

## ‘EU Strategy on Demographic Change – Embrace the potential of Europe’s ageing population’

### AGE General Assembly 2014 Final Declaration

With the major economic, financial and institutional changes in recent years, the European Union together with the Member States have a historical opportunity to seize the potential of population ageing with the aim of enhancing economic growth, supporting social justice and cohesion and strengthening the rights and responsibilities of all generations. Demographic ageing is one of the major challenges our societies face today, together with climate change, technological changes, migration and the distribution of income and wealth nationally and internationally. These challenges provide vast opportunities for economic growth, innovation and greater social justice, and the European Union will need to address them in the coming decades.

Members of AGE Platform Europe met at the 2014 General Assembly to call on the new European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Council and on individual Member States to adopt an **EU Strategy on Demographic Change**, based on article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, ensuring the rights of the elderly.<sup>1</sup>

#### **EU Strategy on Demographic Change to empower the ageing population and address socio-economic challenges**

An EU Strategy on Demographic Change is necessary to underline the added value that older people bring to society as a whole and to enhance respect for the fundamental rights of older persons. Despite progress achieved over the last decade, **age-based discrimination remains an issue** in many Member States. Persistent ageism creates serious concerns among older people and leads to injustice. Whereas the EU has adopted comprehensive strategies to tackle discrimination on other grounds, for example through the European Disability Strategy and the EU Roma Framework, policies promoting age equality remain rather fragmented, leading to various shortcomings, including age-related discrimination in all areas of older people’s lives and in the labour market. Therefore, there is a need for a comprehensive and coordinated

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<sup>1</sup> The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (2010/C 83/02), Art. 25 “The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life.”

approach to older people's fundamental rights which will ensure policy coherence and synergies between initiatives taken at different levels.

From a socio-economic perspective, **acceleration in population ageing increases the urgency to improve age equity to meet the specific needs of current and future generations.** This requires decision-makers, social partners and all other relevant stakeholders taking collective responsibility in designing new ways of organising our societies to ensure a fairer and more sustainable future for all population and age groups in all areas of life and to tackle the ongoing economic and social crisis. Cooperation and solidarity between generations is crucial in this respect to ensure that everyone benefits equally from and has the opportunity to contribute to economic and social progress. The mid-term review of the Europe 2020 Strategy provides an opportunity to strengthen synergies between economic and social objectives so that the needs of our ageing populations will be met in a sustainable and fairer way for all generations and ensure equality between men and women.

### **Overall objectives for an EU strategy on Demographic Change**

Taking a rights-based approach, the Strategy on Demographic Change will help in particular to:

**Tackle the invisibility of older people's rights** in national and EU policymaking and contribute to a cross-cutting discussion about what the EU should do to promote and protect the rights of older people as well as improving social realities and economic conditions in older age;

**Empower and facilitate all older people** to participate in society as rights-holders, citizens and consumers, age in better physical and mental health, be able to work longer with more training facilities and adapted working conditions, live independently at home and enjoy dignity and quality of life in their old age – this should in turn help lower the pressure of older age dependency on the public budget;

**Become a vector for economic growth**, in particular by encouraging Member States, their public authorities, the research and academic world, as well as industry, to adapt their goods and services to the needs of the rapidly ageing population i.e. creation of age-friendly environments; promotion of innovative solutions which generate durable growth, fair to all generations;

**Build synergies and coordinate between EU and international policies on ageing**, through mainstreaming older people's rights in all relevant EU policies and in accordance with the non-discrimination package of the EU Social Agenda, the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European



Disability Strategy 2010-2020 and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities with regard to older persons.

**Increase intergenerational solidarity**, by mobilising a broad coalition of stakeholders at local, national and European level, focused on devising new possibilities and policy solutions, starting from a life course perspective and a design-for-all approach that will benefit people young and old, healthy and vulnerable.

### **What policy priorities do we need to underpin an EU Strategy on Demographic Change?**

#### **I. Engage older people in economic recovery**

- Achieving over time sound economic growth will be an absolute prerequisite for the successful implementation of such a Strategy. It could enable higher levels of employment for both women and men of all ages, in particular young and older workers, as well as guaranteeing an adequate level of pensions for all and facilitate autonomy in later life;
- In this perspective, it is essential, beyond the usual growth strategies pursued by the European Union, to recognise the economic and social potential of older people. Such recognition could stimulate, on the one hand, the creation of jobs requiring social and relational skills, as well as technical know-how and, on the other, a wave of innovation in many market segments, such as medical monitoring or mobility assistance.

#### **II. Enhance the protection of the fundamental rights of older people**

- Improve the Union's accountability to deliver the realisation of the rights of all its citizens, including older people, across relevant programmes, policies and legislation, in addition to the mainstreaming of the non-discrimination provision in EU Treaties;
- Support the adoption of a comprehensive EU fundamental rights strategy, covering all articles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, bringing all actors together, including civil society, enhance inter-service and inter-institutional collaboration in order to properly implement article 25 (rights of the elderly) of the Charter of Fundamental Rights;
- Contribute to the adoption of the long-awaited draft directive on equal treatment, which would give the EU the relevant tools to fight discrimination in all areas of its citizens' lives;



- Increase consistency in the way the Union applies human rights to its own actions, its Member States and in EU policies towards third countries;
- Encourage Member States to monitor age discrimination, especially hidden discrimination;
- Promote active citizenship among all age groups when promoting broad civil dialogue – by giving a voice to older people, in particular the most vulnerable.

### **III. Support age-friendly environments through new investment and innovation at national, regional and local level**

- Launch a Covenant on Demographic Change, gathering regional and local authorities together with all other relevant stakeholders and ensure it is adequately funded with support from the EU;
- As a significant support to active and healthy ageing, promote age-friendly environments through all relevant national and EU processes and initiatives and mobilise actors at all levels with a view to adapting everyday living environments to the needs of Europe's ageing population;
- Include in the next financial period (after 2020) for Structural Funds an objective to support the adaptation of living, working and recreational environments to the needs of our ageing population, with a view to achieving an age-friendly EU;
- Utilise mass media to raise awareness among different age groups of the benefits of a society for all ages;
- Promote local action to develop a positive image of ageing among service providers, employers, and local decision makers.

### **IV. Refocus Europe 2020 and the European Semester to address demographic change**

- Ensure that the national budgets and fiscal policy comply with the social clause in Article 9 (TFEU) and its requirements to guarantee adequate social protection and fight against poverty and social exclusion;
- Rebalance economic priorities versus the social dimension when implementing national reforms, by mainstreaming Europe 2020 social objectives into the European Semester process;



- Pursue reforms of social protection systems to ensure that the minimum old-age income is adequate and allows older people live in dignity with universal access to social services;
- Protect pensions against inflation and erosion over time;
- Create age-friendly working conditions that are good for all ages which value older workers' experience and skills;
- Support the transfer of knowledge and skills from older entrepreneurs to younger generations to ensure long-term sustainability of small and medium enterprises which are the fabric of many national economies;
- Ensure that labour market reforms conducted through the European Semester protect older workers against age-based discrimination, in-work poverty, economic exploitation, precarious work contracts or age-unfriendly working conditions;
- Provide adequate care services to help reconcile family and working life;
- Monitor within the Europe 2020 and European Semester frameworks the progress made by Member States in ensuring the realisation of EU social objectives;
- Mainstream gender equality at all ages across all policies in order to diminish and prevent the persisting gender gaps across the life cycle i.e. pay, career and pension gender gaps.

#### **V. Improve accessibility and promote design-for-all**

- Table a legislative proposal for a European Accessibility Act;
- Support Design for all and standardisation as concrete means to implement accessibility and to support services and products developed for older people;
- Boost support for the silver economy to meet the needs of the rapidly growing number of older people in the EU, while at the same time boosting employment and economy;
- Facilitate the uptake of standardisation deliverables in ICT research projects as well as the transfer of research results in relation to standardisation to promote innovative, user-friendly and interoperable ICT solutions that support active and healthy ageing and independent living.



**VI. Promote access to training and lifelong learning activities for all ages**

- Ensure access to life-long learning and information to empower older people to take an active part in their community as citizens, consumers, volunteers and carers;
- Such opportunities should target all older people to enable them to enjoy their rights, take up their responsibilities and live independent lives for longer.

**VII. Ensure access to quality health and long-term care to live in dignity**

- Encourage Member States to keep the principle of sharing the dependency risk within the wider community through mandatory social protection;
- Strengthen individual well-being and quality of life in older age through actions to fight isolation and universal access to essential services i.e. quality standards for health and long-term care services should be introduced and adhered to by public authorities;
- Ensure that human rights instruments are applied in practice across the wide range of existing care services, such as institutions, home care services and other types of care services for older persons;
- Promote the European Charter of the rights and responsibilities of older people in need of long-term care and assistance;
- Support a comprehensive offer of integrated care from prevention to palliative and dignified end of life care;
- Increase efficient public investment in care services for dependent older persons and consider its positive role as a support to employment (as are childcare provisions) and not merely as a cost to the public budget.

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