally don't have a pension to provide them with the minimum amount of money to ensure they can live safely and with dignity. Increasingly, family support is absent, or is insufficient, due to changes in the way people work and live. This means that, for many older people, retirement is a luxury they cannot afford. Or they find themselves living in situations that put their health and security at risk.



Financial security is also closely linked to a person's sense of self, dignity and standing in the family and the community. Time and again, older people we work with tell us of the transformative power that secure monthly payments have on their physical and mental health, as well as providing a concrete and tangible way of achieving greater equality. This is especially true for older women.

Older people's poverty is also closely linked to the ability of others in their families and communities to lead better lives. Many older people have direct caring responsibilities for family members, and they often use the limited resources they have to invest in the futures of those around them.

Donato, 76, used a HelpAge grant to establish a vegetable business in Tanzania.



“As women grow older, it is important that we have a secure and independent source of income. Every older woman should have the right to a monthly pension or a fixed income, so that she can meet her everyday needs and manage her household without having to depend on others. This is especially important for women who may

not have a husband, children or family members who can support them. Women should also have the right to own property and receive their rightful share of inheritance. Having a regular income and property of our own can give older women the financial security and independence to face difficult circumstances without having to ask others for help.”

Nagheem, 86, Pakistan



“You shouldn’t have to choose between heating and eating.”

Peter, 79, UK

Income security and access to a pension are rights that are already captured under international law. A Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is an opportunity to clarify how these rights specifically apply to older people in all parts of the world, signposting governments to the minimum standards they should be meeting.

Having basic needs met - housing, warmth, safety

There are as many experiences of being older as there are people in this world. But one thing we all have in common is a desire to have our basic needs met. The contexts may be different - from living as a displaced person in an area affected by climate shocks, to living through conflict and war, to lacking a safe place to live, or somewhere with adequate heating. The rights, however, remain the same.



“As I grow older, living in a place like Turkana where droughts are frequent and life is often uncertain, what matters most to me is the right to live with dignity without being pushed into hardship or neglect. I want access to basic healthcare that is within reach, support when I cannot meet my daily needs, and reliable social protection that understands the realities of climate stress and poverty.”

Akai, 71, Kenya



“As people grow older, all constitutional rights remain important, but the most significant for most people are the right to social protection and decent living conditions. Due to the war, I was forced to leave my home and have been living as a displaced person for several years. In older age, it is especially important to have safe and stable housing.”

Anatolii, 76, Ukraine



“The right to live comfortably with adequate food and heating.”

Anonymous, 77, UK

“The right to shelter, food, water, warmth and a decent standard of living.”

Grace, 83, UK

Existing international human rights law has failed to clearly identify what protecting basic rights looks like in later life. The Convention, as a universal set of human rights standards, will have to provide this guidance to ensure that the rights of older people are protected in all contexts.

Being heard and included in decisions

An essential part of being treated with dignity, equality and respect is having our voice heard and being allowed to make decisions that affect our lives. All too often, older people experience a very different reality. They are sidelined, or ignored, when important medical or financial decisions are being made - even when they are in the room. They are talked down to, treated as if they aren't capable of understanding.



“As we grow older, we want people to respect us and listen to our voice. We may be old, but we still have wisdom to share, and we want to be included in decision making that affect our community and our country.”

Antonnia, 75, Tanzania

Older people we work with tell us of being left out of decisions that affect them and their communities, or being prevented from having their basic wishes respected. This needs to change.

“People think we are old & senile ... We still have a voice and an opinion.”

Patricia, 79 UK

“To be independent & have my views & wishes respected.”

Susan, 77, UK

“Control over own finances ... right to remain in own home.”

Anonymous, UK



A Convention on the Rights of Older Persons will be an important tool for helping older people around the world to claim their rights. This is about having greater legal certainty that allows them to exert agency over decisions that affect them. It is also about reframing how we think about ageing and being older, and giving older people a platform to demand that they are treated differently.

Amboye, 60, addresses his community at a zone meeting in a refugee camp in Tanzania.

Digital exclusion and loss of choice



An area that resonates strongly for older people in the UK is digital exclusion and the loss of choice. This is not just about using new technologies, but how people access everyday services and are treated with dignity and respect.

“I do not have the necessary skills and confidence to do things like online banking ... banks are closing.”

Carole, 79, UK

“We don’t want to be forced into the digital age.”

Michael, 76, UK

“Please do not assume we are all up to speed on modern technology and we all have smartphones ...”

Kay, 80, UK

This is an agenda that cuts across all countries and contexts. Access to mobile phones and the internet, for example, is now commonplace across the globe, but is more limited in lower income countries. Also, across the world, older people’s use of these technologies is much lower than younger people. This can mean not having the same opportunities as others to access information, essential services - financial and otherwise - or being able to participate in family life and the life of their community.

We know that advances in technology contribute enormously to improving life for people of all ages. But greater clarity is needed on how older people’s human rights should be protected when technologies are introduced, including having access to services equally alongside others through offline, telephone or assisted channels. This applies to technologies we have today – such as the transition to digital services, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, and crucially, to new technologies that are still to come.

Conclusion

The message coming from older people in all parts of the world is clear - we want all of our rights protected. A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons is a fundamental and necessary step to making that happen for all older people, no matter where they live in the world.

This message is also hopeful. It carries an understanding of the transformational power of this new Convention for older people today and for generations to come. Older people see themselves as part of their communities and want to contribute to the future of their countries. We all have the right to be treated with dignity and equality, at any age.

All governments need to act now to put the protection of older people's rights into practice. A good place to start is by ensuring that representatives of older people are part of the UN Convention drafting process: "nothing about us, without us". We fully expect the UK and other governments to champion the Convention and to include older people in its creation.

Age International and Age UK, alongside older people globally, are campaigning for the creation of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. We are proud members of the **Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People**. Older people's voices sit at the heart of all this work.

In the UK, Age International, Age UK and a broad coalition of allies have called on the Government's Foreign Secretary to make history by championing a Convention (2025) and to ensure it is built on the "nothing about us, without us" principle (2026). The campaign continues, and it echoes the momentum growing globally - please join us!

To find out more about the need for a Convention, and how it will impact older people's lives, please turn to: **'Lifting everyone up'**. And if you want to add your voice to the global conversation, telling us what rights matter to you as you grow older, please go to: **www.ageinternational.org.uk/campaign-for-older-people/**

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Age UK provides crucial support for older people and drives change locally, nationally and internationally.

Age International is the international arm of the Age UK Group, and focuses on improving later life for people living in low and middle income countries, including during humanitarian crises.

Tel 0800 032 0699 | contact@ageinternational.org.uk | www.ageinternational.org.uk

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