

Active Senior Citizens for Europe

A short guide to
the European Union



November 2014

Introduction

The 'Active Senior Citizens for Europe' (ASCE) project

From 2013 to 2014, the project supported civil society organisations and older citizens to participate in and influence the EU political agenda by training them to become key actors in decision-making at local, national and EU levels.

In particular, the project gave trainings to groups of older people on what the EU is and how they can influence EU decision making processes.

More information:

www.age-platform.eu/age-work/age-projects/active-citizenship



ASCE was funded by the Europe for citizens programme

This programme aims to bring Europe closer to its citizens and to enable them to participate fully in the European construction. Through this programme, citizens have the opportunity to become involved in transnational exchanges and cooperation activities, contributing to developing a sense of belonging to common European ideals and encouraging the process of European integration.

More information:

eacea.ec.europa.eu/europe-for-citizens_en



The longer version of the guide to the EU

This 'short guide to the EU' gives basic information on the European Union and what it does for senior citizens.

More detailed and complete information can be found in the longer **'Guide to the EU'**, available in 10 languages on AGE Platform Europe's website.



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What is the EU?

The view of senior citizens

The European Union (EU) is an international union of 28 countries (Member States) which decided to build synergies in strategic areas by putting in common key policies.

Since its creation in 1951 by 6 countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and West Germany), the EU has evolved a lot. It includes now more countries and covers a wide range of areas, such as the monetary union (Euro) and the freedom of movement.

The EU is constantly evolving. The current basis for laws and policies in the EU is the Treaty of Lisbon, entered into force in 2009. The main changes introduced in 2009 seek to make the EU more democratic and more efficient by giving more power to the European Parliament and allowing more decisions to be taken by the majority of the countries rather than the unanimity.



“The EU is a fragmented, difficult project but too precious to be let down”

Elke,
Germany



“We say that 70 to 80% of the national laws are influenced by EU decisions, but this is hardly visible in the media where the EU is being advertised only for bad news!”

A Portuguese
participant

Why do we have the EU?

The founders of the EU wanted European countries to put in common their economic policies to prevent them from going to war again. Creating an alliance on coal and steel – two elements necessary to produce weapons – was the first step of this process, right after the Second World War.

The EU is now in a completely different context than 60 years ago. The globalisation and other challenges pushed EU Member States to join forces on an increasing number of policy areas. For example, they developed a single European economic area to ensure Europe's wealth and to better protect Europeans.

From the point of view of older people, the EU plays an important role in fostering peace in Europe and protecting its citizens' rights.

The EU also plays a crucial role in the promotion of core values such as non-discrimination and human rights, gender equality, patient safety, consumers' protection, passengers' rights, and cooperation between social security systems, notably in the fields of pensions and healthcare.

“The EU is the most civilized alliance in the world which brought peace, but we need it to be a place for democracy and solidarity”

Marjan,
Slovenia



How does the EU protect senior citizens' rights?

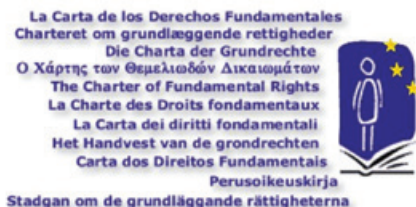
The European Union aims to protect the rights of citizens, consumers, businesses and users in all areas where it has competencies, the ones agreed by the Member States.

While the EU coordinates health systems to ensure that everyone can access healthcare when they travel within the EU, it is the responsibility of each country to provide decent healthcare to people who live in or visit their country.

Citizens' rights that the EU aims to protect are included in the EU Charter of Fundamental rights. Article 25 of this Charter refers to older persons' rights:

“Our rights on equality have been enhanced through our membership to the EU by acting as a support and monitoring mechanism to our national Government.”

Fintain,
Ireland



“The Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life.”



GOOD TO KNOW

The EU currently does not have any legislation to combat age discrimination outside employment, for example in access to insurances, mortgages, education and other goods and services.

To implement the values included in the Lisbon Treaty, the EU can adopt 'Directives', 'Regulations' or 'Recommendations'.

In most cases the EU law provides a general framework within which national authorities take action.

EXAMPLE



The EU also aims to promote equality between men and women. Therefore, the Court of Justice has decided that differences in insurance premiums for men and women are in violation of the EU Charter of Fundamental rights and required Member States to change national laws and practices to reflect that.

If the national authorities do not implement the European legislation, the European Commission can ask them to explain, and when needed, to modify their legislations accordingly. If necessary, the Court of Justice of the European Union takes action.

EXAMPLE



In 2000, the EU adopted a legislation (called directive) to combat discrimination in employment, prohibiting discrimination of older workers in the labour market. According to this directive, Member States can apply exceptions to this rule, for example setting age limits to enter a specific occupation (for instance to become a fireman).

The Court of Justice of the EU plays an important role in monitoring whether these exceptions can be justified or they are violating the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of age and the Charter of Fundamental rights.¹

¹ For example, see case Mangold v. Helm, C – 144/04

In which areas does the EU impact senior citizens' lives?

AGE identified **12 main areas** where the European Union is acting to protect seniors' rights and supporting Member States:

- Active citizenship
- Anti-discrimination
- Employment
- Education and life-long learning
- Coordination of social protection systems
- Pensions
- Social inclusion and participation
- Volunteering
- Health promotion and coordination of healthcare systems
- Research and innovation
- Accessibility to goods and services
- Consumers' rights

In some areas, the EU can adopt directives and regulations, for example in the field of non-discrimination in employment that the Member States have to apply.²

In other areas, the EU supports cooperation between countries, for example in education, pensions, or volunteering.

The EU helps its Member States to agree on common targets in the areas of poverty reduction, research and development, or climate change (see the 'EU2020 Strategy').

The EU also protects seniors' rights through its funding programmes, for example in the fields of research and development, regional development, or social policies.

GOOD TO KNOW



The long version of the 'Active Senior Citizens for Europe' explains in details how the EU impacts seniors' lives in each of the 12 areas.

² Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000

What will the new European Commissioners do for senior citizens?

The main Commissioners who will work on ageing issues are:



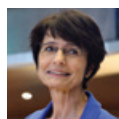
Jean-Claude Juncker, President, is responsible for the overall policy coordination. He considers ageing as a 'global challenge' which has not been adequately addressed yet.



Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President, is responsible for ensuring that fundamental rights are mainstreamed in all EU actions, including Art.25 of the EU Charter of fundamental rights on 'the rights of the elderly'.



Vera Jourova, Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, will work to convince national governments to adopt an EU directive on anti-discrimination in access to goods and services, including on the ground of age.



Marianne Thyssen, Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility, is responsible for all issues related to employment of older workers, pensions, social inclusion, fight against poverty, demographic change, etc.

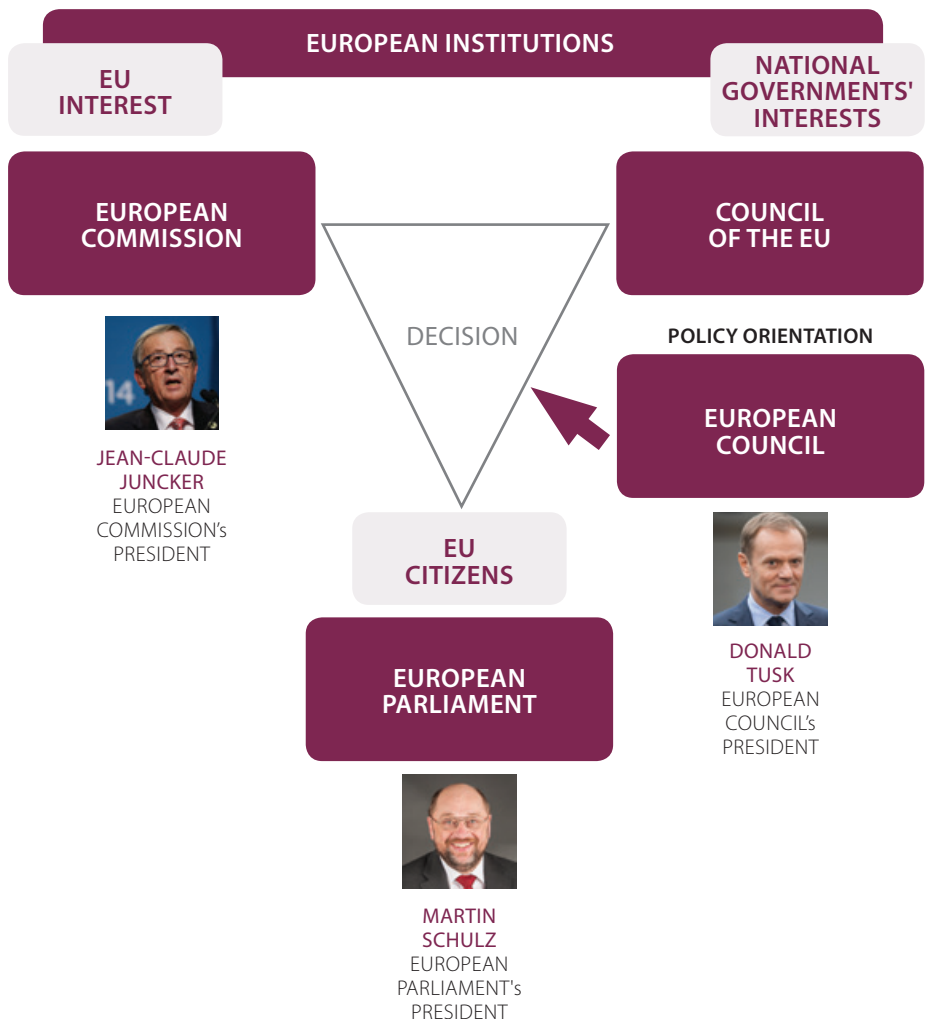


Vytenis Andriukaitis, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, is responsible for health promotion and innovation, patient safety, medicines, etc.



Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President, is responsible for Jobs, Growth, Investment and Competitiveness. He will address ageing through the monitoring of Member States' efforts to modernise their social protection systems (pensions, health, long-term care).

How are EU decisions taken?





The **European Parliament** promotes the citizens' interests through representatives directly elected by the European citizens, called 'Members of the European Parliament' (MEPs).

The **Council of the EU** gathers the national ministries for each policy areas (Finances, Transport, Foreign affairs, etc.).

The **European Council** provides political priorities through the Heads of States and governments.

The **European Commission** protects the interest of the EU and monitors the Member States' implementation of agreed objectives. It is the EU's administration. It can also propose new EU legislation.

The **European Commission** proposes a text which is discussed, modified and, when there is an agreement, adopted by the **Council of the European Union** and the **European Parliament**. The European Commission is then responsible to follow its implementation by national governments (Member States).

CLINICAL TRIALS

In 2009 the European Commission proposed to look at how the 'Directive on Clinical trials' adopted in 2001 was concretely implemented in the European countries. The Commission launched a public consultation to assess the implementation of the legislation.

In 2011 the European Commission released a first paper showing the consultation's results.

In 2012, the Commission made a 'Proposal for a regulation on clinical trials on medicinal products for human use' to the European Parliament and the Council of the EU.

After many debates, including with NGOs, the European Parliament adopted a 'position' including proposals for changes to the European Commission's proposal in April 2014. This position was approved by the Council of the EU the same month.

In July 2014, the Regulation was finalised.

How can senior citizens influence EU policies?

The Treaty of Lisbon recognises the right of citizens and civil society to get involved in the decision making process (article 11). There are different ways senior citizens can influence EU decision making processes.

- They can **contact their Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)** and share their concerns. The MEPs are elected directly by their citizens. Senior citizens should not hesitate to contact MEPs and ask for a meeting to share their concerns.
- They can **reply to public consultations** launched by the European Commission to share their concerns and suggestions on initiatives being prepared by the Commission.
- They can **participate in a European Citizens Initiative**, which will call on the European Commission to act on a

topic falling under EU competences. A citizens' initiative has to be backed by at least one million EU citizens, coming from at least 7 out of the 28 Member States.

- They can **make use of their right to submit a petition** to the European Parliament. To send a petition to the European Parliament: www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/00533cec74/Petitions.html
- They can **join a national organisation** which is a member of a European network whose aim is to influence European policies. This is the role of for example of AGE Platform Europe which voices the interests of 40 million older people towards the European Institutions.

GOOD TO KNOW



AGE Platform Europe usually starts working on an issue with the European Commission before a text is prepared (through consultations, meetings), follows the debates at the European Parliament and at the Council, and monitors with the help of its member organisations the implementation of the text.



HOW CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS INFLUENCED THE PROCESS ON THE REGULATION ON CLINICAL TRIALS

There are many issues related to the consumption of medicines among older people. That is why AGE Platform Europe worked to influence the regulation on clinical trials adopted in 2014.

AGE Platform Europe shared the concerns of older people in clinical trials by answering the European Commission's consultation of 2009. AGE mainly highlighted the need to improve participation of older people in clinical trials, especially when the trials tested medications targeting older people.

AGE organised a meeting at the European Parliament to raise awareness on issues related to medicines for older people and clinical trials and the involvement of older people in 2011. It was organised with the support of the European Parliament's Intergroup on Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity.

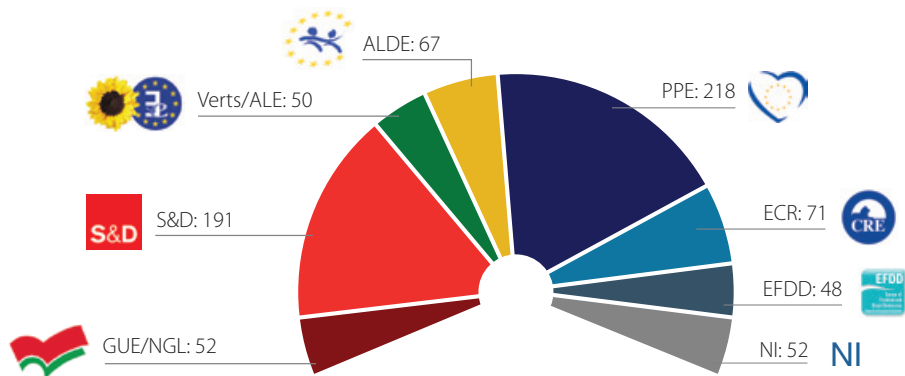
After the European Commission released its proposal in 2012, AGE raised older people's voices by:

- Publishing a joint statement by the civil society organisations on the issue of better information and transparency of the results of the clinical trials.
- Organising meetings with the MEPs
- Proposing clear changes to the proposal to the MEPs, such as a better involvement of women and older people in clinical trials.

AGE's voice was heard and the regulation adopted in 2014 recognises the gender and age issues in clinical trials.

AGE continues to work to make sure medicines tested in clinical trials are adequate for older people. AGE works in particular with the European Medicines Agency to focus more on medicines for older people and related issues.

Who are my MEPs?



In May 2014, European citizens elected the 751 Members of the European Parliament (MEPs). MEPs are divided in 7 political groups.

You can find the contact details of the MEPs who have been elected in your country on: www.europarl.europa.eu - see 'MEPs'.

You can get access to their email addresses, telephone number and postal address. You can also contact the European Parliament information services in your country.

The European Parliament's **Intergroup on Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity** gathers MEPs interested in following ageing issues. They meet regularly to share their opinions, organise events and joint activities. AGE is supporting it in their activities.



Contact points

For all information requests

- **Europe Direct central information service:**
00.800.6.7.8.9.10.11. It works from anywhere in the EU, from 9.00-18.00 CET (weekdays), and in any official EU language.

European Parliament

- **European Parliament National information offices:**
www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/information_offices.html
- **To contact your MEPs:**
www.europarl.europa.eu
(you can chose your language)
- **For videos:** www.europarl.tv.europa.eu

European Commission

- **General website:**
ec.europa.eu
- **EU local offices:** ec.europa.eu/contact/local_offices_en.htm
- **The 'EUtube' with videos:**
www.youtube.com/user/eutube
- **Your Europe website:**
europa.eu/youreurope
Information for citizens (left column)
available in all EU languages

Contact older people's organisations active in your country

- **See AGE Platform Europe website**
www.age-platform.eu



For more information



AGE Platform Europe is a European network of more than 150 organisations of and for people aged 50+ representing directly over 40 million older people in Europe.

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