

HelpAge Asia Pacific capability statement: COVID-19 emergency response

HelpAge

The HelpAge global network is a unique worldwide alliance standing up for the rights of older people. Across 90 countries, there are 157 member organisations in the HelpAge network. In the Asia Pacific region, HelpAge International reaches 17 countries through 35 member organisations. HelpAge Country Offices are present in Myanmar, Vietnam, Pakistan and Bangladesh, while programmes in other countries are delivered in partnership with HelpAge network members. Further information on HelpAge’s work in the region can be found at: <https://ageingasia.org>



HelpAge emergency responses in the Asia Pacific region



WHAT WE DO

- Rapid Needs Assessments (RNA-OP)
- Protection and inclusion
- Cash grants and transfers
- Provision of assistive aids
- Homecare
- Outreach health services
- Non-food items

COUNTRIES



In the last two years alone, HelpAge has responded to 23 emergencies in the Asia Pacific, including in Myanmar, Indonesia, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Common natural hazards in the region include floods, cyclones and earthquakes; HelpAge also responds to man-made emergencies. HelpAge and its partners have significant experience in conducting response activities such as Rapid Needs Assessments (RNA), cash grants, distribution of non-food items (NFIs) and

disability/assistive products, health outreach, protection services and age-friendly spaces.

The impact of COVID-19 on older people

It is now known that older persons (especially those aged over 80) face a much higher risk of dying from Covid-19 than the general population, as do those with underlying health conditions. An early study from China's National Health Commission suggested that about 80% of people who died from the virus in China were over the age of 60, and 75% had pre-existing conditions. In many countries, more than half of older people are affected by multi-morbidity, and the prevalence of multi-morbidity rises sharply with age and with backgrounds of poverty. This puts them at great risk in the current crisis.

While the future trajectory of the pandemic remains unknown, what is clear is that it will disproportionately harm older persons, particularly those in less affluent countries where health and social support is often limited. It is therefore critically important for national and local governments and humanitarian agencies to provide adequate and timely care for older persons, without increasing their risks of contracting the coronavirus.

HelpAge is uniquely positioned to play a key role in protecting older people from COVID-19

HelpAge has specialist knowledge of working with and for older persons, providing assistance to them ensuring a do-no-harm approach. We possess strong operational experience in the Asia Pacific region, and have strong cross sectoral partnerships with national/local governments, local NGOs and service providers, international NGOs and multilateral agencies including the UN system.

Globally, HelpAge has already developed guidance on protecting older people in the context of COVID-19¹. This includes advice for older people on what COVID-19 is, how it is spread and measures they can take to protect themselves and look after their wellbeing, as well as guidelines for those operating in care home environments. This messaging has been translated and globally used by HelpAge teams and network members to improve awareness about the risks faced by older people, to increase protection and prevention measures, and to promote understanding about what to do where cases are suspected. Further guidance² is in development for people caring for older people at home, and on how to ensure social cohesion and community support systems can be maintained. Alongside this advice, teams have begun to supply hygiene kits for older people, that include soap and alcohol-based hand gels, and personal protective equipment for community health workers and home-based carers. Across Asia, we are also supporting older people to access basic goods and critical services during the restricted mobility period (lockdown, etc.) with food parcels, medicine, and psychosocial support.

¹ See: <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/covid19-guidance-and-advice-for-older-people/>

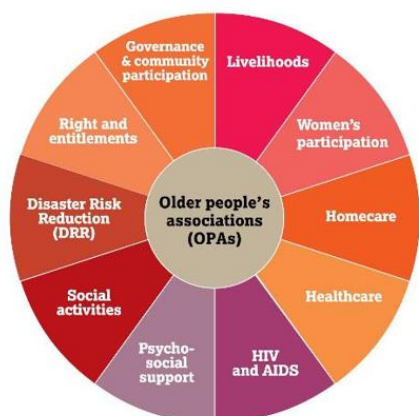
² For other guidance documents relating to older persons: <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/coronavirus-covid19/>

Our approach to disaster risk reduction and emergency response

- **A community-based approach:** HelpAge's humanitarian work is rooted in our community-based approach driven by the formation and development of dynamic Older people's associations (OPAs) within each community. Through close engagement with OPAs, HelpAge has undertaken numerous small and large-scale studies to understand the needs, potentials and perspectives of older persons in disasters³. Regarding COVID-19, OPAs are playing a critical role in ensuring that proper messages for prevention are communicated to those who are socially inactive or have difficulties hearing or seeing. Also, they are helping to ensure that necessary information about older people is communicated to other relevant stakeholders. Also, in most countries where HelpAge and its partners run homecare programmes, homecare volunteers are instrumental in ensuring the critical homecare support to needed for older people.

Older People's Associations

Community-based model for development



- **Capacity building:** HelpAge has extensive experience in carrying out training programmes at the community and government levels, involving a range of actors across the region to improve the overall preparedness and response of actors in an age and disability inclusive manner⁴. HelpAge also works to build capacity of older persons themselves as leaders in disaster preparedness, climate change adaptations and areas such as drought mitigation, natural resource management (forests, ponds, grazing lands), shelter management planning and aid distribution and disaster preparedness techniques. Innovative methods such as inter-generational knowledge and skills-sharing trainings have been adopted. Evidence has shown that these training programmes have been well received and

³ See: <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/emergencies/>;
<https://www.helpage.org/resources/publications/?ssearch=&adv=1&topic=3>.

⁴ HelpAge co-authored humanitarian inclusion standards for older people and people with disabilities, which is now part of SPHERE standards. See: <https://spherestandards.org/resources/humanitarian-inclusion-standards-for-older-people-and-people-with-disabilities/>

appreciated by communities and learning utilised during disasters to strengthen community-led preparedness and response.

- **Empowerment:** Over the years, the HelpAge network has increased its emphasis on participation and providing voice to the older persons through its interventions. Throughout the region, the network has worked to ensure the representation of older people in different committees for disaster management and risk reduction across different levels of administration, starting from the local bodies. This has included activities such as: selecting community members for leadership roles in the risk assessment process; training and peer support for conducting age-inclusive risk assessments by the committee members; and provision of age-appropriate assistive products to enable the elderly to be self-sufficient, as much as possible.

Technical Expertise

- **Health systems strengthening, outreach and monitoring:** HelpAge has significant experience in health systems strengthening, with a focus on building the capacity of health staff on age and disability inclusive health care, generally and in specific areas such as non-communicable diseases. In Myanmar, we have worked with the government to provide training to health workers across all 330 townships. In all regions, HelpAge has partnered with Ministries of Health and other actors to build the capacity of health workers, to increase their knowledge and competency on health issues related to older age. With HelpAge leading the industry in age-specific COVID-19 guidelines and with its extensive experience in capacity building, HelpAge is well positioned to support Ministries of Health to provide training to workers on COVID-19 and its impact on older people. Through our networks of community health volunteers, we will also help bridge the gap between older people, their communities and the formal health system. Volunteers provided with appropriate personal protective equipment will be able to monitor older people at the community level and support their referral to the appropriate health facilities, if they display symptoms of COVID-19.
- **Income and social protection:** As of 20 March 2020, globally a total of 45 countries have introduced, adapted or expanded their social protection programmes in response to COVID-19. With HelpAge's strong track record in this area, we are able to provide technical assistance to support social pension interventions that may be used to lessen the impact of coronavirus economically on older people. HelpAge has produced guidelines on safely accessing pensions during the COVID-19 outbreak⁵. The scale of the emergency and consequent pressure on already weak systems has resulted in at least one known stoppage of social pension benefits to older people. In these cases HelpAge is advocating for the rights of older people to ensure social protection measures are not affected by COVID-19. HelpAge also provides emergency unconditional cash distributions where appropriate to facilitate access to basic goods and services in a dignified manner, and seeks to influence organisations working on livelihoods programme to ensure the inclusion of older people, recognising their capacities as active members of society.

⁵ See: <https://www.helpage.org/what-we-do/how-older-people-can-safely-collect-pension-payments-during-the-covid19-pandemic/>

- **Access and inclusion:** Older people often face particularly acute barriers to accessing appropriate support during humanitarian responses, as old age itself can bring distinctive dimensions of exclusion⁶. Despite the high levels of **health issues** and **disability** in old age, the design and implementation of emergency response projects repeatedly fail to take inclusion and accessibility issues into consideration. Moreover, the accumulation of gender inequalities throughout the life course, can further marginalise older women. **Gender** is thus a core concern in our humanitarian work, and the particular barriers women face to accessing emergency support are considered in our emergency responses.
- **Knowledge contributions and international agenda-setting:** On disaster risk management (DRM) and humanitarian response, through decades of direct advocacy and pilot grassroots interventions, HelpAge recognises, and has evidence of, older people being particularly marginalised in disaster preparedness and response. We have also seen that the successful inclusion of older people, including those with disabilities, requires targeted interventions. Our interventions have contributed to the following initiatives:
 - Humanitarian guidance including suggestions on disaggregated data, with key actors such as the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of the United Nations and its humanitarian partners.
 - Announcement of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002
 - Charter 14, 2015 UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) now known as the UN office for Disaster Risk Reduction³ (UNDRR)
 - Specific topical focus on inclusion during the *Leave No one Behind* - World Humanitarian Summit 2018
 - In partnership with disability organisations, developed the Humanitarian Inclusion Standards for Older People and People with Disabilities (now are part of Humanitarian Standard Partnership (HSP) and are included as a complementary standards to the SPHERE standards)

⁶ In 2018, HelpAge produced a report highlighting the situation of up to 14 million older people with disabilities that may be affected by humanitarian crises, but remain largely excluded from humanitarian response. See: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/missing-millions-how-older-people-disabilities-are-excluded-humanitarian-response>; <https://www.helpage.org/resources/posters/missing-millions-infographic-on-how-older-people-with-disabilities-are-excluded-from-humanitarian-response/>.

HelpAge country operations and key partners in Asia

Help Age Country Offices	
Myanmar	<p>HelpAge International in Myanmar has been active since 2003, providing emergency relief after Cyclone Nargis devastated most parts of the coastal areas. HelpAge provided home care activities for older people, which has continued ever since. HelpAge Myanmar has three programmatic areas: (1) Health and care, with a focus on non-communicable diseases; (2) Community-based interventions, addressing the needs of older people and other vulnerable groups through Inclusive Self-Help Groups; and (3) Policy engagement, providing technical support to the Ministry of Social Welfare in drafting laws, policies, and action plans. HelpAge Myanmar also provides emergency relief during the monsoon season, in which many communities are experiencing severe floods. HelpAge Myanmar provides food, water, household items and shelter material, among other items, to remote communities that are excluded from other relief initiatives.</p>
Vietnam	<p>HelpAge International in Vietnam has offices in all provinces, cities, district and communities in the country. HelpAge Vietnam has worked in Vietnam since 1997 and has experience in humanitarian preparedness since 2000. The country office was set up in 2011 with 15 staff. Current focus areas include income, health and care, policy influencing and DRR. The main implementation model is through inter-generational self-help clubs, which are community-based groups, led by older people, at village level. HelpAge Vietnam has developed a strong partnership with the Vietnam Association for the Elderly (VAE) who are the main implementing partner in this project. VAE has more than 10 million members and over 40,000 staff.</p>
Bangladesh	<p>HelpAge International in Bangladesh has offices in Dhaka and Cox's Bazaar and has been implementing numerous development projects for older women and men since 1991. Since October 2017, HelpAge in Bangladesh has been implementing an integrated humanitarian response amongst the older men and women of the Rohingya refugee camps and host communities in Cox's Bazar. The team had provided integrated age-appropriate inclusive (including those with disabilities) health Services and persons with WASH facilities, protection, livelihoods and technical support to other humanitarian actors, as well as implementing community-level work on disaster risks reduction and social protection.</p>
Pakistan	<p>HelpAge International in Pakistan has a country office in Islamabad with a satellite office in Karachi in the premises of the government's Social Welfare Department. The country office consists of 18 programme and operations staff with national and international experience in delivering humanitarian and development programmes. The country office has been managing large and complex, short and multi-year humanitarian and development programmes. The country office has robust grant management, procurement, programme monitoring and documentation systems in place. HelpAge Pakistan has been responding to natural and man-made disasters in the country since 2010. These include earthquakes, floods, drought, extreme weather, mass displacements and refugees. The humanitarian response consists of multi-sectoral interventions including health service delivery (health camps, health system support services e.g. provision of equipment and trainings, and disability prevention and rehabilitation activities), livelihoods (including cash transfers), and protection services and advocacy. These responses are implemented in partnerships with the relevant government departments, national organisations and older people's associations (OPAs), where they exist.</p>

HelpAge Partners	
Cambodia	<p>HelpAge Cambodia (https://www.helpagecambodia.org/) is a national NGO, became a HelpAge global network member in 2014 and is the only NGO that work on ageing and rights of older people in the country. HelpAge Cambodia has worked with older people for over 28 years on various issues including health and care, income generation, sustainable agriculture, water and sanitation, climate change and disaster risk reduction and social pension.</p>
Indonesia	<p>Yakkum Emergency Unit (YEU; https://www.yeu.or.id/) is one of YAKKUM's (a Christian Foundation for Public Health) units which was established in 2001, in Indonesia. Its core mandate is the delivery of inclusive emergency responses where community participation in needs assessments and relief distribution are encouraged. YEU works to provide initiatives to build community resilience through community-led disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.</p> <p>YEU has been promoting community resilience programmes in more than 250 villages across Indonesia, working with 350 CBOs (Civil society Based Organisations), 60 women groups and 11 older people associations, as well as specifically building preparedness of 78 schools, 5 health institutions, 17 churches.</p> <p>For cash transfers, YEU has an ongoing programme for multipurpose cash transfers and restricted cash vouchers in Lombok. To date, YEU has responded to 85 emergency responses in 22 provinces in Indonesia and 6 neighbouring countries (Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Nepal, Palestine, Timor-Leste). YEU has been registered as a HAP (Humanitarian Accountability Partnership) member. YEU is the only member of the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) Alliance from Indonesia.</p>
Philippines	<p>Coalition of Services of the Elderly (COSE; http://cose.org.ph/) is a Non-Government Organisation registered in the Philippines and working with, and for older persons, with a focus on the most disadvantaged, in urban and rural areas to address issues of poverty, exclusion and invisibility, so they may live in dignity. COSE is a member of DRR-Net Philippines, a coalition of humanitarian and non-government organizations involved in disaster risk reduction and management programs. COSE is also a member of PINGON (Philippine International Non-Government Organizations Network) and regularly attends meetings for updating and coordination of humanitarian works. COSE is also a council member of National Anti-Poverty Commission (NAPC) under Victims of Disasters and Calamities Sector which is tasked to develop disaster-related policies at the national level. COSE has implemented 3 Community-based Inclusive DRR/CCA projects in the past years:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 cities/municipalities in Mindanao Island (2012 – 2014) • 11 municipalities in Typhoon Haiyan affected areas of Leyte and Cebu (2014-2016) • 8 municipalities in Luzon and Cebu (2016-2017) <p>COSE has a range of experience in responding to emergencies since 2009. COSE has participated in needs assessments and the implementation of direct interventions and recovery programmes. These include cash grants, food and non-food items (NFI) distribution, disability aids, health outreach, homecare, and livelihoods. Some of the major responses conducted by COSE include: Tropical Storm Ketsana in 2009, locally known as Ondoy, in Central Luzon, Cyclone Nesat in 2011, Cyclone Bopha in 2012, Cyclone Haiyan in 2013 and Typhoon Mangkhut in 2018.</p>
India	<p>HelpAge India (https://www.helpageindia.org) is a secular, not for profit organisation founded in 1978. It has been working to improve the lives of disadvantaged older people across 33 cities in India for nearly 4 decades. HelpAge India advocates, for the needs of 106 million older people in the country on issues such as Universal Pension, quality healthcare and action against older people abuse. Programmes include mobile health care, cataract surgeries, old age homes, livelihood support, disaster management, helpline, as well as innovative approaches such as benefit cards and mobile phone application to support older people's wellbeing.</p>

	<p>HelpAge India is a founding member of the HelpAge global network and currently covers all States of India with a 1,500-person workforce. GRAVIS is a Non-Governmental Organization working in rural India in the States of Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and the Bundelkhand region of Uttar Pradesh. Currently, GRAVIS' interventions support about 1.3 million people living in over 1,500 remote villages. GRAVIS believes in participatory community development that blends traditional knowledge and modern sciences and that promotes equality. GRAVIS also has runs one of the very few hospitals which serves over 200,000 people in the region. The focus of their health programmes is on outreach health, tuberculosis control, HIV/AIDS, occupational, maternal and geriatric health</p>
Sri Lanka	<p>HelpAge Sri Lanka (https://www.helpagesl.org) was established in 1986 as a small local NGO with 6 staff and became a HelpAge network member in 2009. Today, HelpAge Sri Lanka is one of the most respected NGOs in the country, working closely with the government and non-governmental sectors to improve lives of older persons nationwide. Programmes of HelpAge Sri Lanka include medical and eye camps, day centre for senior citizens, micro finance projects and training for care givers. HelpAge Sri Lanka has extensive experience in humanitarian responses since 2005, since its response to the Tsunami.</p>

Quality and partners

HelpAge is a member of the CHS (Core Humanitarian Standards) Alliance and adheres to CHS and Sphere Standards in all aspects of its humanitarian work.



Partnering with HelpAge for COVID-19 responses

HelpAge seeks to partner with both donors/funders and response actors, to maximise our impact and reach for older persons throughout the region. Our key 'offers' as a COVID-19 response partner include, but are not limited to, the following options:

- **Response and recovery:** Regional, multi-country and single-country project design, implementation and monitoring.
- **Technical assistance:** To governments, donor agencies, NGOs and other response actors on age and disability inclusion, health and care, social pensions, income, protection, intergenerational support and care, and other interventions to protect and address the vulnerabilities of older persons.
- **Research and policy analysis:** On the situation of older persons and their communities, the impact of emergency response and recovery interventions, analysis of policy options available for national/local governments and development partners.

Contact information

For further information on HelpAge International's COVID-19 response work in the Asia Pacific region and partnership inquiries, please contact:

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