

Ageism and the next EU Agenda

Workshop Report – Main discussion points

- Invited by the FutuRes Policy Lab, more than 130 engaged citizens from all over Europe discussed **education, intergenerational interactions, and policies and laws**, their impacts and limits.
- The participants came from over 20 European countries and from all adult age groups.
- They suggested **concrete educational interventions** from the earliest age until adulthood.
- They shared **best practices of intergenerational programmes** from their communities.
- They expressed **which policy areas they would prioritize** to fight ageism.

Framing ageism and solutions to fight it

The European Commission aims at a **Union of Equality** where all people can live free from discrimination. And to do so, the **recognition of ageism** is key, alongside solid, broad and systemic solutions to contrast ageism. Ageism is stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination based on age that harm people's health, well-being and the enjoyment of our human rights. Despite equality and non-discrimination being core values and fundamental rights in the European Union, enshrined in the founding Treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights, discrimination is still a reality for many. Age discrimination specifically has been constantly overlooked. Although ageism has a negative impact through the entire life course, age discrimination remains the most socially accepted and ageism the least legally challenged form of discrimination in the EU [WHO, 2021]¹.

The FutuRes project contributes to such recognition through an upcoming research report on ageism, and through consultation with decision-makers and citizens, with the aim to deliver new research and policy recommendations based on science-informed scenarios of demographic resilience for Europe.

¹ <https://www.who.int/news/item/18-03-2021-ageism-is-a-global-challenge-un>

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FutuRes invited engaged citizens from Europe to brainstorm on solutions during an online workshop entitled “Ageism and the next EU Agenda”. Based on the World Health Organization (WHO) three key areas for combating ageism, more than 130 citizens from all over Europe discussed **education, intergenerational interactions, and policies and laws**, their impacts and limits. The following is an overview of the discussion points raised during the workshop, alongside resources shared by the participants. These materials will feed into a deliverable on ageism that FutuRes will address to the European Commission and to Members of the European Parliament.

Educational interventions

The WHO Report on Ageism cites examples of educational interventions. These include workshops with lectures directly involving older people, with life-story documentaries, homework to students to practice new skills with older people in their lives and virtual reality activities to foster empathy for older adults. Research however states that the impact of educational interventions on ageism against younger people remains underexplored. Such interventions do not require massive investments and are considered affordable.

Many participants at the workshop emphasised that ageism awareness should be integrated into school curricula. Asked about at what age educational interventions could be more effective to contrast ageism, 96 participants replied to a proposed poll, giving most relevance to the 13-18 age range, as showed below.

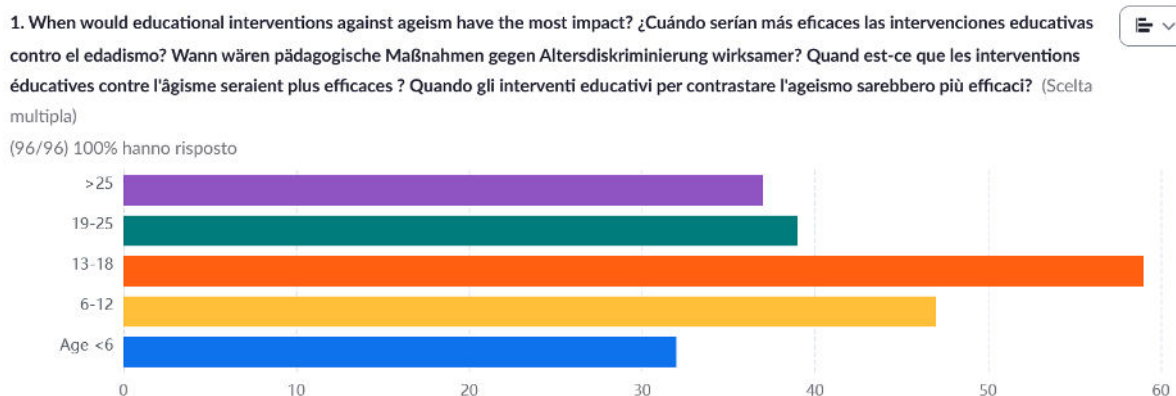


Figure 1: Results of the poll on educational interventions

Across the replies, however, a life-course approach emerges, with educational interventions being considered impactful since the earliest age until adulthood. During the open discussion, the following comments and feedback were provided:

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- Early childhood is the age range where educational interventions are considered to have most impact, as interventions at the earliest age can more efficiently contrast internalized ageism.
- A publication explaining the attitudes and perspectives of young children towards older adults was shared: "[Young children's attitudes and perceptions of older adults](#)".
- Training on ageing awareness should not be learnt only from books but in the real daily life and should start from family level.
- Age-related education could be included in the curricula of trainings in social sciences, health education, psychology.
- Advertising can be an effective way to break down cultural barriers in society.
- The meaning of "successful ageing" should be reconsidered. Quoting a participant: *"successful ageing is often associated with some kind of eternal youth. I think successful ageing is being ok with the process of ageing and having access to whatever is needed to have a meaningful life at all stages."*
- Longevity not only offers a new approach for society to live longer, but it can also provide economic benefits. One participant mentioned the book from the economist Andrew Scott "[The Longevity Imperative](#)" which provides economic arguments to policymakers about the benefits of longevity.
- A comment concerned the age of politicians and considered important that education against age discrimination is provided not only to children but also to politicians, parliamentarians and decision-makers.
- It was suggested that training for employers would be very useful as workplaces often see much age discrimination. In addition, a participant stated that: *"in our research we found that often people working in job centres do not consider older people 'capable' of taking certain jobs based on ageist perceptions."*
- It was pointed out that the older people in Italy do not receive much attention and that the current government has not addressed ageism, not yet through the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Policies.
- Learning to live together does not only come from books and trainings, but also from everyday life and family, and it is a continuous experience, across the life-course. One participant held these views: *"This seems to be a kind of paradox. In order to protect the many rights of everyone we are separating the many segments of our life from childhood to old age..."*
- Participants emphasized the importance of encouraging older adults to take a more active role in civil society. One participant proposed initiatives like #AgePride to

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advocate for the visibility of ageing and frailty in public spaces as a normal part of life, and stated: *“it is okay to display frail bodies in public spaces and to acknowledge that we may become frailer with age.”*

Intergenerational contacts initiatives

Intergenerational interventions seek to encourage interactions between different age groups. They can take the shape of mentorship programmes, intergenerational workshops or trainings, exchanges, community service projects, volunteering, co-housing initiatives, digital literacy programmes.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own intergenerational relationships and the discussion opened on attitudes towards older adults across the generations. The following comments were shared:

- Images of old age have changed, but many people have not yet realised this and more is needed to reduce prejudices. Supporting this statement, a participant said that: *“the more we talk to each other, the more prejudices fall away”*. Beyond the issue of the images of older people and of age, the question of people’s attitude towards different generations was raised, underlining the need to challenge both images and attitudes to combat ageism towards both young and old generations.
- A publication about this topic was shared: [“Intergenerational Contact Predicts Attitudes Toward Older Adults Through Inclusion of the Outgroup in the Self”](#).
- The significance of intergenerational interactions was highlighted, and a practical project implemented in Italy was briefly described, showing encouraging results in connecting different generations. More information through this project by the Italian association ATDAL [“Tales in the kitchen – Grandmothers shares memories and recipes in Italy”](#)
- The role of games and fun activities involving young people and older adults was also underlined.
- Various campaigns were shared, such as a [campaign to combat ageism in Zurich](#), an ongoing [campaign where we invite people of all ages to get photographed in Greece](#) sending messages of social cohesion, and the existence of programmes such as “Adopt- a Granny/Grandpa”. Also the [project “Be the Change”](#) by INRCA (National Italian Institute on Ageing) was mentioned in the field of employment, to ease the transfer of skills from older entrepreneurs to young people who are not working and are not in education.

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- It was moreover highlighted that these interventions put different age groups at the same level, meaning that sharing of knowledge and experience is not unilateral. *“When we think about interventions we need to consider the power relations between participants. So, we need to stop having programmes where only young people share knowledge with older people (namely about tech training)...”*
- Instead of framing activities expressively for older people when they actually are open to people of all ages, such as *“pilates for the older people”*, it may be effective to name and conceive such learning activities for all ages.
- Last, the report "[Rigeneriamoci](#) (in Italian, “Let's regenerate” in English) was shared by INRCA as an additional resource.

Policies and laws

Policy and laws are another important pillar in the fight against ageism. Policies are plans or commitments addressing specific issues. They establish a framework for action. Laws are rules recognized by a country or community that govern the behavior of its members and can be enforced through penalties. To combat ageism, policies and laws may include legislation targeting age discrimination and inequalities, initiatives promoting respect for the dignity of individuals of all ages, and human rights laws that safeguard these principles. Governments and public bodies must guarantee people’s rights across the life span. If they do not, we can hold them accountable.

Questioned via a poll about the areas where participants deemed ageism hit the most, the results showed on the top in the list the areas of work and occupation, alongside with health. The following figure shares the ranking of major exposed areas resulting from the poll. The results, however, also confirm how ageism permeates every sphere of our individual and social lives.

The following is a compilation of the main comments on the pillar of policies and laws to combat ageism.

- Participants underscored the need for special interventions to raise awareness of ageism, particularly among employers and healthcare providers, sharing their own and their relatives’ experiences of discrimination in these areas and drawing attention to discriminatory age-related policies and the lack of accountability within institutions. Some participants highlighted difficulties in accessing healthcare, with health problems frequently dismissed by doctors as a normal part of ageing, leading to inadequate care.

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Work/Occupation - Trabajo/Ocupación - Arbeit/Beruf - Travail/Profession - Lavoro/Occupazione	47/73 (64%)
Health - Salud - Gesundheit - Santé - Salute	40/73 (55%)
Transport - Transporte - Transport - Transport - Trasporti	28/73 (38%)
Technology - Tecnología - Technologie - Technologie - Tecnologia	27/73 (37%)
Care - Cuidado - Pflege - Soins - Assistenza	25/73 (34%)
Media - Medien - Médias	22/73 (30%)
Justice and safety - Justicia y seguridad - Justiz und Sicherheit - Justice et sécurité - Giustizia e sicurezza	22/73 (30%)
Housing - Alojamento - Wohnun- Logement - Abitazione	22/73 (30%)
Education - Educación - Bildung - Education - Istruzione	17/73 (23%)
I don't know - Non se - Ich weiss nicht - Je ne sais pas - Non so	1/73 (1%)
Other - Otros - Andere - Autres - Altro	1/73 (1%)

Figure 2: Perceived areas where ageism hits the most

- The bank sector was also brought forward, with some comments finding it increasingly difficult to access basic banking services, while lacking the necessary digital skills.
- It was suggested that parliaments and governments closely monitor demographic surveys and adjust their policies accordingly. Increasing the representation of older politicians in parliaments was seen as a way to ensure that the needs of the older population are adequately represented. It was reminded that there is an age-related problem regarding the preservation of the driver's license.
- It was underlined that the area of ageism suffers from a relevant lack of action and that we should all collectively and strategically look at what is missing and speed up action on those fronts.

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Next steps in policies and research

The insights collected through this workshop will feed the work by the FutuRes team, namely a report on ageism that will serve the compilation of final recommendations addressed to European policy-makers. Moreover, the workshop highlighted the importance of framing and implementing a European Strategy for Age Equality, alongside with a United Nations' Convention on the rights of older people, as essential tools to contrast ageism via policies and laws, impacting also on educational and intergenerational interactions. From the research perspective, the role of more comprehensive private and public partnerships against ageism was drafted, which FutuRes will have the chance to further debate.

The workshop showed how the strength of demography should not be underestimated when fighting ageism and FutuRes is precisely working to capture such strength and use it for more resilience-inducive European policies.



This workshop supported the global campaign to combat ageism by the World Health Organization, gathering stakeholders and initiatives in a global movement to change the way we think, feel, and act towards age and ageing.

Other links mentioned and shared during the event

<https://futu-res.eu/publications/myth-busts>

<https://futu-res.eu/fact-frailty-can-be-prevented-and-treated>

<https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism>

<https://www.age-platform.eu/ageism-has-no-place-in-the-eu/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/sep/24/equality-downgrade-european-commission-rights-groups-ursula-von-der-leyen>

<https://www.age-platform.eu/short-guide-to-avoid-stereotypical-communication-when-talking-about-ageing-and-older-people/>

<https://theconversation.com/older-swiss-women-just-set-a-global-legal-precedent-for-challenging-their-nations-climate-change-policy-227629>

<https://www.johnsaey.be/nl>

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