



AGE Manifesto Explainer #2

Foster participation and active ageing

2024 European Parliament Elections

AGE Platform Europe
22 April 2024
www.age-platform.eu

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 appeals to future Members of the European Parliament:

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

By means of three Manifesto explainers, we explore these calls in details and provide future EU officials with recommendations for changes that we believe are essential for a European Union that address adequately population ageing and works towards a society for all ages.

[Access to the AGE Manifesto blog](#)

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About AGE Platform Europe

AGE Platform Europe is the largest European network of non-profit organizations 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 foster participation and active ageing

What do we mean by participation and active ageing?

Older persons should have the same right and opportunities to participate in society as anyone else. This should cover politics, culture, justice, employment, education and learning, in the same way as for other age groups. Although this statement seems obvious, the prevalence and impact of age discrimination and ageism in our society, leading to isolation, exclusion and marginalisation, prevent older people from fully participating and being full members of society.

Participation is a right and must be guaranteed throughout life. The European Union's current approach to the participation of older people focuses on a vision of active ageing limited to economic participation or consumerism, and some aspects of social policies. To avoid the harmful and depreciatory effects of social constructions of old age, we need to move towards a vision of older people as individuals with rights that guarantee equality at all ages, throughout life, and for the diversity of experiences of ageing. It is about recognising the autonomy of individuals throughout their life and ensuring that, at all ages, they are supported in their different roles and expectations as they grow older. By treating older people as rights-holders, they can be empowered to improve their own lives, express their views, contribute to decision-making processes, be heard by policy makers, and continue to be active in the labour market rather than being treated as passive recipients of support.

Lastly, **equal participation of all age groups and in all their diversity** means recognising the challenges and assets associated with old age, as is the case for all stages of life. It also requires a good understanding of the challenges faced by older people in all their diversity, through an intersectional approach. Older women, older migrants, older LGTQI people, and older people with disabilities, to name but a few, face specific challenges that hinder their enjoyment of their right to participate. Recognising these challenges is essential to support in the best possible way and ensure older people's right to participate equally and meaningfully.

The right to participate must be the results of choice and measured according to the will of each individual. We suggest that the term "active ageing" is understood as one aspect of what Moolaert and Biggs call "desired ageing", a flexible approach that respects the autonomy of older people so that they can live their lives as they wish.

Why is fostering participation in old age important?

The participation of older people in society is diverse and plays an essential role. Because of ageism, it is often underestimated in society. Indeed, as soon as an individual is no longer present on the labour market, he or she is considered non-productive and therefore useless to society. On the contrary, whether an older person participates in the labour market or not, they bring a significant contribution to various aspects of the society.

Older people bring a wealth of experience accumulated over the years. Their knowledge and perspectives are invaluable for passing it on to younger generations. **They play a crucial role in cultural and memorial transmission,** and their involvement in cultural and artistic activities enriches society's heritage and helps to maintain links between generations. Their active involvement strengthens the social fabric and enriches community life. For older people themselves, their involvement and participation undeniably **contribute to healthier ageing, fostering better mental health and self-esteem.**

Older people are often pillars of their communities, providing valuable support and assistance to neighbours, friends and family. Volunteering is an important area of engagement for many older people, offering not only a valuable contribution to society but also a sense of purpose and social connection. In particular, it helps to strengthen the social fabric and create lasting intergenerational links. Volunteering are not limited to activities around ageing but contribute to areas of society, for which, older persons often form the pillars of contributing to logistics, management and long-lasting engagement. **The economic value of their voluntary participation in society is not negligible,** and can form the backbone of the functioning of large NGOs as well as small local clubs. The care sector, for example, is particularly dependent on older volunteers: volunteers visit older people who are isolated or unable to leave their place of care, and help to organise activities for other older people. In addition, 80% of care work itself is provided by informal carers, often older relatives and most of the times women. This has a cost on their income, ability to engage in paid work, health, risk of poverty and isolation. Without the work of informal carers or the voluntary work of older people, the economies of the Member States would be greatly impacted. However, to date, it is not sufficiently valued or supported by public policies.

As demonstrated by their high turnout at elections, **older people are enthusiastic about participating in decision-making and public life.** Despite their desire to contribute to building an inclusive world for all ages, their activism is often not recognised nor supported by public policy. Older people, particularly those living with long-term care needs or with disabilities, face physical or geographical barriers to participating in elections. Their consultation on relevant policy issues is often based on personal contacts and the activism of older people's organisations, without being anchored in structured dialogue or legislative procedures. This means that many voices are not heard, particularly in

Member States where public support for organisations representing older people is insufficient.

What do we need on EU level to achieve it?

Tackling the problems that hinder older people's participation in society means first and foremost recognising and supporting their full potential in all aspects of society and life. When older people are consulted, it is generally in relation to old age, such as for pensions. However, older people care about their communities, about the future for coming generations, and not just about their own interest. **Older people must have a say on all issues.** It must also be part of a longer-term process and not a one-off exercise. Often, participation only takes place at the early stages of the policy cycle, through consultations on the European Commission's 'Have your say' portal for instance. However, **meaningful participation involves stakeholders at all stages of the policy cycle.** This includes research, data collection, priority setting, policy formulation, budgeting, implementation, review and evaluation. In this respect, we call on the future European Parliament and the European Commission to work towards **the adoption of the European Strategy for Age Equality** by involving older people and their representatives in all aspect of life and at all stages of the policy cycle.

In the Strategy, participation of older people in public and political life should be fostered and **addressed as a human right.** It should also **provide guidance to Member States on how to make their policy-making processes inclusive** of older people and in line with human rights standards, through institutionalised participatory processes and the allocation of adequate resources. **In particular, this should be the case where Member States are implementing EU policies:** in the European Semester, the governance of EU funds, the EU Care Strategy etc. Finally, it should ensure that older people have a means of holding their government to account, while the recommendations of the mechanisms developed in this respect will feed into policy development and reform processes.

Tackling the problems that hinder older people's participation in society also means adapting policies to different individual circumstances and contexts. In particular, **it means ensuring that older people have full, affordable and equitable access to essential services.** The opportunities and challenges associated with exercising these rights differ, for example, between rural and urban areas. Access to places of participation, transportation to get there, essential goods such as health and care services, food, housing and banking services or access to the internet, is limited in rural areas. To guarantee the right to participation, it is essential to implement provisions to overcome these, by, for instance, maintaining alternative options to digital services, set up "service points" with access to internet, public services and essential private services in public places and develop mobile units to provide information and offer space for discussion and participation in public life in sparsely populated areas. As part of a comprehensive EU anti-poverty strategy, the EU should actively **fight against**

the non-take-up of public services and benefits by people who have the right to access these, such as by automatic enrolment or active outreach services.

These provisions are also **beneficial to older people who face intersectional challenges**. Older people with disabilities, particularly those living in institutions or requiring long-term care and support, face barriers to participation that mobile or outreach units could help overcome. Similarly, older people with low incomes who cannot afford digital technologies could participate more easily thanks to "service points".

In addition to the intersectional approach, the European Commission and the Members of the European Parliament must address the issue of participation in old age from **a lifelong, person-centred perspective**. The European Commission's Directorate-general on Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion responsible for EU policy on employment, social affairs, skills and labour mobility has a major role to play in supporting people and encourage transition between learning, working, family care, periods of unemployment, and retirement at different ages. In particular, it is important to have the opportunity at all ages to acquire and update the skills needed to participate in public and political life. Learning in old age is currently very limited and **opportunities for education and training beyond retirement age need to be multiplied**. In particular, the Council's recommendation on **individual learning accounts** adopted in 2021 needs to be implemented in Member States by encouraging them to ensure the accessibility of such accounts beyond "adults of working age". It is important for **digital education** for instance as the lack of digital skills is a major obstacle faced by older people, creating new inequalities in terms of participation, as many of them have not yet had the opportunity to acquire basic skills or keep them up to date. **Particular attention should also be paid to older women's access to education**. Throughout their lives, women face additional obstacles to learning than men. When they are older, they might have not had the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to participate, and/or face additional barriers related to both their age and their gender that limit their access to training and therefore to participate.

At the European level, **a service dedicated to older people within the European Commission** ensured by the Directorate General Justice and Consumers, and **the re-establishment of the Intergroup on Ageing and Solidarity between Generations** would ensure that both the Commission and the Members of the European Parliament are committed to defending the rights of older people and that older people and their representatives are regularly consulted and involved throughout the decision-making and implementation process of public policies that affect them. In addition, the participation of older people will benefit from exchanges and dialogue with younger generations. The intergroup would be the ideal place to **maintain a dialogue between the generations and promote intergenerational solidarity**, including exchange of cultural, professional, technological knowledge and skills between younger and older people.

It could also give rise to more ambitious measures on dialogue between generations or participation of older persons, similar to the European Disability Parliament or the European Youth Event.

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Transparency Register ID: 16549972091-86