Joint statement by AGE Platform Europe and BAGSO
on the Council conclusions about "Human rights, participation and well-being of older persons in the era of digitalisation"

A shortened version of this statement was presented by Heidrun Mollenkopf in the closing session of the international online conference on "Strengthening the rights of older people in times of digitalisation" on September 29, 2020.

AGE and BAGSO welcome the proposal of Council conclusions on "Human rights, participation and well-being of older persons in the era of digitalisation" put forward by the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2020. As civil society representatives, we value the opportunity to engage in this direct dialogue on policymaking on ageing. For the first time in 10 years, Council conclusions focus on older people.

As civil society organisations, we welcome that the Conclusions take into account the diverse living situations and experiences of older persons that exist between and within the EU member states. Given the tremendous opportunities and challenges the increasing digitalisation means for living in old age, we urge the German Presidency and all other European governments to give particular attention to the following aspects in their further deliberations and future policy actions:

- The vast diversity among older persons themselves must be considered. The persisting digital gap within the older population which prevents a large share of them from social, economic, and societal participation must be closed – as inequalities in general have to be reduced.
- Therefore, digitalisation must be shaped involving older persons and according to their diverse needs and abilities.
- ALL older persons must get access to digital infrastructure and devices that allow them to receive relevant information and reach social networks, independent of their financial resources or living places.
- Adequate digital and media literacy programmes must be developed and respective facilities as well as support systems must be provided to leave no one behind.
- At the same time, we demand that analogue participation in society is guaranteed even in times of increasing digitalisation.

- Health, long-term, and palliative care must be accessible and affordable for all older persons whether they wish or not to benefit from digital applications. Alternatives must remain available to cover for diverse needs, abilities and preferences.
- While we recognise the advantages of digitalisation, we call for sound legal protection against the risk of intrusion and fraud, and of age discrimination especially where automated decision making is used.
- Physical distancing during COVID-19 further amplified loneliness; the pandemic incentivised many older people to go online, but digital means will never fulfil the basic need for human contacts.
- Last but not least, older persons' diverse competencies and valuable contributions to society must be recognised and supported, in particular in times of digitalisation.

We, as representatives of older people, call for the timely adoption of the Conclusions and call for concrete measures for its implementation. This must include the allocation of adequate budgets and qualified human resources at both national and EU levels.

Consequently, AGE and BAGSO applaud the 5-year action plan foreseen to enhance the autonomy of older persons and promote their active participation in shaping a Europe for all generations.

We are ready and committed to contribute to the implementation of this action plan.

Finally, we realize once more – and with the current pandemic, it became even more perceptible than before – that our laws, policies and international human rights mechanisms fail to protect older persons against discrimination. Therefore, AGE and BAGSO strongly encourage EU Member States to promote these conclusions within and beyond the European Union. Political leadership and new legislation are needed to guarantee the equal application of universal human rights in older age at national and global levels.

We will proudly support any effort in that direction.

About AGE Platform Europe

AGE Platform Europe is a European network of organisations of and for older people. We aim to voice and promote the interests of the 200 million older citizens aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most.
www.age-platform.eu

About BAGSO

The German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations is a non-partisan umbrella organisation of civil society institutions in the field of senior citizens' work and ageing policy in Germany. As a representative of the interests of older persons, we consistently call on politics, society and business to offer framework conditions that allow for a good and dignified life in older age. In doing so, we also have the interests of older people of tomorrow and beyond firmly in view.
www.bagso.de/english