

**HelpAge**

**International**

# Living, not just surviving

*What older people say about their rights  
to social protection and social security,  
and to education, training, lifelong learning  
and capacity building*

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Lydia Humphrey/Age International



**HelpAge International is a global network of organisations promoting the right of all older people to lead dignified, healthy and secure lives.**

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## Introduction

Life is about more than just surviving. Human rights are also about more than just surviving. They are as much about being able to live meaningful, self-fulfilling lives as full members of society, as about being able to live free from fear and want. As this report shows, for many older people, however, everyday life is reduced to survival.

*Living, not just surviving* collates responses from a consultation with older people on two key areas of human rights: social protection and social security; and education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building. These areas of rights are topics for discussion at the tenth session of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in April 2019. This report aims to inform the discussions at this and future sessions.

The consultation was carried out in November 2018 by HelpAge Global Network members and partner organisations with 539 older people (348 women and 191 men) in 23 low-income, middle-income and high-income countries across the world, using individual interviews and group discussions.

The report has two main sections: 1: Social protection and social security (including social protection floors) and 2: Education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building. Each section presents the responses of older people to a set of questions about human rights, summarises existing human rights laws, and draws on older people's experiences to make recommendations for a convention on the rights of older people. Annex 1 lists questions asked of older people, Annex 2 covers countries participants came from and the methodology, and Annex 3 describes the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing.

*Living, not just surviving* is the third in a series of reports on areas of rights discussed at the Open-ended Working Group. It follows *Entitled to the same rights*, on what older women say about their rights to non-discrimination and equality, and to freedom from violence, abuse and neglect, discussed at the eighth session, and *Freedom to decide for ourselves*, on what older people say about their rights to autonomy and independence, long-term care and palliative care, discussed at the ninth session.

# Key findings

Older people are being denied their rights to social protection and social security, and to education and lifelong learning, whether they are women, men, older people with disabilities, or from low-income, middle-income or high-income countries.

This is a key finding from a consultation with 539 older people (348 women and 191 men) in 23 countries. This report presents the issues raised by older people, summarises existing human rights law on social protection and social security, and on education and lifelong learning, and makes recommendations for the normative elements (the content) of these two rights in a new convention on the rights of older people.

The report aims to inform the discussions on these rights at the tenth session of the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing in April 2019 and at future sessions (see Annex 3 on the Open-ended Working Group on Ageing).

## Social protection and social security (including social protection floors)

While some older people on a pension say they can get by, many, whether on a contributory or non-contributory pension, say they are unable to afford basic necessities to survive, such as food, water, clothing, housing, medical care, and care and support.

**“[My pension] is so little, it’s impossible to survive on it.”**

**81-year-old man, Kenya**

Older people receiving a pension where the value of the payment is low say they have to rely on others, including their spouses, children or other family members.

**“Thankfully I raised good children. They keep supporting me with money and buy groceries for me.”**

**76-year-old man, Jordan**

Older people enjoy different levels of autonomy and control over how they spend their pension. Some have full control. Others have none. Some are subjected to theft, threatening behaviour, intimidation and fraud. Others feel that when the value of their pension is so low, there is nothing meaningful to make decisions about.

**“I live alone so I decide how to spend my pension but what is there to decide? The day I get it at the post office, I pay the bills, I go to the pharmacy and I have nothing left when I get home.”**

**67-year-old man, Moldova**

Older people on inadequate pensions, or who have no pension at all, are being denied not only their right to social security and social protection but also their rights to health, an adequate standard of living, participation in society, work, autonomy and independence, and education and lifelong learning.

The unique barriers older people face to realising their right to social protection and social security are not adequately covered under international human rights law. The right to social protection and social security needs to be applied to the unique context of older age and set out in a new convention on the rights of older people.



Malik Alymkulov/HelpAge International



## Education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building

Many older people do not have the skills, knowledge and information they need for different aspects of their lives, from making money to enjoying life more, and want to acquire them.

**“Before I had some skills but most of those are irrelevant today.”**

**75-year-old woman, Nepal**

Without the skills, knowledge and information they need, older people feel excluded and dependent. With them, they feel independent and part of society.

**“My son taught me how to use my phone and Google. I really like it! When a question pops into my mind, I just type it in and get loads of answers!”**

**65-year-old woman, Jordan**

Acquiring IT skills is important to older people. They want to use smart phones, computers and the internet to withdraw money, pay their bills, book doctors’ appointments, shop and bank online, buy tickets for cultural events, and stay in touch with family and friends.

**“We need more IT skills to be able to communicate digitally with public authorities.”**

**Group discussion, Denmark**

Many older people do not know where they can go to acquire the skills, knowledge and information they need or want, or have never tried to do so.

**“Where we live in our community we haven’t even tried to get support. We simply don’t know where to go and who to approach.”**

**Group discussion, Sudan**

Negative attitudes and stereotypes encountered by older people, and internalised by older people themselves, can prevent them from acquiring new skills, knowledge and information.

**“I’d like to have writing and reading lessons. I tried but they said it could be hard for me because of my age.”**

**60-year-old woman, Rwanda**

The exclusion of older people from lifelong learning and educational opportunities is a denial of their right to education and prevents them from pursuing the realisation of other rights, such as the rights to work, to fully participate in social, economic, cultural and political life, and to health.

The right to education has not been specifically applied to the life-course or to education in older age in the international human rights framework. The right to education and lifelong learning needs to be applied to the unique context of older age and set out in a new convention on the rights of older people.

# 1. Social protection and social security (including social protection floors)

## 1.1 Findings from the consultation

### 1.1.1 Inadequate old-age pensions

Almost two thirds of participants said they received an old-age pension. However, almost all of those who received a pension, whether contributory or non-contributory, said the amount they received was not enough for them to maintain an adequate standard of living. This applied to participants living in low-income, middle-income and high-income countries.

**“The [monthly] old-age pension only buys food for one week.”**

**62-year-old woman, Rwanda**

**“It’s enough for very basic expenses.”**

**Group discussion, Denmark**

Some said their pension was not even enough to survive on.

**“It’s so little, it’s impossible to survive on it.”**

**81-year-old man, Kenya**

Older people receiving a pension where the value of the payment was low said they had to rely on others, including their spouses, children or other family members.

**“Thankfully I raised good children. They keep supporting me with money and buy groceries for me.”**

**76-year-old man, Jordan**

Some participants who said their pension was enough explained that this was because they lived modestly or had savings.

**“[My pension is enough] because I have savings.”**

**Older woman, Argentina**

Some found their pension was enough because they received support from elsewhere or shared their income and expenses with their spouse.

**“My husband’s pension is bigger than mine. As we live together and share our expenses, we have enough.”**

**80-year-old woman, Finland**





### 1.1.2 What older people on a pension cannot afford

Everyone who said their pension was not enough said they could not afford either the healthcare, medication, rehabilitation, dental care or assistive devices they needed.

“It’s not enough as I have to buy disposable incontinence pads because sometimes urine just drips out and my trousers become wet. I feel very embarrassed.”

**86-year-old man, South Africa**

“I can’t afford to fix my teeth and get new ones. As you can see, I’m missing half my teeth. I also need a hearing aid, because I can’t hear a thing in my right ear.”

**74-year-old man, Jordan**

“Without an electric wheelchair, I am but a plant that breathes and is barely alive, always indoors.”

**78-year-old woman, Serbia**

Two thirds of those who said their pension was not enough said they could not afford to buy enough food or food that was nutritious.

“I can’t afford three meals a day, only one inadequate meal.”

**75-year-old woman, Tanzania**

Some said they would like to produce their own food but could not afford to do so.

“I’d like to buy a goat and even get someone to plough for me, but I can’t.”

**81-year-old man, Kenya**

Just over half said they could not afford to pay regular bills such as water, heating, electricity, rent and school fees.

“I can’t afford to pay the electricity and water bills as well as the rent.”

**66-year-old woman, Tanzania**

“I’m not able to pay the grandchildren’s school fees and the children have dropped out of school.”

**86-year-old man, Lesotho**

Other necessities that participants said they could not afford included soap, clothes and shoes.

“We can’t afford to buy the quality medical supplies, good clothes and shoes we need.”

**Group discussion, Tajikistan**

## Definitions

**Social protection** is defined by the International Labour Organization as protection against “poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle”. Social protection measures “include nine main areas: child and family benefits, maternity protection, unemployment support, employment injury benefits, sickness benefits, health protection (medical care), old age benefits, invalidity/disability benefits, and survivors’ benefits.”<sup>1</sup>

**Social security** is defined under international human rights law as security against a) work-related income insecurity caused by sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age, or death of a family member; b) unaffordable healthcare; and c) insufficient support from families. Social security measures are benefits, whether in cash or in kind, to provide security in times of loss of work-related income, unaffordable healthcare and insufficient support from families.<sup>2</sup>

The two terms “social security” and “social protection” are often used interchangeably.

**Social protection floors** are defined by the International Labour Organization as sets of basic social security guarantees aimed at preventing or alleviating poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. The four guarantees of a social protection floor are access to essential healthcare, basic income security for children, basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, and basic income security for older people.<sup>3</sup>



Some participants said they could not afford to pay for home repairs, renovations or replacing broken furniture or appliances.

**“I don’t have enough money to pay for repairs if the electricity or heating breaks down.”**

**73-year-old woman, Kyrgyzstan**

Participants also said they could not afford to socialise with their family and friends or visit relatives.

**“Our relatives invite us to weddings, anniversaries or other celebrations, but we refuse the invitations because we can’t go without a present and we don’t have clothes to wear for such occasions.”**

**67-year-old man, Moldova**

Some said they missed going to cultural events or taking part in sporting activities.

**“I miss doing sports activities, but you know how it is these days, you have to pay for everything.”**

**68-year-old man, Slovenia**

### **1.1.3 Autonomy and control over spending pensions**

Most participants who received a pension said they had full control over how they spent their money.

Some said they had authorised other people to decide how to spend some or all of their pension.

**“I give my daughter my pension to manage.”**

**90-year-old woman, Mauritius**

**“My son takes care of the bills. I’ve given him permission to do so. He can use my account to pay them. This has worked well. I almost feel I owe him!”**

**75-year-old woman, Finland**

However, others felt that when the value of their pension was so low, there was nothing meaningful to make decisions about.

**“I live alone so I decide how to spend my pension, but what is there to decide? The day I get it at the post office, I pay the bills, I go to the pharmacy and I have nothing left when I get home.”**

**67-year-old man, Moldova**

**“Well, yes, I do have full control [of how I spend my money] but what’s the point of having full control over a pension that’s so small it’s barely enough to pay for extremely basic things?”**

**74-year-old man, Jordan**

One participant said she was only given control of her pension by family members because its value was so low.

“My family gave it to me because it’s a small amount and they aren’t interested in it.”

**88-year-old woman, Myanmar**

Some participants said they lost control over how their pension was spent when their circumstances changed, for example, if they moved into a nursing home or started depending on others for support.

“We have full control [over how we spend our money] until we move into a nursing home. Then we have to pay for everything – accommodation, electricity, food etc., and only a small sum is left for ‘fun’.”

**Group discussion, Denmark**

“Since I’m bedridden, the person paid to care for me has power of attorney to collect my pension from the post office every month. They also buy the food and medicines I need. I can’t control all the payments they make. It makes me feel powerless because I depend on the carer and I can’t decide much for myself.”

**88-year-old woman, Moldova**

For some, becoming older led to other people taking control of their money.

“Over the years I have been controlling my money but [it’s changed] as I’ve grown old. People are like vultures when it comes to us older people. I have a nephew who makes sure that on pension pay day he comes to collect money from me for funeral schemes. I’m scared that if I complain he might kill me – who knows? I just give him money and keep quiet.”

**86-year-old man, South Africa**

Others described how members of their family or people in the local community stole from them.

“They snatch my pension by taking my pension card.”

**66-year-old man, Mauritius**

Some described how their relatives used threats or intimidation to control their money.

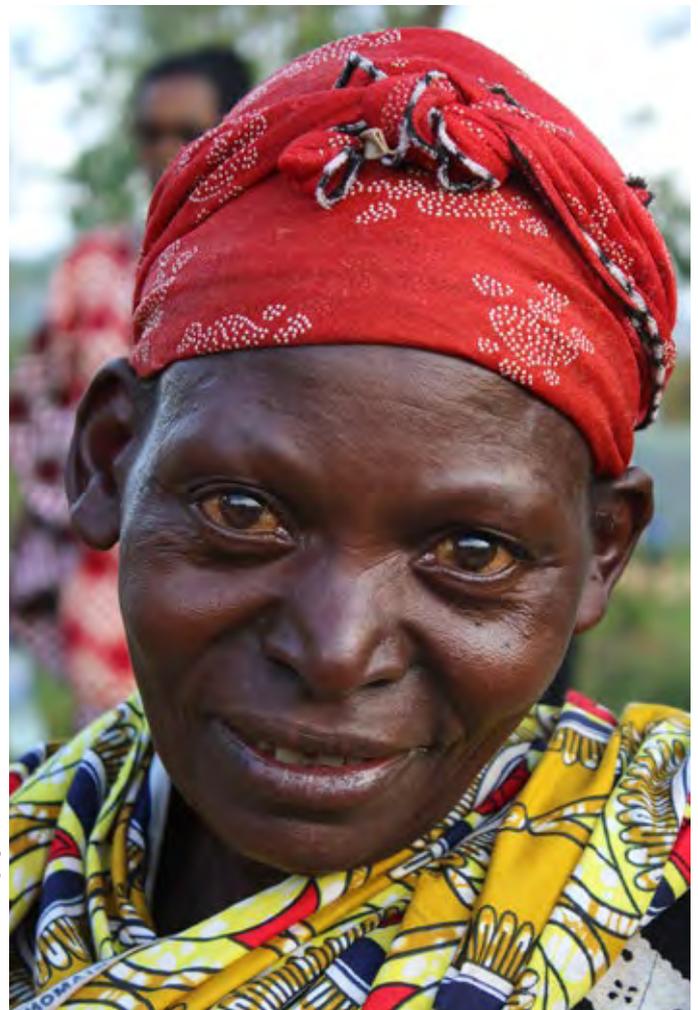
“My money is controlled by my close relatives. They usually follow me when it’s time for me to collect my pension. They plan how to use the cash in different ways without consulting me.”

**60-year-old man, Sudan**

Some said they were subject to fraud by family members.

“My daughter and her husband took me to the bank. They took out a two-year pension loan. I signed but they took the money and spent it on a car without consulting me. It means I haven’t been able to buy any milk for my tea for a year.”

**72-year-old woman, Mongolia**



Ellie Parravani/HelpAge International

## 1.2 Social protection and social security in human rights law

The particular barriers older people face to realising their right to social protection and social security are not adequately covered under international human rights law.

These barriers include inadequate levels of entitlements that foster dependency on others; discriminatory age limits on some social security and social protection measures; pension penalties for those who wish to continue working after normal retirement age; inadequate income and support services for persons with disabilities as they age and for those who acquire a disability in older age; disparities in life expectancy between different populations, for example, indigenous and non-indigenous populations; and the exclusion of measures for care and support for independent living from social security and social protection floor schemes.

The right to social protection and social security in older age needs to be clearly set out in a new convention on the rights of older people to guarantee this right in older age. This would build on existing human rights standards and apply them to the particular context of older age.

The right to social security is guaranteed under international human rights law in Article 22 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and

Cultural Rights and Article 11 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. The right to an adequate standard of living and social protection for persons with disabilities is guaranteed in Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The right to social security protects people against work-related income insecurity (caused by sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age, or death of a family member), unaffordable healthcare, and insufficient support from families. The core elements of the right to social security are availability; adequacy of measures in amount and duration; accessibility, including eligibility, information and physical access; and non-discrimination and equality, including gender equality.<sup>4</sup>

At the regional level, Article 17 of the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons affirms the right of all older people “to social security to protect them so that they can live in dignity”. Article 7 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa obligates states to provide older people who have retired from employment with adequate pensions and to ensure income security for those who have not had the opportunity to contribute to pension schemes. Article 23 of the revised European Social Charter establishes older people’s right to social protection to enable them to remain full members of society, to choose their lifestyle freely and to lead independent lives.



Sarah Gillam/HelpAge International



### 1.3 Recommendations on the right to social protection and social security

These recommendations on the normative elements of the right of older people to social protection and social security are informed by older people's experience as reported in this consultation.

**Older people have the right to social protection and social security without discrimination based on age or any other grounds, so they can live dignified, autonomous and independent lives and fully participate in society.**

The right includes social protection and social security measures, whether in cash or in kind, to ensure adequate income security, access to healthcare, medication and assistive devices, and access to care and support services for independent living in older age.

#### **Non-discrimination and equality**

- All older people should enjoy this right without discrimination on the basis of their age, gender, disability or any other grounds.
- Social protection and social security schemes should be designed so that they do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, disability or any other grounds.

#### **Accessibility**

- All older people have the right to access social protection and social security schemes without discrimination.
- Older people have the right to access information on all aspects of social protection and social security schemes, including information on eligibility, entitlements and fees.
- Older people, including those without identity documentation, should have access to support with applying for social protection and social security measures without delay.
- Delivery mechanisms for social protection and social security measures must be adapted so they are accessible and affordable for all older people without discrimination.
- Social protection and social security measures must be portable and accessible to older people.

#### **Availability**

- Social protection and social security schemes must be in place to provide older people with social protection and social security measures relevant to the risks and contingencies they face, including in relation to care and support.

#### **Adequacy**

- Older people have the right to social protection and social security measures, whether in cash or in kind, of a high enough value and quality, and for a long enough duration of time for an adequate standard of living and to enable them to live dignified, autonomous, independent lives and fully participate in society.

#### **Acceptability**

- Older people have the right to social assistance and in-kind social protection and social security measures that are appropriate and acceptable for their needs and preferences.

#### **Autonomy**

- Older people have the right to mechanisms, including supported-decision-making processes, to exercise their right to autonomy and independence in relation to the use of income from social protection and social security schemes.

#### **Accountability, remedies and redress**

- Older people have the right to access accountability mechanisms that provide for complaints and appeals, and for remedies and redress when their right to social protection and social security is violated.

## 2. Education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building

### 2.1 Findings from the consultation

#### 2.1.1 Skills, knowledge and information older people already have

Older people who took part in the consultation had widely varying levels of education and training. Some had completed professional or vocational training courses, others only elementary schooling. Some had only a couple of years' schooling or none at all. Some said they had no literacy or numeracy skills.

About 60 per cent of participants who answered said they had the skills, knowledge and information they needed to make their own decisions and do what they wanted to do in their daily lives. Some said this was because they were still working or had had an education.

**“The fact that I still work helps me a lot to find out new information.”**

**66-year-old woman, Moldova**



Jonas Wresch/HelpAge International

**“Yes, I’m educated. I’ve had training in how to manage a small business. I’m farming and raising chickens.”**

**59-year-old woman, Rwanda**

Others felt they had just enough skills to get by, but that their skills were limited in some way.

**“[I have enough skills] but with some limitations when it comes to technology.”**

**72-year-old woman, Argentina**

**“I think I have all [the skills and knowledge I need] but the situation is changing constantly so perhaps I don’t have them all.”**

**71-year-old woman, Serbia**

Of the 40 per cent who said they did not have the skills, information or knowledge they needed, some said this was because they had not had enough education.

**“I don’t know much. Since I come from a poor family, I only went to elementary school.”**

**70-year-old woman, Slovenia**

Some said the skills they had were out of date and no longer relevant.

**“Before, I had some skills but most of those are irrelevant now.”**

**75-year-old woman, Nepal**

Some pointed out that they needed new skills to do new things.

**“After retirement we venture into other fields to survive. You may have worked as a teacher and, after retirement, ventured into farming where you have no skills.”**

**81-year-old man, Zambia**

However, some said they had had no time to learn new skills.

**“I don’t have many skills or the knowledge that I need in my old age. With lots of work around the house and farming, I didn’t have time or opportunities to get informed or trained.”**

**88-year-old woman, Moldova**



## Definitions

**Education** is the process of receiving or giving instruction in public, private, formal or non-formal settings, or educating oneself, so that people can develop their full human potential, personality, creativity, talents and sense of dignity and self-worth, and fully participate in society.

**Lifelong learning** is the continuous development of knowledge and skills throughout life for personal fulfilment and full participation in society. Lifelong learning includes formal and informal education, training and capacity-building activities in different settings, including the home, schools and colleges, the community and the workplace.

**Training** is the process of learning the skills a person needs to do a particular job or activity.

**Capacity building** is the process of increasing an individual's or an organisation's ability to do things, solve problems and achieve their goals.

**A skill** is the ability to do something, often after learning or practising how to do it.

### 2.1.2 What older people want to learn

Many participants said it was important to continue to learn, for a number of different reasons.

**“Education helps to prepare for life in new conditions and participate in public life.”**

**Group discussion, Russian Federation**

Participants from a wide range of countries said they wanted to be able to use new technology, including smart phones, computers, the internet, cash machines, digital TVs and household appliances.

**“My illiteracy is creating problems in my daily life, especially regarding technology. So, I want to learn technological skills like using a mobile and a computer.”**

**65-year-old woman, Nepal**

They said they wanted to be able to use new technology to pay their bills, book doctors' appointments, shop and bank online, use the internet, buy tickets for cultural events and stay in touch with family and friends.

**“[I need the] laptop and internet [to keep in touch with] my children. They live in the non-government-controlled area where there's no mobile signal.”**

**76-year-old woman, Ukraine**

**“We need more IT skills to be able to communicate digitally with public authorities.”**

**Group discussion, Denmark**



Some participants wanted more information about their own health, exercise and nutrition.

**“I need to learn how to walk with my prosthetic leg.”**  
**67-year-old woman, Serbia**

Some wanted to know how to access health services, pay for health insurance or obtain other types of social support.

**“I need more information about how to move to another apartment that has a lift. It’s very important as my wife can’t walk.”**  
**90-year-old man, Finland**

Several participants said it was important to develop new skills and knowledge to earn a living. They wanted skills in agriculture, raising small animals, fish farming, horticulture, construction, carpentry, sewing, entrepreneurship and investment.

**“I need to be skilled and knowledgeable in modern methods of agriculture.”**  
**54-year-old woman, Rwanda**

**“I need some skills for my business. I only sew for older people because I can’t make modern designs. I want to learn new designs for clothes.”**  
**80-year-old woman, Myanmar**

Others wanted to learn how to manage their finances, obtain a loan or understand how their pension was calculated.

**“[I want to learn] how to make sure my money is secure.”**  
**66-year-old man, Mauritius**

A number of participants wanted skills to enable them to participate in community and public life. Some wanted to develop leadership, advocacy and campaigning skills.

**“We need skills to *toyi-toyi* [march/campaign on the streets].”**  
**86-year-old man, South Africa**

Some wanted to learn about their human rights, politics and the law.

**“[I need to know about] human rights and legal processes. I’m facing discrimination. My neighbours are trying to dispossess me of my land.”**  
**62-year-old woman, Ukraine**

Others wanted to learn how to run an organisation.

**“I want to learn how to manage and develop an association.”**  
**70-year-old man, Cambodia**

Some said they needed skills to raise their grandchildren or other children in their care.

**“We would love to be equipped to raise children. This is challenging due to the age gap between us and the children we’re raising.”**

**Group discussion, Lesotho**

Creative and recreational skills were important to some participants. They wanted to go to painting classes, study art or local history, or learn how to sew or knit.

**“I don’t know if there are any painting courses for people with disabilities in Moldova.”**

**75-year-old man, Moldova**

Some participants wanted to learn languages. Others wanted to learn to read and write or develop basic numeracy skills.

**“I need to learn to write and read so I can access information.”**

**54-year-old woman, Rwanda**

### **2.1.3 Where older people can go to learn**

Participants who felt they needed more skills, information and knowledge identified a wide range of places to get these. These included non-governmental organisations such as older people’s or senior citizens associations and self-help groups, and civil society organisations working either with older people or on health or development issues more broadly.

**“We can share knowledge and experiences with each other through our older people’s self-help group.”**

**80-year-old man, Myanmar**

**“I’m a member of the Finnish Parkinson’s Association and active in a local group. I get information from the association’s magazine.”**

**80-year-old woman, Finland**



Eva-Lotta Jansson/HelpAge International

Some participants said there were community-based centres they could go to, such as citizen advice bureaux, adult training centres, village community centres, social clubs and knowledge hubs. Participants also identified government-run services, such as health centres, agricultural centres and libraries, and educational establishments, such as agricultural training centres, universities, colleges and privately-run courses.

Participants also said they obtained information from individuals, including their peers, family members, friends, neighbours and other community members and people who had been educated.

**“My son taught me how to use my phone and Google. I really like it! When a question pops into my mind, I just type it in and get loads of answers!”**

**65-year-old woman, Jordan**

**“We can only receive information from each other. If you have a wider social circle, then there’s [more] information [available]. If you’re alone, you get very far behind the times.”**

**68-year-old woman, Kyrgyzstan**

Some participants said they got information from books and the media, including TV, radio, the internet and newspapers.

However, despite the wide range of sources of information identified by participants, a large number said they did not know of any that were available to them.

**“There are many places you can go for training in clothes design, but they’re only for young people. I haven’t tried to go because of my age.”**

**80-year-old woman, Myanmar**

**“I want to learn skills and acquire knowledge but unfortunately there are no vocational centres or accelerated learning programme classes for older people.”**

**60-year-old man, Sudan**

**“There are no government institutions for retraining retirees, except one for civil servants who are about to retire.”**

**77-year-old man, Zambia**

### 2.1.4 Barriers to accessing education and lifelong learning

Participants described negative attitudes towards their older age as a barrier to obtaining education and training. Some said they were teased, laughed at and humiliated because they were going to classes.

“A year ago I was completely illiterate. I couldn’t even write my name. Luckily, I had the opportunity to attend a basic literacy class. At the time, the villagers laughed at me and teased me because of my age.”

**81-year-old woman, Nepal**

Others said that older people were not welcome in educational establishments.

“No one seems to have the time to give you a clear step-by-step explanation.”

**80-year-old man, Serbia**

Some felt uncomfortable in a class of younger students.

“We have difficulty getting into formal institutions like colleges because we feel we’re too old to learn with young people.”

**77-year-old man, Zambia**

Others had been told it was too difficult for them to learn because they were older.

“I’d like to have writing and reading lessons. I tried but they said it could be hard for me because of my age.”

**60-year-old woman, Rwanda**

Some participants had internalised negative attitudes and stereotypes about older people and older age. They themselves said they were too old to learn.

“Some older people feel ‘tired’ or unable to learn new things because of their age. This makes them resistant to learning new things.”

**Group discussion, Denmark**

A few said older people did not need to learn.

“We can do little with [the] skills [we have]. We’re old, that’s a fact.”

**79-year-old woman, Kenya**

“Older people have no need for skills because we are waiting for death.”

**88 year-old woman, Myanmar**



Some participants said that information was not accessible to them.

“I’m now blind. Listening to radio programmes can help me pass on ideas to my wife and other people. The problem is, the batteries are expensive.”

**76-year old man, Kenya**

“There are no established resource centres with materials relevant for older people.”

**Group discussion, Tanzania**

Some participants said they could not obtain the training or information they wanted. This was because they did not have enough time, or the right documentation or equipment, or enough money.

“The cost of training is a limiting factor as it would compete for your meagre resources with the cost of looking after grandchildren or children still under your care.”

**77-year-old man, Zambia**

For some, the training was too far away. They could not afford the transport or there was none available.

“We would like to receive training in our community due to challenges with mobility.”

**Group discussion, Lesotho**

For others, training centres were inaccessible.

“There are obstacles, insurmountable ones, like high steps on a staircase. I’m an older woman with a disability.”

**84-year-old woman, Serbia**

A large number of participants said they had never tried to obtain any training or information.

“Where we live in our community we haven’t even tried to get support. We simply don’t know where to go and who to approach.”

**Group discussion, Sudan**

“We have never tried. We don’t have any idea where to start.”

**Group discussion, Lesotho**

Some said they did not want to learn any more, or that they had other priorities.

“Frankly speaking, I don’t want to learn anything. I want to rest. I did all I could all my life. Now I don’t want to do anything.”

**71-year-old woman, Moldova**

Muthande Society for the Aged/HelpAge International



## 2.2 Education and lifelong learning in human rights law

The right to education has not been specifically applied to the life-course or to education in older age within the international human rights framework. It needs to be included in a new convention on the rights of older people to guarantee this right in older age. This would build on existing human rights standards and apply them to the particular context of older age.

The right to education is guaranteed under international human rights law, for example, in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities obligates states to ensure inclusive education systems and lifelong learning that is directed to “the full development of human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and the strengthening of respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and human diversity”.

At the regional level, Article 20 of the Inter-American Convention on Protecting the Human Rights of Older Persons affirms older people’s rights “to education on an equal basis with other sectors of the population and without discrimination .... to participate in existing educational programs at all levels; and to share their knowledge and experience with all generations”. Article 16 of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa obligates states to “provide opportunities for older persons to have access to education and to acquire ICT skills”.

## 2.3 Recommendations on the right to education and lifelong learning

These recommendations on the normative elements of the right of older people to education and lifelong learning are informed by older people's experience as reported in this consultation.

**Older people have the right to education and lifelong learning on an equal basis with others and without discrimination, so they can live dignified, autonomous and independent lives, fulfil their aspirations, build their skills and capacities, develop their full human potential and sense of dignity and self-worth, and fully participate in society.**

The right shall cover all forms of learning and education, including but not limited to tertiary education, vocational training and retraining, digital education, adult education, informal, recreational and community-based education, lifelong learning programmes, and skills training in literacy, numeracy and technological competencies.

### Non-discrimination and equality

- All older people have the right to equal access to opportunities for all forms of learning and levels of education without discrimination based on age or any other grounds.
- Older people have the right to equal access to digital learning and education platforms without discrimination on the basis of age or any other grounds.
- Older people have the right to benefit from scholarships and other educational or study grants on an equal basis with others.
- States should take steps to eliminate negative ageist stereotypes and prejudices about older people's ability to learn.

### Accessibility

- Older people have the right to affordable education and lifelong learning opportunities that fit their needs, preferences, skills, motivations and diverse identities.
- Older people have the right to education and lifelong learning opportunities in settings that are accessible to them, including in their communities and in care and support settings.



Ellie Parravani/HelpAge International

### Availability

- Older people have the right to equal access to opportunities for education and lifelong learning available to the general public and to learning opportunities adapted to their specific needs, preferences, skills, motivations and diverse identities.

### Acceptability

- Older people have the right to access, and be involved in the development and design of, appropriate and acceptable education and lifelong learning opportunities that are adapted to their needs, preferences, skills, motivations and diverse identities including, but not limited to, design of and training in new technologies, so they can develop their full human potential, personality, creativity, talents and sense of dignity and self-worth.
- Older people have the right to learning and educational materials in an accessible and acceptable format.

### Accountability, remedies and redress

- Older people have the right to accountability mechanisms that provide for complaints and appeals, and for remedies and redress when their right to education and lifelong learning is violated.
- Safeguards must be in place to protect against breaches of the right to education and lifelong learning, including breaches of privacy and security of data on digital and online learning platforms.

## Annex 1: Consultation questions

### Social protection and social security (including social protection floors)

1. Do you receive an old-age pension?
2. If you do, is the amount of money enough for you to pay for the things you need for an adequate standard of living?
3. If it is not enough, what things do you need but are unable to afford?
4. Do you have full control over how you spend your money from your pension?
5. If you don't, who controls how your money is spent? How have they taken control of your money and what do they spend it on?

### Education, training, lifelong learning and capacity building

1. Do you have the skills, knowledge or information you need to make your own decisions and do the things you want in your daily life?
2. If you don't, what type of decisions or activities do you need more skills, knowledge or information for?
3. Where can you go to learn the skills and get the knowledge or information you need?
4. If you have tried to get this support, have you experienced any difficulties because of your age? If yes, what difficulties have you experienced?

## Annex 2: List of countries and methodology

The consultation took place in 23 countries:

Argentina	Mauritius	Serbia
Cambodia	Moldova	Slovenia
Denmark	Mongolia	South Africa
Finland	Myanmar	Sudan
Jordan	Nepal	Tajikistan
Kenya	Russian Federation	Tanzania
Kyrgyzstan	Rwanda	Ukraine
Lesotho		Zambia

A total of 539 older people took part (348 women and 191 men). They were invited to respond as individuals or as part of group discussions. Their responses have not been weighted in any way. The participants were self-selecting, so they are not a representative sample of older people.

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## Annex 3: The Open-ended Working Group on Ageing

The Open-ended Working Group on Ageing was set up by the UN General Assembly in 2010 to identify possible gaps in the existing international human rights framework in relation to older people and how best to address them, including the possibility of new human rights instruments.

<https://social.un.org/ageing-working-group>



## Endnotes

1. International Labour Organization, *World Social Protection Report 2017-19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals*, 2017, page 194.
2. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No.19, The right to social security*, 2008
3. International Labour Organization, *R202 - Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202)*
4. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *General Comment No.19, The right to social security*, 2008



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Find out more:

[www.helpage.org/what-we-do/rights](http://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/rights)

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