



AGE Platform Europe

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Public consultation: reviewing the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020

Contribution from AGE Platform Europe

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AGE Platform Europe (AGE) is the largest European Union (EU) network of organisations of and for older persons. Funded by European Commission's Directorate-General for Justice, we aim at voicing and promoting the rights and interests of the 190 million inhabitants aged 50+ in the EU. Through our membership we represent more than 40 million older persons across the EU.

Although AGE as an organisation represents older people with varying degrees of abilities and needs, the probability of facing a disability such as mobility problems, dementia and other functional limitations increases with age. In reality older people with age-related disabilities are too rarely recognized and supported: bringing their voice in such consultation is thus critical.

Indeed, the [European Disability Strategy \(2010-2020\)](#) does not address the intersectionality between age and disability, although it shows in its introduction how widely the two areas crosscut. For some of its objectives, there is clear reference to older persons (e.g. Participation with the issue of the transition from institutional to community-based care or Equality) while it misses some key elements such as lifelong learning, employment of older disabled workers as well as social protection schemes which address differently the needs of older persons with disabilities in comparison to younger people with disabilities.

Age-based biases create unique challenges to older persons with disabilities. For example, older people may have access to fewer services or opportunities because they are seen as no longer playing role in society. Likewise, double standards apply too often in law and practice excluding older people from some benefits: across the EU we come across laws and policies that enshrine differential treatment for older people imposing age limits in access to [disability benefits, mobility allowances or personal assistance](#).



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When ageism – i.e. stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination based on age – intersects with ableism older people with disabilities are not offered the same level, quality or ranges of support as younger people with disabilities and are more likely to be institutionalised, denied of autonomy, marginalized, as well as subject to poverty and abuse¹.

It is therefore crucial that the next Disability Strategy addresses the intersectionality between disability and ageing across the different domains, such as. accessibility, participation, equality, employment, education and training, social protection, health and external action.

To support this intersectional approach and facilitate its implementation, it is crucial to improve statistics and data collection, as well as to enhance the involvement of older persons with disabilities.

Statistics and data collection: more and qualitative data to better monitor the situation of older persons with disabilities

Statistical data are missing to better monitor the intersectionality between age and disability. While the 2018 Report of the Fundamental Rights Agency reports that “in the EU-28, it is estimated 49% of people aged 65 years and over reported long-standing limitations in usual activities due to health condition (figures for 2016)”, it acknowledges that this number is a proxy for older people in need of some sort of support². When it comes to ageing, there is a critical lack of disaggregated data, not only between ageing and disabilities but also for ageing and gender, and simply within the wide age group of 65+.

Likewise, compared to other forms of violence, few studies focus on the forms and prevalence of violence, abuse and neglect experienced by older people, and even fewer refer to older persons with disabilities. Some studies on gender-based violence may indirectly address elder abuse, but methodological issues and age limits in data collection do not always allow capturing violence at the intersection of ageing,

¹ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (theme: older persons with disabilities), 2019, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/74/186

² <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/annual-reports/fundamental-rights-2018>



disability and gender. For example, the largest EU survey on violence against women had an age limit at the age of 74, did not include women in residential settings and mainly targeted inter-partner violence, failing to capture cases of institutional abuse and neglect in care services for older people or financial abuse.

Involvement of older persons with disabilities in the development of policies related to ageing and/or disability:

The consultation of older persons in policies related to disability is still weak. There are different reasons which can explain this situation, including the widespread difficulty to acknowledge the disability identity³, the quasi-absence of consultation of older persons living in residential care settings as well as the lesser access of older persons to new technologies through which a number of consultations is conducted at EU level, considering that with help and support to get acquainted with the technological tool some of them would be able to get on board.

There is also a clear lack of information and a gap to be closed when it comes to a “human rights culture” in the ageing sector⁴: a survey among AGE members revealed that across the EU there are still organisations of and for older persons who are not aware of the relevance of the UNCRPD and disability law and policy for older persons, while the majority has not been involved in the monitoring and the implementation of the UNCRPD in their country. The experiences of the disability and ageing movements have been rather different and the two constituencies do not necessarily overlap although de facto the majority of people with significant impairments are over retirement age⁵. The lack of involvement is also linked to the fact that most of older persons with disabilities are mostly defined by policymakers as older and not as disabled⁶, which inevitably leads to a fragmentation of policies and the exclusion of older persons with disabilities from the policies and programmes developed for persons with disabilities, not only in terms of benefits and rights they might provide, but also from the starting point of the design of these policies and programmes. **As recommended by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities, the mainstreaming of the rights of older persons with disabilities into**

³ <https://ageing-equal.org/shared-stigma-separate-silos/>

⁴ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (theme: older persons with disabilities), 2019, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/74/186

⁵ Mark Priestley & Parvaneh Rabiee (2002) Same Difference? Older people’s Organisations and Disability Issues, *Disability & Society*, 17:6, 597-611, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0968759022000010399>

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0890406508000819>



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all disability and ageing-related policies and programmes is key to ensure that the concerns and needs of older persons with disabilities are adequately addressed⁷. The renewal of the Disability Strategy for the next decade, 2020-2030, is a unique opportunity to make it concrete.

⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities (theme: older persons with disabilities), 2019, https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/74/186