

Diversity and Inclusion

Champion global solidarity and respect for older persons everywhere

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Introduction

There are many issues around global solidarity and respect for older persons everywhere. Here we reflect on Age & Opportunity's work in the areas of participation, civic engagement, rights, and research. We highlight the visibility of older persons in policies and implementation plans, the challenges faced by older persons, and the need for better data to influence change.

Lack of Visibility

A Better World, published in 2019, is Ireland's policy for international development. With a strong commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals 'and in particular the rallying call to reach those furthest behind' the Policy prioritises gender equality, reducing humanitarian need, climate action and strengthening governance. In addition to these priorities Ireland aims to focus on interventions relating to protection, food, and people.

While there is much we can be proud of in our current international development policy and, indeed, in its implementation by citizens across the world, it presents us with a world almost uninhabited by older persons. Although interventions focused on 'people' are prioritised, and older persons do feature in two out of twenty images, there is not one mention of older persons throughout the document. Older persons are not included with 'Women and girls, people living with disabilities, religious and ethnic minorities, and members of the LGBTI+ community' who are named in this document as those who 'often

experience systemic levels of discrimination and marginalisation.’ There is no reference to older women throughout the section on gender equality and ‘second chance’ education is focused on girls and young women. Age & Opportunity believe that a policy that does not specifically mention older persons once indicates that older persons will not be prioritised in the implementation of the policy.

The lack of visibility of older persons is also reflected in Ireland’s current Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, Age & Opportunity welcome the commitment to further stakeholder engagement, including older voices, in the next version of this plan.

Exclusion from Humanitarian Assistance

Ireland’s focus in *A Better World* on reducing humanitarian need reflects the first SDG to put an end to poverty. Older persons are often willing and able to be active agents in their own struggle against poverty. However, research carried out on behalf of HelpAge International in 2013 found that they are ‘excluded, often systematically, from rehabilitation programmes such as the distribution of seeds and tools, cash and food for work, micro-credit, cash transfers and skills training.’ We can see this reflected in *A Better World* where re-skilling and education are prioritised for children and young adults. This bears out the observation in the *Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing* that even though global attention is now focusing more actively on poverty eradication targets and policies, older persons are often excluded from these policies and programmes. As well as lack of opportunities or reduced ability to work for social, economic or health reasons, HelpAge International point out that ‘in many of the contexts where emergencies occur more regularly, older people do not receive any, or a very small, social pension’.

Exclusion from Capacity Building

On the other hand, it is also important to recognise the resilience and capability of many older persons in challenging situations. In some countries, middle generations are away from home working. In others they are fighting elsewhere or have been killed by conflict or disease. In these situations, older persons are the carers and can be instrumental in distributing humanitarian assistance to where it is needed most. They are, in fact, often the first responders and a potential resource. Another reason they should be visible in Ireland's policy for international development which, as well as providing humanitarian assistance, aims to 'strengthen domestic resource mobilisation' in areas affected by conflict or disaster.

Exclusion from Health initiatives

The third SDG is a commitment to health and wellbeing. As significant users of health systems in every country, rich and poor, across the world, Age & Opportunity believe that older persons must be highly visible in Ireland's international development commitments. Furthermore, we argue that older persons should participate in the design of health and social care initiatives in their communities to ensure that any interventions are fit for purpose and based on a philosophy of recovery.

Exclusion from Research

More specific data about older persons is needed to identify and address particular health and other challenges that are not always addressed by interventions aimed at the general population. On International Day of Older Persons 2020 Claudia Mahler, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons said that the involuntary focus on older people caused by Covid-19 should not conceal the fact that older people are 'chronically invisible' in data. Irish researcher Patricia Conboy has looked at statistical reporting on progress of the SDGs. She found a lack of data on older people relating to malnutrition, HIV infection, mortality attributed to non-communicable diseases (NCDs), access to universal health coverage, to education and lifelong learning, gender

equality, employment and unemployment, coverage by mobile phone network, deaths due to disasters, experience of sexual violence and access to legal identity. She pointed out that this goes against the commitment of SDG17 to increase the availability of reliable data sorted by income, gender, age, disability, ethnicity, migratory status, and other characteristics. Age & Opportunity strongly agree that if Ireland wants to reach those furthest behind, we must make a firm commitment to improve the collection of data related to ageing.

Positive Climate Action

Positive climate action by Irish people of all ages will make life better for older people, and their families, living in climate vulnerable regions. Government should improve collection of data regarding climate related behaviour and attitudes of all Irish citizens in order to direct policy to influence positive climate action and provide clear evidence about where change is needed.

Ageism and Climate Change

While older persons in climate vulnerable areas may be more at risk from extreme weather events, back at home climate concern can fuel ageism and intergenerational conflict which can lead to a general erosion of respect for older persons. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, international studies indicate that older people seem to be as concerned about the environment as their younger counterparts. As much of this debate is played out in the media it is important that older people are visible and included.

Human Rights Approach

Ireland's next policy for international development, its implementation of the SDGs and its climate related actions at home provide opportunities for us to lead by example. In this regard, Age & Opportunity believes that Ireland should also support the call for a United

Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. Only when the particular challenges faced by older persons all over the world are addressed through a human rights lens can we reach those furthest behind.

Age & Opportunity is working to champion global solidarity and respect for older persons everywhere by:

- Seeking opportunities to convene older and younger generations to share knowledge and build a collective understanding of how to tackle global challenges.
- Encouraging media organisations to represent all age groups in media coverage and debate about climate action.
- Influencing stakeholders to include data on older persons in all research and data collection.
- Recommending more Government investment in research and data collection about climate related behaviour and attitudes in Ireland.
- Recommending more Government policies and actions to promote positive climate action by individuals and organisations in Ireland.
- Calling on Government to support the global movement for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.
- Recommending that Ireland's future international development policies should:
- make older persons visible in words and images, acknowledging the particular challenges that older persons in low and middle income countries face.
- Make specific commitments to specify and allocate resources for interventions targeted at older persons in low and middle income countries.
- Include older persons in all poverty eradication and health enhancing targets and policies.

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Age & Opportunity's policy positions support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals