

Including older people in Sudan's recovery

Sudan Conference, Berlin – April 15th, 2026

Executive summary

Sudan is facing one of the world's most severe and complex humanitarian crises. Armed conflict, economic collapse, and intensifying climate pressures have devastated livelihoods, displaced millions of people, and pushed large parts of the population into acute food insecurity. More than 33 million people now require humanitarian assistance.

Older people are among those most affected by the crisis. Older women, in particular, may be widowed, caring for grandchildren, or living alone, with limited income and few support networks. Yet despite representing a significant proportion of the population in displacement sites and host communities, they remain systematically overlooked in humanitarian assessments, programming, and protection efforts.

Older people are not only affected by the crisis. Across Sudan and in neighbouring countries, they serve as caregivers, community mediators, knowledge holders, and first responders. Their experience, social networks, and knowledge, particularly in agriculture, conflict mediation, and climate adaptation, make them essential contributors to community resilience and recovery.

The 2026 Sudan Conference in Berlin provides a critical opportunity for governments and international partners to ensure that humanitarian and recovery strategies recognise older people not as passive beneficiaries, but as active agents in stabilisation, recovery, and long-term resilience.

We call on donor governments and international partners to commit to four priority areas:

- Ensure age, gender and disability-inclusive humanitarian programming
- Strengthen local and community-based response systems
- Ensure protection, health access and livelihood recovery
- Improve age-disaggregated data and accountability

Older people face unique risks and make important contributions

Sudan's protracted conflict has led to widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, the collapse of basic services, and massive displacement. Older people face particular barriers in accessing assistance, healthcare, and protection.

Evidence from assessments and partner data indicates that:

- More than **one million older people require urgent health assistance**.
- In several displacement sites, **older people represent over 10 percent of residents**.
- Many older individuals have experienced **multiple displacements**, often travelling long distances without support.
- Widespread gender-based violence (GBV) has been a defining feature of the violent conflict in Sudan. **Violence against women has no age limit**.
- **66 percent of households headed by people aged 60+ report at least one functional difficulty**, highlighting the strong intersection between ageing and disability.

Because of mobility limitations, loss of family networks, and barriers to accessing services, older people are frequently **left behind during displacement or excluded from aid distributions**.

However, older people also play a critical role in sustaining communities during crises. Across Sudan, they contribute by:

- supporting extended family structures and caring for children
- sharing agricultural and environmental knowledge essential for food production in climate-stressed areas
- acting as mediators and trusted figures in local conflict resolution
- helping maintain social cohesion in displacement settings

Recognising and strengthening these roles can significantly improve the effectiveness and sustainability of humanitarian interventions.

Regional implications and the importance of durable solutions

The crisis in Sudan has also resulted in large-scale displacement across neighbouring countries including Chad, South Sudan, Egypt, Ethiopia, and the Central African Republic. Many refugees are hosted in regions already facing severe economic and environmental pressures.

Humanitarian assistance in host countries remains essential to protect displaced populations and support host communities. At the same time, the international response should also prioritise conditions that enable safe, voluntary, and dignified return when circumstances allow.

Strengthening livelihoods, restoring local services, and supporting community resilience inside Sudan will be essential to ensuring that displacement does not become permanently protracted. Older people, with their strong ties to land, community structures, and local governance traditions, can play an important role in supporting recovery and reintegration processes.

Recommendations for the 2026 Sudan Conference

We call on the German Government, the UK Government, and international partners to commit to the following actions:

1. Ensure age, gender and disability-inclusive humanitarian programming

Humanitarian responses must systematically include older people and address the intersection of age, gender, and disability.

Governments and donors should:

- Require age, gender and disability-inclusive design in humanitarian programmes and funding guidelines.
- Ensure older people are explicitly included as a priority group in humanitarian strategies and funding frameworks.
- Support the deployment of Age-Inclusion Specialists within the humanitarian cluster system in Sudan.
- Ensure older people and their representative organisations are meaningfully consulted in programme design, implementation and monitoring.

2. Strengthen local and community-based response systems

Sudanese civil society organisations, community networks, and Emergency Response Rooms have been the backbone of the humanitarian response under extremely difficult conditions.

Donors should:

- Provide direct, multi-year and flexible funding to local organisations, including older people's associations.
- Simplify funding mechanisms to allow rapid access for local actors.
- Invest in community-based resilience initiatives, including agriculture and food systems that draw on local knowledge and experience.

Empowering local actors helps ensure assistance reaches the people most at risk, including older people.

3. Protect access to essential services and livelihoods

Older people face significant barriers to accessing health care, protection services, and humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian partners should:

- Expand mobile health services and outreach programmes for individuals who face mobility or access barriers.
- Remove documentation requirements that prevent older people from accessing food or cash assistance.
- Train humanitarian staff to identify and respond to age, gender and disability related barriers to protection and assistance

- Ensure that protection and gender-based violence services are accessible and inclusive of older women and men.
- Support livelihood and agricultural recovery programmes that enable older people to contribute to community resilience and reconstruction.

4. Improve data and accountability

Older people remain largely invisible in humanitarian responses due to the lack of reliable data. Better data will ensure that assistance reaches those most in need and improve the effectiveness of the response.

Donors and humanitarian agencies should:

- Require systematic data disaggregation by sex, age (including 60+ in ten-year cohorts) and disability.
- Integrate age indicators into monitoring and evaluation frameworks.
- Ensure accountability mechanisms are accessible to older people and allow them to provide feedback on humanitarian programmes.

Conclusion

The Sudan Conference in Berlin represents a critical opportunity to strengthen the international response to one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises.

Recognising the rights, needs, and contributions of older people is not only a matter of inclusion, it is essential for effective humanitarian action, community resilience, and long-term recovery.

By committing to age, gender and disability-inclusive programming, supporting local actors, strengthening protection and essential services, and improving data systems, governments and humanitarian partners can ensure that older people are recognised not as a burden of the crisis, but as a vital part of the solution for Sudan's recovery and stability.