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AGE Platform Europe Statement at 13th Conference of States Parties to the CRPD Round Table 2 on “Addressing the rights and needs of older persons with disabilities: ageing and demographic trends”

Older persons with disabilities are subject to a double oppression: that of ableism in combination with ageism. Whereas the CRPD has shed a light into the ways in which pervasive ableism in our societies creates barriers to the full participation and enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities, we still lack consciousness and understanding of how ageism affects our rights when we are older. Ageism makes inequalities and discrimination in old age to be seen as ‘natural’ or justifiable. When ageism and ableism are combined, the impact on rights is catastrophic. This was shown in the context of COVID-19, when more than half of the deaths from the virus in Europe occurred in residential care facilities for older persons. Even though we knew that congregated settings were hotbeds of infection, older people and care staff in institutions were not prioritized, they were treated as expendable, they did not have access to protective equipment, testing, they were denied any contact with their loved ones and were refused access to lifesaving medical treatment.

But even before the pandemic older persons with disabilities often found themselves caught between two different support models. The implementation of the CRPD by State Parties is largely focused on people of working age and below, therefore failing older persons with disabilities. Disability benefits and services are often capped at a certain age. In many countries, long-term care – typically targeting older persons- is not seen as a disability service and is considered as the end goal, not the means to a fulfilling life. As shown by the former UN Special Rapporteur in her report, older persons with disabilities tend to be excluded from programmes that aim to increase independence, mobility and empowerment, such as rehabilitation and personal assistance. They are more likely to be institutionalised and to be deprived of their legal capacity. Even the EU, in the frame of the European Pillar of Social Rights, applies two distinct principles for people with disabilities of working age (Principle 17) and for those who need care when they are older (Principle 18).

International norms are also biased and apply double standards. They are based on a medical model that accepts functional limitations as a normal part of ageing. Whereas under the CRPD people with disabilities have a right to decide where and with whom to live (Article 19), under the existing standards older persons are expected to live in the community only ‘for as long as possible’.¹ The co-existence of these standards that are in sharp contrast with the CRPD, renders practically impossible the equal application of disability rights in old age.

Older persons with disabilities are rights holders, they are not objects of care and a ‘burden’ to society. They - and the organisations that represent them - must have a say and they must be at the centre of the implementation of the CRPD. We cannot break the silos, we cannot eliminate these inequalities unless we root older people’s rights squarely in human rights, unless we consider ageism an equally wrong and

¹ See Revised European Social Charter, Council of Europe Recommendation on the promotion of human rights of older persons, Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, among others.



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harmful form of discrimination, unless we look seriously at the intersection of ageing and disability and the unique human rights challenges it entails.

I would like to ask the governments of Costa Rica, Italy and France represented in this pane, how do you intend to address these inequalities, fragmentations and silos to ensure that older persons with disabilities are no longer subject to models of care and services that are incompliant with the CRPD? How will you eliminate age limitations or different services for people with disabilities and older people in your countries? How are you addressing ageism and ableism? How are you making sure that older persons with disabilities, including those who acquire disabilities for the first time in old age are included and consulted about the CRPD implementation?

Thank you.

On behalf of AGE Platform Europe,

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About AGE Platform Europe

AGE Platform Europe is the largest European network of non-profit organisations of and for older people, which advocates for equal rights in old age.

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