

# Healthy Ageing and Climate Action

Building age-friendly and  
resilient communities<sup>1</sup>

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## Active Ageing in the Face of Climate Change

The impacts of climate change have disproportionately affected the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged populations, such as older adults (Tipaldo et al., 2024). By 2050, it is projected that 22 per cent of the global population—about 2.1 billion people—will be aged 60 or above, almost doubling the share of this age group in 2015 (12 per cent). Additionally, two-thirds of these older adults will live in low- and middle-income countries.<sup>2</sup> More than 23 per cent of the global population aged 69 and above are projected to live in climates where the 95th percentile of daily maximum temperatures will exceed the critical threshold of 37.5°C by 2050, compared with 14 per cent currently, exposing an additional 177–246 million older adults.<sup>3</sup> The intersectionality of climate change, health system disparities, and social inequality suggests that older adults, especially those residing in low- and middle-income countries where extreme climate events are more likely to

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<sup>1</sup> This is an evolving database. We will be adding more examples and cases over time.

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization. (2024, October 1). *Ageing and health*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/ageing-and-health>

<sup>3</sup> Falchetta, G., De Cian, E., Sue Wing, I., & Carr, D. (2024). Global projections of heat exposure of older adults. *Nature Communications*, 15(1), 3678. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-47197-5>

occur, are disproportionately affected by socioeconomic and health risks associated with heat (Falchetta et al., 2024).

The impacts of climate change on older adults and climate interventions targeting older populations are still understudied (Wu et al., 2025). The current peer-reviewed literature highlights the vulnerability of older adults facing climate change and disasters, while the grey literature underscores the agency of older adults in contributing to climate action, including inclusive climate adaptation and emerging forms of mitigation-related advocacy (Patrick et al., 2025). Scholars and practitioners are increasingly calling for actions to incorporate climate justice considerations into the development of age-friendly communities and cities, including positioning older adults as a valuable resource to actively design and implement innovative interventions.

This article explores two case studies in the UK and Switzerland, highlighting the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives to promote the integration of active ageing and climate action.

## UK: Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate

The Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate project is led by The Urban Institute, Heriot-Watt University, the Stockholm Environment Institute, and the University of York to explore the challenges and opportunities of climate

change on ageing populations, which ran from October 2022 to September 2023.<sup>4</sup> The project team collaborated with local governments and voluntary and community organisations by engaging with over 140 older adults, policymakers, practitioners, and other actors across England (Manchester and Rochdale), Northern Ireland (Belfast), Scotland (Leith), and Wales (Cardiff, Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate workshop in Cardiff

Source: Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate

During the project period, policy and practice mapping were conducted with key stakeholders to identify priorities, an online awareness-raising national campaign was implemented, and community dialogue workshops were designed to capture the perceptions and experiences of older people. Notably, the individual workshops highlighted different issues and assets for each community, as well as participants' knowledge of effective strategies for dealing with previous weather events.

The project identified six key areas for immediate action to address the threat posed by climate change to the healthy ageing of older adults throughout the UK:

- Empowering older people towards climate action

<sup>4</sup> Woolrych, R., Haq, G., & Latter, B. (2023). *Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate*. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/639cd497a20>

[e9d6261e8b7db/t/6560c35dca2bc772a9b6f2d/1700840287300/Healthy+Ageing+in+a+Changing+Climate.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/639cd497a20/e9d6261e8b7db/t/6560c35dca2bc772a9b6f2d/1700840287300/Healthy+Ageing+in+a+Changing+Climate.pdf)

- Mobilising community and social infrastructure
- Enhancing mobility and transport for healthy ageing
- Climate resilient housing for ageing-in-place
- Healthcare and wellbeing for older adults in extreme weather
- Intergenerational communities and climate resilience

Three key enablers to support the development of climate resilient age-friendly cities and communities are also highlighted:

- **Engaging Diverse Voices:** Building age-friendly and resilient places requires meaningful engagement across age groups, ethnicities, and cultures to maximise the knowledge and capacities of older people.
- **An All Agency Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Approach:** A cross-sectoral approach is critical in delivering people-centric interventions to address the intersectionality of linking healthy ageing-in-place and climate resilience.
- **Strengthen the Evidence Base:** Further research and learning are needed to better understand targeted interventions across diverse contexts.

Thus, older populations in different places are empowered beyond the lens of vulnerability to co-design and create place-based solutions with key stakeholders at various levels, exploring next actions collaboratively.

The Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate project made valuable attempts to raise awareness of the intersection between ageing and climate resilience by providing evidence-based policy recommendations co-produced by older adults. For example, the project highlighted the need to promote low-carbon housing solutions—such as using sustainable materials and energy-efficient systems, improving connections between homes and local services and amenities, and integrating green and nature-based features (e.g., green roofs and rainfall capture systems)—to support ageing in place during extreme heat.

However, like many project-based initiatives, this one-year initiative lacks longitudinal evidence of impact, clear accountability pathways, and policy alignment. For meaningful and sustainable change, piloted interventions, sustainable funded implementation plans, and systematic evaluation across varied community contexts should be addressed—with a stronger integration into health and local government systems. Only then can the vision of age-friendly, climate-resilient communities truly materialise.

## Switzerland: KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz

KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz (Senior Women for Climate Protection) is a climate litigation group of older women in Switzerland, initially formed by 40 members on 23 August 2016, and has grown to a membership of over 2,500

women aged 64 and above as of April 2024.<sup>5</sup> The group aims to demand stronger government action on climate change. For instance, KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz filed a legal petition asserting that the Swiss federal government's failure to adopt sufficient climate measures to secure safety would be a breach of human rights obligations, considering that older women have faced increasing risks from the impacts of extreme weather events.

After multiple domestic courts (e.g., the Federal Supreme Court) dismissed the case as a political matter, KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz appealed to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2020, emphasising climate justice. Since then, KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz has been considered as one of the most innovative cases at the intersection of healthy ageing and climate advocacy:

- **Legal Innovation:** The group pioneered a strategic litigation approach by framing climate inaction as a human rights violation. Their case became the first climate change lawsuit to be upheld by an international court, with the ECtHR's Grand Chamber ruling in April 2024 that Switzerland's weak climate efforts infringed the rights of older women. By leveraging human rights law in climate advocacy, KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz set a precedent that governments have a legal duty to pursue more

progressive climate mitigation as part of their obligations to citizens.

- **Public Engagement:** The group deliberately coupled its legal strategy with grassroots outreach and coalition-building. With support from Greenpeace (which had helped catalyse the group's formation), KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz engaged in active media work and public events to raise awareness, such as press releases at key legal milestones and sending delegations to the UN Climate Conference (COP23). Notably, the group partnered with youth movements, such as Fridays for Future, to present a united climate advocacy across generations. The movement's growth demonstrated the effective mobilisation of an often-underrepresented demographic, giving older populations a stronger voice in climate discussions and policymaking.
- **Older Adults-led Empowerment:** KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz has reframed and mobilised older women as active political agents and climate actors, instead of passive victims. Their organisation, strategic litigation, and public advocacy demonstrate how older adults can define the problem, choose the tactics, and exercise civic power to shape national and even international climate policy.

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<sup>5</sup> KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz. (n.d.).  
*KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz*.  
<https://en.klimaseniorinnen.ch/>

The advocacy of KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz highlights the previously invisible climate risks faced by older women. This underscores the need to include voices from the most susceptible—a notion now echoed in initiatives to align age-friendly city planning with climate preparedness. The intersectional framing, recognising age and gender as key axes of climate vulnerability, has expanded the normative foundations of climate justice (Kartepé & Zheltukha, 2025). KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz highlights a rights-based framework for integrating active ageing, social inclusion, and climate advocacy in the development of age-friendly communities and cities facing climate change.

However, the case centres on older Swiss women, predominantly white, economically secure, and politically active, who are considered to have a higher socio-economic status. Insights from this case may not apply to more marginalised older adults (e.g., the low-income, rural residents, people with disabilities, from the Global South).

## Conclusion

The Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate project and KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz demonstrate two different pathways through which ageing societies can engage with climate change: place-based co-design and rights-based legal mobilisation. The Healthy Ageing in a Changing Climate project mobilises older adults as community knowledge holders who co-produce adaptation strategies grounded in their everyday experiences.

KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz empowers older adults—specifically older women—as political agents seeking legal recognition of their heightened climate risks.

Both challenge dominant narratives that position older people merely as passive, vulnerable recipients of climate impacts. They illustrate that healthy ageing under climate change requires not only technical interventions but also systems that support empowerment, participation, and recognition.

Knowledge gaps persist in low- and middle-income countries, where rapid population ageing has become increasingly prevalent, but the intersection of healthy ageing and climate action remains significantly under-conceptualised and under-studied.

The future of ageing in a world with increasingly frequent climate hazards will depend on our ability to align legal norms, urban planning, health systems, and community participation in ways that enable older adults to thrive. Age-responsive climate action is needed, in which older adults are central actors in demanding, designing, and sustaining climate-resilient societies.

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