



AGE Manifesto Explainer #1

Age Equality

2024 European Parliament Elections

AGE Platform Europe

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www.age-platform.eu

About AGE Platform Europe's Manifesto

Ahead of the upcoming European Parliament elections in June 2024, AGE Platform Europe calls in its Manifesto for a Europe for all ages. At the heart of the Manifesto are three major calls to future Members of the European Parliament:

- Promote age equality
- Foster participation and active ageing
- Ensure autonomy and well being

In our three Manifesto explainers, we explore these calls in details and provide future EU officials with recommendations for changes that we believe are essential for the European Union to address adequately population ageing and work towards a society for all ages.

Support our call for age equality!

We call on all stakeholder and candidates who share our views to endorse our Manifesto and join our campaign for a Europe for all ages:

[Access to the AGE Manifesto blog](#)

[Endorse the AGE Manifesto](#)

About AGE Platform Europe

AGE Platform Europe is the largest European network of non-profit organisations of and for older people. We elevate older people's voice, bringing their experience and aspirations to the table to celebrate ageing and fight for equality at all ages.

We call on the next European Parliament to promote age equality

What do we mean by age equality?

The majority of children born in the European Union today can expect to live to more than 100 years. Yet, instead of celebrating longevity as an achievement, all too often we consider ageing as a problem and older people as vulnerable, dependent, frail, and incapable, even as a cost to our societies. The reason is **ageism- stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination on the basis of old age**.

Across the EU, age discrimination remains one of the most pervasive forms of unequal treatment with over 45% of individuals believing that age discrimination is widespread in their country ([Eurobarometer on Discrimination in the EU](#), 2023). Globally, one in two people are ageist against older people ([Global Report on ageism](#), 2021). Yet, **ageism is so socially and legally accepted** that it literally goes unnoticed. Like sexism and racism, ageism can come in many forms, ranging from interpersonal to internalized and systemic inequalities.

Ageism is embedded in societal structures, policies and legal systems that reinforce prejudice, perpetuate demeaning attitudes and limit opportunities for the equal participation of older people in society. For example, policies that support healthcare rationing by age and age cut-offs to access rehabilitation, surgery, preventive treatment, mobility allowances, support for independent living, and assistive technologies, among others. Ageism drives coercive, restrictive and abusive practices in care settings as well as varying patronizing behaviors. In the workplace, ageism means that older people are often treated with prejudice because they are perceived as less productive and therefore can be marginalized or harassed. Ageism also takes the form of fewer opportunities for career development and mandatory retirement.

Ageism has real human and societal cost. It impacts how we see our ageing selves, erodes solidarity between generations, affects our health and well-being and has far-reaching economic consequences. Ageism is associated with poorer physical and mental health, increased social isolation and loneliness, greater financial insecurity, decreased quality of life and premature death (by 7.5 years on average!). Ageism also increases risky health behaviors, such as eating an unhealthy diet, drinking excessively or smoking, and reduces our quality of life. An estimated 6.3 million cases of depression globally are attributable to ageism. It also intersects and exacerbates other forms of bias and disadvantage including those related to gender, race and disability leading to an even greater negative impact on people's health and well-being.

Internalized stereotypes also prevent individuals from living lives to their fullest potential and from claiming their rights. Courts and monitoring bodies reflect the same biases that we as society have and accept a range of explanations and justifications of inequalities, which are perceived as neutral or necessary despite imposing an undue burden on the older population. This makes it much more difficult to detect and report ageism and leads to a **'justice gap'**: a significant number of cases of age discrimination risk being dismissed or not reported at all.

Age Equality is the antidote to ageism; it is about putting in place the systems that enable everyone to be treated equally and enjoy the same rights as we age. It ensures that people, no matter their age, can live in dignity. Striving for age equality means using human rights principles and norms to challenge the practices that keep us from living fairly and freely as equals when we are old.

A human rights-based approach is the most appropriate and effective framework to challenge ageism

Report on Ageism and Age Discrimination A/HRC/48/53, 2021)
UN Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons

Why is age equality important?

We live in a Europe where the rhetoric in favour of equality and active ageing has never been more prevalent. [By 2050 it is projected that almost 30% of Europe's population will be aged 65 or above.](#) This European demographic reality means a growing number of age-sensitive policies and legislative instruments will emerge at a faster pace than before. The EU is indeed committed to full participation of all age groups in society and to boosting active and healthy ageing and as such avoiding that individuals are disparately impacted financially, socially or in terms of their quality of life merely by virtue of their age (See the [2020](#) and [2021 Council Conclusions](#), or more recently by the [2022 UNECE Ministerial declaration](#))

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated pre-existing human rights violations and disproportionately impacted older persons' lives: they have been denied health services, have been physically and socially isolated, their needs have been neglected and they have fallen victim of ageist attitudes and abuse. Despite being a highly diverse group, older persons as a whole have been labelled as vulnerable and branded as burdens to societies. The pandemic has made very evident the human and social cost of stigma and age discrimination.

In reality, older people contribute to society and the economy, sharing their experience, skills and knowledge through various means of paid and volunteer work, informal care, social and political participation - and they do so substantially longer today than they did ever before! There's a real urgency to enable the growing number of older people to live full, healthy and independent lives.

What do we need on EU level to achieve it?

Ageism is hampering the realisation of the EU's ambition to create a Union of Equality and to promote active and healthy ageing and prevents us all from living to our full potential as we age. The European elections in 2024 represent an important momentum for the EU to reiterate its commitment to creating societies where everyone can flourish. As the EU renews its institutional architecture to put equality into practice, it needs to step up action to ensure equal treatment in old age:

- An [EU Age Equality Strategy](#) is vital to uphold human rights at all ages and embrace the opportunities of longer lives. Currently, there is no comprehensive EU policy framework on ageing meaning existing policies are scattered, risk perpetuating prejudices and miss the desired effect.
- **Improve and extend legal protection from age discrimination** at EU level: the current EU directive only covers employment and leaves too many exceptions and gaps in legal protection. The EU legal framework needs to be expanded to end age discrimination in all areas of society. Enforcement of the employment framework directive needs to move away from bias and comply with human rights standards to address real barriers to employment in old age.
- Promote a **positive discourse on ageing** and **raise awareness on ageism** through legal and policy initiatives to eliminate ageist practices and educational campaigns to dismiss stereotypes on older age.
- **Address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination** that people experience based on a combination of factors such as age, gender or disability, and the cumulative forms of discrimination that build up over time by mainstreaming age equality within existing equality strategies, action plans and other initiatives.
- **Ensure that intersections with age are explored in other equality strategies** of the EU, such as the future Gender, Race or Disability Strategies.
- Eurostat should gather and publish even more **inclusive age-disaggregated data without age limits** to assess the potential impact of policies and programmes, to deliver effective policies and monitor their implementation.

- As global leaders in the defence and promotion of human rights, the EU and its member states must support the drafting of a **United Nations convention on the rights of older persons** that would trigger legal reforms and societal change promoting age equality across every aspect of life.
- **Strengthening Commission services to promote age equality:** The creation of a dedicated unit within the Directorate-General for Justice focusing on age discrimination is a positive first step. Coordination of the Age Equality Strategy should imply a strong consultation between all relevant Directorates-General. The Commission services need to be adequately staffed and trained to mainstream age equality across all EU policies.
- **Expand the work of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) on issues of later life:** the FRA should continue developing a body of research work and policy recommendations to guarantee the equal enjoyment of fundamental rights in old age and address intersectional challenges.

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