

New EPSR Action Plan

AGE Platform Europe Proposal

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AGE Platform Europe is the largest European network of organizations representing and defending the rights of older people. We work to ensure that EU policies promote equal opportunities, dignity, and quality of life for all people as they age.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) emerged in response to the austerity measures of 2010–2015 which weakened social protection systems. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the consequences of underinvesting in social rights. The EPSR and its Action Plans also addressed the limited progress of the Europe 2020 Strategy in reducing poverty and boosting employment. Since the EPSR adoption in 2017 and the launch of its first action plan in 2021, the EU has taken important steps to strengthen its social dimension. While the 2019–2024 mandate brought greater focus to social issues, implementation of the 20 EPSR principles remains uneven. Key targets, such as 60% participation in education and training, exclude older age groups, and despite rising old-age poverty since 2015, no targeted measures have been introduced, threatening progress toward poverty reduction goals.

The upcoming review of the EPSR Action Plan provides a crucial opportunity to reaffirm the EU's social ambition. In this contribution, AGE Platform Europe presents concrete proposals for a selection of new initiatives at EU level that we believe should be included in the revised Action Plan. These recommendations are based on the lived experience of older people and aim to ensure that the next phase of the EPSR truly guarantees social rights for all, at all ages.

Equal opportunities and access to the labour market

#1 - Education, training and lifelong learning

To meet the EU’s goal of 60% adult participation in training by 2030, the new Action Plan must address the exclusion of older people from education and make learning opportunities relevant to all, regardless of age or employment status.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Promote lifelong learning:** Remove age limits and expand equal access to education beyond the labour market, and to reflect this in the indicators used to measure progress.
- **Foster inclusive and intergenerational training**: Design inclusive programs that encourage learning across age groups.
- **Ensure education is accessible and affordable for all:** Provide guided, offline, and financially accessible learning options for all.
- Maintain the objective of reaching **80% of people having at least basic digital skills,** but expand the measurement beyond the current 75 years age limit.

These priorities should be reflected in the upcoming EU initiatives:

- Union of Skills
- Individual Learning Accounts - *AGE_Policy_Statement_on_individual_learning_accounts-May2022.pdf*

#2 - Gender equality

Older women face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that accumulate throughout their lives, resulting in significant inequalities in later life. Gender-based inequalities compound over the lifecourse, leading to disparities in income (gender pay gap that leads to the gender pension and old-age poverty gap), health, participation in the labour market, and access to services in old age.

It is essential to recognize how ageism intersects with sexism, ableism, racism, and socio-economic disadvantages, creating systemic barriers that older women face. Despite representing a growing share of the population, older women's voices, lived experiences, and needs are often overlooked in policy and public discourses, while they experience ageing in gender-specific and often unequal ways.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in every aspect of daily life**, including in all relevant social, economic, and political domains, with attention to the lived experiences and challenges of older women.

- **Combat gender-based violence against older women** by strengthening cooperation between key services and agencies to ensure better support services for older women victims of domestic violence.
- **Tackle the gender pay, pension, and old-age poverty gaps** by promoting equal pay, supporting women's full participation in the labour market, and reforming pension systems to better account for unpaid care work and interrupted careers.
- **Collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data across different age groups** to ensure that the lived experiences and specific issues of older women are properly considered.

These priorities should be reflected in the upcoming EU initiatives:

- Gender Equality Strategy post-2025

#3 - Equal opportunities

The current EU policy and legislative framework offers asymmetric and incomplete protection, covering some grounds better than others. The Special Eurobarometer SP535 data reveals that age-related discrimination is widespread across sectors, with 38% of people aged 55–64 reporting discrimination when job-seeking, 50% of those aged 45–54 and 41% of those aged 65–74 experiencing it in healthcare, 14% of 65–74-year-olds facing it in accessing social services.

Age is the least covered ground among those included in the EU treaties, with only the directive relating to employment and occupation including protection against age discrimination, with important exceptions. Whereas the other grounds covered by the EU treaties are the subject of equality action plans/strategies, to date the EU has not adopted a strategy covering age discrimination. The proposed withdrawal of the horizontal equal treatment directive would mean that there is also no legislative initiative covering age discrimination in its entirety.

AGE Platform Europe recommends:

- **Adopt the draft horizontal equal treatment directive** to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall EU's anti-discrimination framework in line with the commitments included in the EU Treaties and the Charter of

Fundamental Rights. In case the EC decides to withdraw the current proposal, immediately propose a more robust and comprehensive legislative proposal that takes an intersectional approach, along with a clear timeline.

- **Integrate the age equality dimension in EU equality strategies:** integrate older people's rights into all EU equality strategies.
- **Combat ageism in a dedicated Action Plan:** include a specific Action Plan to combat ageism within the upcoming Strategy for Intergenerational Fairness.

These priorities should be reflected in the upcoming EU initiatives:

- LGBTIQ Equality and Anti-Racism Strategies
- Strategy for Intergenerational Fairness
- Gender Equality Strategy post-2025
- Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

#4 - Active support to employment

To meet the EU's 78% employment target by 2030, inclusive labour market policies must actively support older workers, whose employment rate still lags due to persistent ageism and discrimination.

AGE Platform Europe recommends:

- **Reassess age-based exemptions in the Employment Equality Directive**, which currently limits equal access and participation in the labour market and hinders efforts to promote longer, healthier working lives.
- **Promote the value of age-diverse workforces** by encouraging employers, policymakers, and judiciary bodies to recognize the benefits of recruiting and retaining workers across all ages, challenging ageist stereotypes and discriminatory hiring practices.
- **Recognize quality jobs as a foundation for sustainable employment:** Provide career guidance and targeted support to help older workers stay employed in quality jobs and avoid long-term exclusion.

These priorities should be reflected in the upcoming EU initiatives:

- Employment Equality directive - The_right_to_work_in_old_age-AGE_Platform_Europe_June2021.pdf
- Quality Job Roadmap - AGE-Barometer-2023_vf_EN.pdf
- European Job Guarantee

Fair working conditions

#9 - Work-Life balance

Adequate and flexible working conditions, along with quality care services, are essential not only to support but also to empower informal caregivers. AGE supports the EU Work-Life Balance Directive but believe it does not go far enough concerning informal care in terms of social protection and remuneration of carers, as well as flexibility and extent of care leaves.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Strengthen carers' leave:** ensure an adequate amount of paid leave and the right to flexible work, with clear EU standards and employer accountability.
- **Value caregiving through financial and structural support for informal carers,** through compensation, continued full social protection coverage, pension credits, and access to services.
- **Adopt an inclusive and intersectional approach:** broaden the definition of informal carers in EU law to ensure equal rights for all, including the self-employed and retired, while promoting the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men.
- **Encourage Member States to invest in support services for informal carers,** including respite care, day care, training, peer support, and counselling, with explicit prioritisation in the next iteration of NextGenerationEU and other European funding instruments.

These priorities should be reflected in the following EU policies:

- EU Care Strategy EU and National priorities for long-term care reform
- Work-Life Balance Directive - Policy Paper

#10 - Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data

Creating age-friendly workplaces means addressing the physical and mental health needs of older workers while ensuring they are not left behind in the digital transition. A supportive work environment must adapt to diverse realities to promote longer, healthier, and more inclusive working lives.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Improve physical working conditions along the working lives**: reduce physical strain and ensure occupational health policies reflect ageing over the lifecourse.
- **Promote mental wellbeing at all ages in the workplace culture**: shape well-being policies, fostering an open and age-positive work environment, and addressing age-related health topics, such as menopause, without stigma.
- **Bridge the digital divide and design inclusive digital tools**: offer tailored digital training and ensure workplace technologies are accessible to all, including those facing sensory or cognitive challenges.

These priorities should be reflected in the following EU policies:

- The next Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work - AGE-Barometer-2023_vf_EN.pdf
- Support mental health across the lifecourse - Mental health of older persons

Social protection and inclusion

#12 - Social protection

#14 - Minimum income

#15 - Old-age income and pensions

Older people, including older women, migrants, and those living alone, remain at high risk of poverty due to structural inequalities, inadequate pensions, and limited access to services. About one in five older persons is at risk of poverty and social exclusion, with an increasing trend, in some member states over 40%, and gender gaps are extremely high particularly for people over 75. A rights-based, lifecourse approach is key to ensuring dignity and financial security in later life.

AGE Platform Europe recommends:

- **Strengthen social protection systems:** guarantee adequate and sufficient income support to escape the risk of poverty and social inclusion, including for those without full pension rights, and ensure that arising needs for health and long-term care do not put people at risk of poverty and exclusion.
- **Index social transfers to the cost of living**: index pensions and social transfers to real inflation and essential expenses.
- **Make minimum income schemes truly adequate:** strengthen the Council Recommendation by requiring Member States to progressively raise minimum incomes to ensure a life in dignity.
- **Apply a lifecourse and intersectional approach**: Address overlapping inequalities, such as age and gender, by ensuring anti-poverty policies reflect the diverse realities of older people.

These priorities should be reflected in the following EU policies:

- Anti-Poverty Strategy - Tackling old age poverty
- Council Recommendation on adequate minimum income
- Keeping the energy – Older persons in the 2022 inflation surge

#16 – Healthcare

Older persons can struggle to access the health care they need, due to the lack of generalists and specialist medical professions, in particular geriatricians, sometimes high out of pocket payments and long waiting periods. Ageism exists in some health policies, such as through cut-off ages for cancer screening and the fact that data about effectiveness of medicine is still biassed towards male, middle-aged patients with no comorbidities. More attention should be put into developing health promotion and prevention in both physical and mental health, and to develop access to mental health care on par with physical health care.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Present an EU Strategy for health promotion and prevention**, which has the potential to reduce the disease burden both for individuals and societies, by addressing the socio-economic determinants of ill-health.
- **Address the shortage of healthcare workers**, raise the status of less valued professions, and propose an initiative to develop geriatric skills across all healthcare professions in line with demographic change.
- **Address the development of 'medical deserts',** by mapping the proximity of generalist, specialist and hospital care services in the EU's regions and encourage the creation of mobile or rural health centres through EU funds.
- **Boost age-related health research and care**: invest in research on diseases affecting older people's autonomy, ensure vaccination in old age, and address bias through an intersectional approach.
- **Reintroduce the aim to increase healthy life years** in the EU's research programme
- The EU should actively engage with the **World Health Organisations' Ageing is Living Work Programme and the UN Decade of Healthy Ageing.**

These priorities should be reflected in:

- An EU Mental Health initiative - AGE_2025_Older_Persons_Mental_health.pdf
- The next EU Multiannual Financial Framework - AGE-contribution-to-MFF-Expanding-to-new-priorities.pdf

#18 – Long-term Care

Access to long-term care remains uneven across EU Member States, with residential care still dominating service provision. High costs make care a major driver of poverty and social exclusion, especially as it is often delivered informally by unpaid family members, predominantly women, impacting their careers, income, and health. Intra-EU migration further strains systems, as some countries lose younger, skilled workers needed to support ageing populations. Abuse prevention is not systematically integrated into care services, and persistent workforce shortages undermine quality and access.

AGE calls for the development of person-centred, rights-based long-term care systems that treat care as a component of social protection, supporting individuals to live independently and with dignity.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Guarantee that persons with care needs stay in control** by addressing procedures to withdraw legal capacity and develop supported decision-making procedures, as well as advance directives
- **Develop quality standards** for patient-centred, rights-based care and support
- **Encourage investment int home care, community-based care** which support autonomy and independence, including by making use of the flexibility of the new Economic Governance Framework and through the active use of EU funds
- **Monitor and control the quality of care of all types of service providers**, public, not-for profit, for-profit and of the social economy

These priorities should be reflected in:

- EU and national Priorities for long-term care reform - Care must empower us throughout our lives - AGE position paper - AGE Platform Europe
- The next EU Multiannual Financial Framework - AGE-contribution-to-MFF-Expanding-to-new-priorities.pdf
- The creation of an EU Care Platform - Joint statement: The Commission must give space to its ambitions for reform long-term care! - AGE Platform Europe

#17 - Inclusion of people with disabilities

Older people with disabilities often face discrimination and exclusion due to the combination of ageism with ableism, as well as age limits in access to disability services and benefits. The specific challenges at intersection of old age and disability, beyond the field of care, have not been adequately reflected in the ongoing EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

AGE Platform Europe recommends to:

- **Establish new actions within the Strategy for the period 2025-2030**, that take due account of the intersection of ageing and disability and the particular role of older people as caregivers for people with disabilities.
- **Ensure the revision of** the proposed Regulation COM/2023/280 final, and the proposed Council Decision COM(2023) 281 final/2 which aim to apply the Hague Convention of 13 January 2000 on the International Protection of Adults at EU context, to ensure compliance with the UNCRPD.

These priorities should be reflected in:

- EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2025-2030
- Regulation COM/2023/280 final
- The proposed Council Decision COM(2023) 281 final/2

#20 - Access to essential services

Access to essential services is key to ensure autonomy, participation and dignity. While their access can be limited due to affordability, accessibility and/or availability, the equality angle is also important to take on board. For example, in some EU countries, older people may not be entitled to disability benefits if they acquire their disability above the age of 60-65 years old. This limits their resources and the possibility of accessing transport or care services. It should also be noted that while digitalisation provides opportunities to improve access to essential services, it can also increase barriers and even create new ones.

AGE Platform Europe recommends:

- **Ensure full and equal access to mainstream services**, so that face-to-face options remain available whenever services are digitalised (e.g., public administration, transport, bank).
- **Tackle the digital divide and digital poverty** by funding support and initiatives to improve infrastructure (access to electricity and broadband coverage), to support equipment (PCs, tablets, smartphones) and digital literacy.
- **Prioritize accessible and affordable public transport** in its funding programs to ensure door-to-door mobility between and within EU countries, notably for people living in remote and/or segregated community/area.

- **Apply accessibility regulations and standards** to improve access to essential services for all citizens, including older people and people with disabilities.
- **Beneficiaries should be involved** in the design of services and regularly consulted to ensure their views and experiences are taken on board.

These priorities should be reflected in:

- The Digital Decade policy programme - Digitalisation and older people, our call to EU Policy Makers

You can stop 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.

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