

Report

AGE Platform Europe Annual Conference: Intergenerational Solidarity in Europe – Multistakeholder Meeting

AGE Platform Europe

17 June 2025

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AGE Platform Europe Policy Statement

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Towards an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism: Building a Europe That is Inclusive of People of All Ages

Seizing the Political Momentum for an EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy

For the first time, the European Union has appointed a **dedicated Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport – Glenn Micallef – who is responsible for the drafting of an Intergenerational Fairness Strategy**. Within the framework of Ursula von der Leyen's second mandate, the European Commission has outlined 7 strategic priorities for the 2024-2029 period aimed at enhancing Europe's global competitiveness while reinforcing its social model. These priorities place particular emphasis on promoting social fairness, advancing a Union of Equality, and fostering social cohesion to help reunite and strengthen our societies. This underlines a growing political momentum to address demographic transitions and build a more inclusive, resilient, and forward-looking Europe for people of all ages. This aligns with international developments such as the UN Convention on the human rights of older people. Indeed, on 3 April 2025, the United Nations Human Rights Council has decided to establish an intergovernmental working group tasked with drafting a UN Convention on the rights of older people. This resolution marks a significant milestone towards the adoption of a long-awaited legally binding international instrument aimed at upholding and safeguarding the rights of older people worldwide. AGE Platform Europe (AGE), together with civil society

organisations worldwide, has long advocated for such a Convention to ensure the full protection of human rights in older age.

AGE's 2025 Annual Conference took place in this crucial context. The Conference brought together institutional stakeholders, academics, civil societies representative of and for older people, and advocates (younger and older people) to explore how intergenerational fairness and solidarity can be jointly mobilised in EU policymaking. There were an opening and closing sessions and 2 panels:

- Panel 1: Addressing Shared Interests and Challenges Across Generations
- Panel 2: Intergenerational Solidarity as a Way to Combat Ageism

In addition to the panel discussions, AGE recorded three testimonies from younger and older individuals who shared their unique perspectives on what intergenerational solidarity means to them in different areas such as advertising, housing and climate change.

The objectives of the Conference were to:

- **Clarify the conceptual and practical differences between intergenerational fairness and intergenerational solidarity**.
- **Highlight the role of civil society organisations representative of older people in shaping intergenerational policies, notably the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy**.
- **Emphasize the importance of fostering dialogue, cooperation, and shared responsibility between generations, especially in addressing global challenges such as climate change and rising inequalities**.
- **Bring together diverse expert voices to contribute meaningfully to the development of the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy**.
- **Promote the adoption of an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism**.

This report aims to highlight the various discussions that took place during the Conference, enhance our understanding of what is meant by intergenerational solidarity and fairness, and explore how we can further contribute to the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy.

Fairness Begins with Solidarity

We opened the Annual Conference with the testimonies of three younger and older advocates who shared their perspectives on what intergenerational solidarity means to them.

> *Intergenerational solidarity means to me working together like a family. They fall out sometimes, that's ok, that's part of it. But they respect each other and hear what each other's saying. Today, it is so important to [strengthen dialogue between generations] because there is a gap between generations. They're misunderstanding each other. And it's mainly because there is a myth which has grown up about generations which started in advertising that we're all different. Each generation is different, and I don't believe it.*
>
> Clive Colledge, retired Art Director in Advertising and Marketing

Since the launch of the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy, some of us – including our members – have sought clarification regarding the distinction between "solidarity" and "fairness". Several of our speakers have attempted to provide an explanation.

Dr. Gemma Carney, Associate Professor of Social Policy and Ageing at Queen's University Belfast, opened the Conference by situating the debate within the wider political and social context. She underlined how the crisis of democracy and the rise of populist discourses often create and even exploit intergenerational divides, something that is rarely mentioned in mainstream media. To counter these harmful narratives that seek to set generations against others, she insisted on our responsibilities as individuals, organisations and institutions to reframe the conversation and debunk harmful myths:

1- **Ageism only affects older persons** – In reality, ageism can impact individuals across the life course, particularly both teenagers and older people.
2- **Older people predominantly vote for authoritarian and far rights movements** – Evidence from the 2024 EU elections in Germany suggests otherwise: people over 60 had the lowest rate.
3- **Each generation will be economically better off than their parents** – All generations now face uncertainty and economic setbacks, reinforcing the need for mutual support and cooperation between generations.
4- **Fairness trumps solidarity** – While fairness is often seen as a governmental duty, true fairness cannot be achieved without solidarity. **Life is never fair and inherently unequal, and it is through acts of solidarity that we can ensure justice for all**.

From her side, **Deša Srsen, Member of Cabinet for the Commissioner on Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport**, explained why the European Commission chose intergenerational fairness over intergenerational solidarity:

- To ensure that current generations act collectively in the interest of future generations.
- To ensure "symmetry" rather than "dependence – it is important to highlight the empowerment and contribution of different generations. The European Commission understands "intergenerational solidarity" primarily in terms of dependency and vulnerability.

During the second panel, **Professor Arnstein Aasve – Professor in Demography at the Bocconi University and lead researcher of the FutuRes project** – presented his work on the **EU Index on Intergenerational Fairness**. This Index aims to assess various aspects of interactions between individuals from different age groups, with a particular focus on fairness across generations.

The Index is divided in 4 dimensions:

1. **Economic Fairness** – examining age-related disparities in poverty rates, labour market participation, job quality, and earnings.
2. **Public Goods Accessibility** – measuring differences in access to essential public services and infrastructure that influence well-being and life opportunities.
3. **Relational Equality** – addressing issues such as social isolation, discrimination, and mental health, which affect the quality of intergenerational relationships.
4. **Political Equality** – evaluating the degree of political representation and influence across age groups, including responsiveness within democratic institutions and intermediary bodies.

Professor Aasve stressed the need for drafting EU policies that are inclusive of people of all age groups if we want our societies to successfully navigate demographic shifts and tackle the root causes of inequalities. He concluded by noting that, in the context of his research – which will contribute to the Joint Research Centre's work on the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy – fairness is more easily measurable than solidarity, which may explain the preference for this term in the policy framework.

According to **Moira Allan, co-founder and International Coordinator of the Pass It On Network and AGE Platform Europe member**, intergenerational solidarity means recognising and supporting people of all ages, regardless of their situation. She emphasized that solidarity is not abstract – it is about care, participation, and social cohesion in everyday life. She mentioned that it is crucial that people of all ages remain united by being curious of one another, co-generating innovative solutions, engaging in communication, collaborating effectively in order to overcome age-related biases and co-create solutions for shared challenges.

From our members, talking about **intergenerational solidarity** rather than **intergenerational fairness** emphasizes mutual support and cooperation between generations, to promote shared responsibility, social cohesion, and collective well-being.

Fostering Intergenerational Dialogues at Local and National Levels – National Best Practices

Several speakers presented intergenerational initiatives at both local and national levels, which can serve as best practices for the implementation of the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy.

During the first panel, Moira Allan presented the outcomes of the MEET project, conducted in over 15 countries, which aimed to promote the value of democracy and incite people to vote, especially in the context of the 2024 EU elections. As part of this initiative, AGE Platform Europe and the European Youth Forum co-drafted the "United Across Generations" Declaration, which:

- Calls on EU institutions to prioritise the fight against ageism and age discrimination.
- Encourage citizens to act and engage with awareness for future generations, ensuring today's decisions benefit people of all ages, people not born yet and the planet.
- Promotes intergenerational dialogue, connections, and volunteering.
- Urges the European Parliament to value the complementary roles and contributions of younger and older people.
- Advocates for inclusive and respectful online spaces that are accessible to all age groups, without any age discrimination.

Carole Gadet, in charge of intergenerational projects in éducation nationale France (académie de Paris), member of a network of COST European researchers, and founder of the 'Ensemble demain' association presented a unique intergenerational project. This French project seeks to develop educational initiatives that promote intergenerational knowledge-sharing, bringing together young people with students, parents, grandparents, active older adults, and those in need of care. This programme encourages interdisciplinarity in different departments across France.

Alice Latta, Project Manager at ENTR'ÂGES, and AGE member spoke about her organisation, which specifically works on intergenerational solidarity at the Belgian level. The organisation develops educational tools and raises awareness of the following issues:

- Addressing children's perceptions of youth and old age to prevent discrimination and mistreatment.
- Moving away from a homogeneous vision of both young and older people.
- Understanding the concept of ageism and encouraging reflection on how individuals can act against ageism and age discrimination.

These national organisations of and for older people highlight how national initiatives play a vital role in addressing age-related stereotypes and discrimination and demonstrate the importance of aligning such grassroots efforts with broader European policymaking on intergenerational solidarity and fairness.

In the second testimony, **Lisi Brizuela, Founder & Managing Director of Leb Bunt e.V. / Das Hallo Projekt**, an intergenerational housing initiative in Germany presented the project together with 2 participants: **Angelika Bär** and **Dr Varsha Shivakumar.** Both participants highlighted the many benefits of such a project, noting how it helped deconstruct their unconscious ageist biases and broadened their perspectives.

In the third testimony, we heard the perspectives of 3 climate activists: **Godela von Kirchbach, Board member of European Grandparents for Climate, Mogens Jorgensen, Member of the Grandparents' Climate Action in Denmark and European Grandparents for Climate and Agata Meysner, President of Generation Climate Europe.** They explained why it is important for them to engage in the fight against climate change from an intergenerational perspective.

Solidarity among all people is vital to battle climate change. We all sail on the same boat through the universe and damage to the

boat anywhere makes everyone unsafe. We are all deeply social beings, and we all go through the phases of childhood, youth, adulthood and old age. So we should also consider these stages as shared experiences among us all.

Godela von Kirchbach, Board member of European Grandparents for Climate

Implementing Intergenerational Solidarity Across Europe

We were honoured to have with us **Pia Ahrenkilde Hanse, Director General for DG Education, Youth, Sport and Culture**. In her keynote speech, Ms Ahrenkilde Hansen, reaffirmed the EU's commitment to inclusive governance and responsive legal systems. She acknowledged the demographic shifts Europe is facing and stressed the importance of intergenerational policies embedded within the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy. She also highlighted the crucial role of collaboration to reinforce the European Social Model – *a framework for social policy in the European Union that emphasizes a balance between economic competitiveness and social progress*. Yet, her speech placed a strong emphasis on younger generations, particularly in relation to the labour market. In response, she explained that empowering young people, developing their skills, and ensuring access to housing and employment are essential conditions for safeguarding the well-being of older people. While this perspective highlights the interdependence between generations, it lacks a parallel emphasis on the **empowerment of older people, who deserve equal opportunities in different areas. It is crucial that equal attention and resources be devoted to both younger and older people, especially via the civil society organisations that represent them, in order to build intergenerationally fair societies.**

We were also honoured to share messages from **Members of the European Parliament, Idoia Mendia (S&D, Spain) and Michał Szczerba (EPP, Poland)**, who each recorded a short video underscoring the importance of intergenerational solidarity. **MEP Idoia Mendia** emphasized that addressing the shared challenges faced by both younger and older people requires a genuinely intergenerational approach – particularly in areas such as housing, the labour market, and care services. From his side, **MEP Michał Szczerba** highlighted the demographic transformation in the EU and stressed that **intergenerational fairness is key to turning this shift into a positive change**. They emphasised the importance of ensuring that the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy connects people of all ages – promoting dignity at every stage of life, equal access to services, and policies that foster connection and contribution across generations. They also stressed the need to place intergenerational solidarity at

the core of the Strategy, alongside a strong human rights-based approach and firm commitment from both the European Commission and Member States.

Deša Srsen, Member of Cabinet, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, in charge of drafting the EU Intergenerational Fairness Strategy, explained that the Strategy will include measures to combat ageism and age discrimination, highlighting its significant economic harm. Despite growing concerns among our members that the Strategy primarily focuses on younger generations, Deša Srsen reassured them that empowering younger people will not come at the expense of older generations. She insisted on the fact that the Citizens' Engagement Platform was not the only way to contribute to the Strategy but that members could send their contributions on behalf of their organisations directly to the European Commission.

The Annual Conference also served to influence and inform the Cyprus Presidency, represented by **Stavroula Georgiou, Administrative Officer at the Deputy Ministry of Social Welfare in Cyprus**. After presenting the main priorities of the Cyprus Presidency regarding the rights of older people – namely long-term care, social protection, and active ageing – she highlighted the crucial role of the Presidency in ensuring continuity between institutions, Member States and civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders.

The Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), represented by **Sabine Springer, Project Manager of the Equality, Roma and Social Rights Unit**, presented the FRA's work on intergenerational solidarity: the FRA has established a Youth Advisory Panel to provide young people with the opportunity to contribute to its activities and priorities. However, no similar advisory structure currently exists for older people. This highlights a significant gap in representation and underscores the need to create mechanisms that also amplify the voices of older persons in shaping EU policies.

Johanna Schima, Vice-President of Make Mothers Matter, shared a powerful example of solidarity in practice: **informal care provided by grandparents**. This support structure not only strengthens family bonds and mental health but also

sustains intergenerational cohesion. However, she underscored that **such care is real work and should be valued and recognized in social EU policies**.

Claire Champeix, Senior Policy Officer at Eurocarers, echoed Johanna Schima's remarks regarding informal care and its economic value**. Informal care is a vital expression of intergenerational solidarity between different age groups**. The value of unpaid informal care in the EU is estimated to be between 2.4% and 2.7% of the EU gross domestic product (GDP). **A shift from informal to formal care would require a 109% increase in the share of GDP devoted to long-term care, underscoring the crucial role played by older people as informal carers – especially older women, who make up the vast majority of informal carers compared to older men**. Too often, intergenerational solidarity is misunderstood or reduced to discourses where older people are seen primarily as a burden to society. However, this perspective overlooks the significant and active contributions that older people make. Recognising and valuing these contributions is essential to fostering genuine solidarity between generations and building inclusive societies where every age group plays a vital role.

The Involvement of the EU in Engaging in a Legally Binding Instrument that Would Benefit People of all Ages

Claudia Mahler – the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons reminded us that today's younger generations are the older generations of tomorrow. **To effectively combat ageism and age discrimination, a legally binding instrument is needed to establish minimum standards for the protection and promotion of the rights of older persons**. Drawing on the example of the Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD), which has had a significant and transformative impact at EU level, she highlighted how a UN Convention on the rights of older persons could similarly drive legal, policy and societal change.

Such a Convention would help close existing normative and implementation gaps, reinforce accountability, and provide a comprehensive framework to guide Member States. **The EU has a central role to play. Its leadership is key to shaping the content of the Convention, ensuring coherence with EU**

competences, and promoting the inclusion of core human rights principles such as intergenerational solidarity, fairness, and the full participation of older persons in society. Without such involvement, there is a risk that the Convention may not adequately reflect the realities, perspectives and aspirations of older persons in Europe and beyond.

Regarding how civil society organisations can participate in the drafting process of the UN Convention, Claudia Mahler explained that they can get involved in 3 different ways:

- **Strengthening national engagement and alliances**: there is a need to build momentum at the national level by fostering awareness around ageing issues. Bringing the EU perspective into national discussions is key. More collaboration between the European Commission and the United Nations in Geneva is needed.
- **Building a strong and vocal movement for older people**: older people are still not loud enough in advocating for their rights. A collective, visible, and assertive movement is needed to demand recognition of the human rights of older people and action.
- **Driving a paradigm shift**: we must work toward a rights-based approach, where older people are active contributors of policies that concern them. This notably require the consistent involvement of civil society organisations that represent the voices of older people, such as AGE.

The Way Forward: AGE is calling for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism

As **AGE Platform Europe President Heidrun Mollenkopf** concluded, achieving intergenerational fairness requires dismantling societal silos. In today's Europe, generations live in increasingly segregated environments: young people in schools, adults in workplaces, and older persons in volunteering and often isolated. We must intentionally create inclusive spaces – both physical and digital – where individuals of all ages can interact, share experiences, express fears and hopes, and co-build solutions.

AGE Platform Europe strongly calls for an **EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism**, as part of the broader Intergenerational Fairness Strategy. Such an Action Plan should be grounded in:

- A human rights-based approach.
- A life-course approach.
- An intersectional lens that acknowledges the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination faced by older women, LGBTIQ older people, racialised people and older people with disabilities, and any other groups that are marginalised.
- A recognition that both fairness and solidarity must be foundational principles of EU policy, **within and in-between generations**.

How Can You Engage?

If you would like to contribute to shaping the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy:

- Participate in consultations via the Citizen's Engagement Platform, calling for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism.
- Join AGE Platform Europe's efforts to combat ageism and advance intergenerational solidarity and fairness by giving visibility to our Secretary General, Maciej Kucharczyk's contribution on the Citizen's Engagement Platform. You can like and endorse his contribution, which calls for an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism.
- Subscribe to our newsletter to stay informed and receive the latest updates about our activities.

Solidarity is a precondition for our society, for living together, for cohesion and for mutual support. It is positive to hear from the Commissioner, Member States and organisations that they want to fight against ageism, that they want to create measures and strategies for intergenerational justice, fairness and solidarity. But we are living in and experiencing a segregated society and communities. We have to create more space for the exchange of our experiences, fears for the future and positive experiences.

We need to create a common understanding and cohesion in society.

Heidrun Mollenkopf, AGE President

You can stop the perpetuation of ageism!

Please read our one-pager on communicating on older persons in a non-stereotypical way.

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.

Contact

For more information, contact: Apolline Parel at apolline.parel@age-platform.eu

AGE PLATFORM Europe

Av de Tervueren, Tervurenlaan 168,
box 2 - 1150 Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32.2.280.14.70
info@age-platform.eu

WWW.AGE-PLATFORM.EU

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