AGE Platform Europe's contribution to the European Commission Gender Equality Strategy 2026 – 2030

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Older women (OW) face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that accumulate over the lifecourse, resulting in marginalisation, violence, economic inequality, social exclusion. OW's poverty rate is 7.5 percentage points higher than men's over 75. This risk is greater among women (W) with disabilities, living alone, with low education, or with a migrant background. Pensions failing to keep pace with the cost of living increase this risk. OW also face ageist and sexist stereotypes, being portrayed as frail/passive/dependent. A Union of Equality is not possible without recognising the lived experiences and structural barriers faced by all W and girls, including OW. The 2026-2030 Gender Equality Strategy must address ageism through an intersectional lens, as age remains the only ground of discrimination without a dedicated EU strategy

Gender-based violence (GBV)

GBV against OW remains largely invisible in research, policy, and law. In 2021, 24% of W aged 65-74 reported experiencing GBV. There is a lack of protection mechanisms and awareness that GBV affects women of all ages. Support services are rarely adapted to OW's needs. Elder abuse is often framed as a neutral "vulnerability" issue, omitting the power dynamics and patriarchal structures that underpin GBV

Gender pay & pension gap

The gender pay gap increases with age. In 2023, W 65+ received pensions 25% lower than men's

Healthcare & long-term care

OW face unequal access to care due to both sexism and ageism. Abuse in care settings includes coercion, psychological violence, and financial abuse. OW live longer but with more years in poor health. Diseases may present differently in W but are less often recognised. Medicines are rarely tested on older people, especially OW, despite high polypharmacy resulting from multiple health conditions. OW also have greater long-term care needs

Employment

Only 56.2% of W aged 55-64 are employed, vs. 68.7% of men and 76.5% of W aged 25-54. 33% work part-time, compared to 8.7% of men. 70% of informal carers are W. The sector's precarious employment conditions disproportionately affect a predominantly female and ageing workforce. Menopause affect OW at the workplace, yet stigma and lack of support persist

Recommendations

- Mainstream ageing across the Gender Equality Strategy 2026–2030
- Apply an intersectional lens to address the needs of older migrant W, racialised W, carers, W with disabilities, low income, or living in rural areas
- Adopt an EU Action Plan on Ageism aligned with the Gender Equality Strategy
- Support the appointment of an EU Coordinator to end all forms of violence against W that will work towards the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, the Directive on combating violence against W and domestic violence and the Directive on Victims' Rights
- Collect age disaggregated data by different age groups, removing upper age limits

- Recognise elder abuse as part of DV and GBV strategies, acknowledging its unique dynamics (e.g., abuse by adult children, carers, and other family members)
- Strengthen coordination between GBV services, OP's services, and frontline actors including health, social, and justice services
- Commission an EU-wide study on elder abuse and violence against older people
- Ensure medicines are tested for effectiveness on OW and address bias in medical research
- Tackle ageism and gender bias in healthcare through training and awareness campaigns
- Address suicide via a gender perspective among older people – especially older men – through tailored, gendered mental health services
- Adopt a Council Recommendation on support and social protection for informal carers
- Ensure robust implementation of the Long-Term Care Recommendation with a gender and age lens
- Promote employment for OW via gender and age-sensitive policies, flexible work, and life-long learning
- Promote lifelong learning for OW to support participation and inclusion
- Ensure that Member States correctly implement the Work-Life Balance Directive