

# In support of an active senior citizenship across Europe

AGE Platform Europe  
contribution to the european year of citizens 2013



NOVEMBER 2013

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European Year of Citizens 2013  
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# The Maastricht Treaty and the European Year of Citizens 2013

Since 1993, with the Maastricht Treaty, any national of a Member State became a citizen of the European Union. The aim of the European citizenship is to strengthen and consolidate the European identity by greater involvement of the citizens in the European integration process.

In order to mark the 20th anniversary of the EU citizenship, 2013 was designated the "European Year of Citizens" to provide an opportunity for people throughout Europe to:

- learn about their rights and opportunities as EU citizens
- discuss about the obstacles they face to using these rights and possible solutions to address them
- strengthen civic and democratic participation in EU policies, thereby contributing to the preparations of the European elections in 2014

Although significant progress has already been achieved, EU citizens still encounter real obstacles, both practical and legal, when they wish to exercise their rights.

Through the European Year 2013, the European Institutions want to re-open the discussion on the benefits which EU citizenship offers us – as private individuals, consumers, residents, students, workers or political actors – and what should be done to enhance them. In order to do so, various activities have been organised in 2013 including events, competitions, and debates with citizens on the future of Europe. Citizens' access to all relevant information on the EU has also been facilitated through web portals, information centers, etc.

In this time of crisis, empowering European citizens and highlighting the role of the EU are more important than ever. Therefore, we welcomed the European Year 2013 as a key opportunity to mobilise EU citizens towards a more inclusive Europe. We welcome this initiative as an attempt to filling the gap between the European citizens and the European institutions, and to addressing the democratic deficit that is now at the center of many debates across Europe.

# The European Year 2013 and AGE's work towards an active senior citizenship

Although older citizens have in general a positive attitude towards Europe, few are fully aware of what the European Union is doing to translate our shared values into concrete outcomes for European citizens, what the EU competences are and how EU policies impact their daily life. Even fewer know how to engage in a constructive dialogue with the EU institutions and help shape the EU political agenda. This is the reason why AGE took part in the European Year of Citizens' Alliance EYCA (<http://ey2013-alliance.eu/>), to promote the European Year 2013.

Since 2001, AGE Platform Europe has been fostering citizens' participation by promoting the vision of a society for all, where everyone regardless of age, gender, ethnic origin, religion, ability or sexual orientation, can enjoy equal rights and fully participate in their communities. In order to foster active citizenship among older persons, AGE has been:

- Voicing the needs of older persons' organisations towards the EU and International Institutions to ensure that their work better reflects the needs and expectations of older persons
- Helping older citizens across the EU understand how the EU works, what issues are at stake in an ageing Europe and what they can do to take part and make Europe a better place to grow old
- Encouraging participatory approaches towards engaging older persons in services' and products' design and policy-making
- Promoting user involvement in research through various European research projects.



We want to use the opportunity of this European Year 2013 to highlight our work to promote a participative and inclusive democracy in Europe, and voice our recommendations for a stronger participation of older persons in society. In the following pages we will stress why and how AGE is working to strengthen civil dialogue on ageing and the involvement of older users in the production of solutions that suit their needs. In the last part of the leaflet, you will also find our recommendations to policy makers and a series of suggestions for those NGOs that are willing to contribute to our objectives in this field.

We believe that civil dialogue on ageing and the involvement of older persons are key to fostering active senior citizenship and to contributing to the creation of an age-friendly European Union. Active senior citizenship helps design policy measures, products and services that better meet the needs and concerns of older persons, as well as recognise the contribution of older persons in society.



# What are the benefits of participating in civil dialogue?

By taking an active part in civil dialogue, older people's organisations and older persons themselves wish not only to influence policy-making but also raise awareness on the ageing phenomenon within society. They can also ensure that their needs and expectations are taken on board in the relevant policies. The active and regular participation of older people's organisations in civil dialogue gives older persons the possibility to comment on the issues that concern them most, as well as to be recognised as an equal partner in the discussion. It helps to:

- Support policy makers in taking better informed decisions based on the needs of their population;
- Improve the visibility and strengthen the voice of the ageing population which they represent;
- Disseminate and promote older persons' requests among policy makers and other stakeholders;
- Define their own role as an equal partner in policy developments;
- Engage more older persons to join such organisations and get involved in defending their own rights;
- Attract a higher number of older persons to participate in policy-making and non-profit organisations, thus strengthening their self-confidence and their capability to articulate and express their needs and requests.

Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty provides a legal basis for civil dialogue and involves the responsibility of all EU institutions. Therefore, the active participation of all citizens and their representatives should become a principle of good governance and eventually form a complement to representative democracy. Thus civil dialogue will become one of the major tools in policy and decision-making processes in the EU context. Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty introduced the European citizens' initiative, which allows one million EU citizens to participate directly in the development of EU policies, by calling on the European Commission to make a legislative proposal on a specific issue and thus enhance participative democracy.

In addition, thanks to article 4.3 of the UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, persons with disabilities, including older persons who face functional limitations, now have a legal right to be actively involved and consulted in all processes and decisions that affect them.

# What is AGE doing to promote civil dialogue?

AGE supports the direct engagement of older persons in all legislative and decision-making processes that affect them.

**AGE task forces** Thanks to the involvement on its experts, AGE is able to include the national perspectives into its policy work and drafts common statements that reflect the reality faced by our national members. These statements are then submitted to AGE Executive Committee and Council of Administration for discussion and approval.

**Civil dialogue at European level** In 2013, AGE managed to include in the Draft Council of Europe Recommendation on the promotion of the rights of older persons, a provision stating that older persons should be consulted through representative organisations, prior to the adoption of measures that have an impact on the enjoyment of their human rights. We also asked for the establishment of an EU-level dialogue group on the rights of older persons, where older persons would have a say on their needs and what should be done to protect their rights at the different decision-making levels.

**Civil dialogue at international level** AGE is calling for a better consultation of older persons when EU's position in international fora, such as the United Nations, is shaped. Thus, we have asked the EU Member States delegations to the UN Open-ended Working Group on Ageing to include representatives of older persons.

**European Economic governance** AGE closely follows the European Semester process for the coordination of national economic policies, recalling the necessary involvement of social partners and civil society organisations in the process. We believe indeed that this is the only way to ensure effective and adequate social and grass-root assessments of national reform programmes.

**Active Senior Citizens for Europe (ASCE) Project** This project led by AGE develops training material on the EU policies and initiatives that are relevant for older citizens. The project also seeks to support older people's involvement in the preparation of the next European parliament elections and help them establish long-term contacts their newly elected Members of the European Parliament.

**WeDO Project** Through this and other projects, AGE is encouraging public authorities and service providers to actively involve older persons using care services, and when appropriate, their families and carers in the planning, delivery and evaluation of these services.

**INCLUSAGE Project** Thanks to the INCLUSAGE project, AGE developed a guide that presents some recommendations on how to get older people involved in the civil dialogue process across all national policy-making levels.

**MOPACT Project** Through this project, AGE is contributing to identifying best practices and promising approaches in advancing the effective participation of senior citizens in policy-making processes.

**Campaign for an EU Covenant on Demographic Change** With the support of the European Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing and the AFE-INNOVNET project AGE is campaigning for the launch of an EU Covenant on Demographic Change that will seek to create the necessary political and technical framework to bring together local and regional authorities, and other stakeholders including older people, across the EU who want to find smart and innovative evidence based solutions in support of active and healthy ageing through age-friendly environments.





## What are the benefits of user involvement?

Genuine user involvement means adding value to the research and practice, as well as to the policy design process and debate. From a civil dialogue perspective, engaging directly with citizens entails a broad set of benefits:

- Research ends up in results which are relevant for older persons and which can provide policy-makers with a more comprehensive overview on the concerns of their population. Policy makers can make **better informed decisions** and the quality and applicability of research is improved;
- Expressing one's own view means feeling part of the community. Involving the EU citizens is a powerful way to confer them an **active role** in the designing phase of research, policies and practices, as well as to combat a feeling of demotivation and distance from the decision-making centers;
- The **quality** of both the democratic process and policy outcomes is improved, as well as their **acceptance** and **applicability**. We are more inclined to accept and to comply with what we have contributed to create;
- Market deployment of the developed **products and services** is facilitated as the real needs and problems of the final users are addressed in an adequate way;
- The engagement of the most vulnerable citizens is a way to **tackle social isolation and discrimination**: fostering user involvement means increasing the opportunities to empower them.
- **Visibility** and **dissemination** are improved, especially when user's involvement is organisation-based.



## How does AGE contribute to user involvement in European research projects?

The role of AGE in projects varies widely, but in all of them AGE works to make older persons' perspectives heard, to effectively involve end-users in all stages of activities and from the outset, and to ensure that the main ethical and legal issues are correctly addressed.

Sometimes our involvement takes the shape of an **Advisory Board**, where AGE experts are called to provide expertise and direction to a project, to suggest improvements, to assess the evolution of some actions, to provide the peer review of documents, to wider disseminate the project's outcomes, as well as to discuss the project's exploitation and sustainability plans.

At other times, AGE engages older persons in projects by participating in **User Fora**, where they meet experts, users, stakeholders and end-users for dialoguing with researchers, policy makers and decision-makers, designers and developers.

Other forms of involvement foresee the provision of feedback on deliverables and other documents, project brochures, leaflets, and dissemination materials.



# Contribute to the promotion of active senior citizenship!

Follow the example of AGE members and read some of their initiatives in 2013!

## **Build a national or local coalition on the topic**

The French coalition “Senior citizens and Europe” wants to foster active senior citizenship across older people’s organisations at national and local level. It aims at informing seniors in France on their role as citizens, as well as encouraging them to actively participate in the debate for the European elections 2014.

## **Organise debates on key policy topics that concern older persons**

**24 April 2013** – AGE Platform Italia devoted its annual conference in Rome to facilitating a debate between the civil society and national and European decision-makers on active senior citizenship.

**15 August 2013** – As part of the European Map of Intergenerational Learning Network, AGE German member BAGSO co-organised the World Café “Solidarity between Generations” in Rostock. The event brought together professionals, older and younger persons to consider a number of key questions concerning intergenerational relationships and to reflect on intergenerational policies.

**7-8 October 2013** – Through the conference «Ageing Connects 2013” in Prague, AGE Czech member Zivot 90 opened a debate on the living conditions of older persons in the country and their role as citizens of the Czech Republic and the European Union.



## **Disseminate promotional material on active senior citizenship and train older persons**

50&Più updated the toolkit “EuropAmica”, a practical handbook about the advantages, opportunities and protections that the UE offers to its citizens. The leaflet was widely disseminated through local 50&Più associations in view of the 2014 European Elections. They also added on their website the official banner of the European Year 2013, as well as several articles and links on the Italian Alliance for the Year.

## **Lobby your candidates for the next EU elections**

Belgian older people’s organisations are working on a memoranda for the political parties in regard to the elections of the Federal Parliament, the Government and their MEPs next year. The Flemish organisations are in particular pushing their politicians and political parties to strengthen intergenerational solidarity and the participation of all age groups in society.

More initiatives of our members are available on AGE website:

<http://tinyurl.com/mzhqr64>



# Our policy recommendations for strengthening civil dialogue

## **Empower older citizens and older people's organisations**

- Provide older people's organisations with training on how to participate in policy-making (e.g. legal issues, specific themes such as pension reforms, lobbying techniques)
- Financially support older persons' participation in civil dialogue

## **Provide a legal environment to support civil dialogue**

- Set-up legal frameworks for civil dialogue, such as senior citizens councils, senior citizens parliaments, etc.
- Strengthen common quality standards for civil dialogue
- Provide national guidelines for the strategic engagement of older persons

## **Strengthen transparency and accountability**

- Raise awareness of the existing or planned participatory or consultation processes at all levels
- Train decision-makers and civil servants about the role of participatory governance

## **Provide feedback**

- Provide regular follow-up during and after consultation processes in order to facilitate older persons' participation in all stages of the policy-making process
- Facilitate the involvement of the most excluded groups in decision-making processes

## **Coordinate**

- Enhance awareness and understanding of the existing legal frameworks and/or quality standards for civil dialogue between central and local government
- Facilitate stakeholders' involvement at all levels, including in small towns, villages or local communities
- Develop and improve communication channels to support discussion between all existing civil dialogue fora in order to share good practice and identify recommendations for better coordinated policy making

# Our recommendations for strengthening user involvement

## Revise funding programmes by:

- Setting User Involvement as a requirement for funding and simplify the application procedures for an easy participation of end users
- Increasing opportunities for the participation of users and their organisations
- Ensuring that users actively participate in the setting up and prioritisation of the policy and research agendas, and not only in the validation of results
- Pushing for equal inclusion whereby marginalised groups are included, age discrimination and gender issues are addressed
- Measuring the social impact of the decision-making process at the local, national and European levels

**Promote the creation of a good practice database** allowing an exchange of know-how in the field of civil dialogue

**Favor a mechanism for sustainable user involvement**, instead of fragmented approaches in different projects and decision making

**Encourage the organisation of events bringing together relevant stakeholders** (policy-makers, researchers, NGOs,...)

**Work towards common principles of user involvement**

**Address legal and ethical considerations linked with user involvement**

## Have your say!

Send us your comments on the publication via e-mail ([info@age-platform.eu](mailto:info@age-platform.eu)). You can also follow us on Twitter and share your ideas to foster active senior citizenship using the hashtag #ASCE.

### **For more information on AGE work**

AGE brochure “Active Citizens for Europe: a guide to the EU” <http://tinyurl.com/kzeh8vc>, including examples of good practices in the field of civil dialogue.

Link to AGE projects: [www.age-platform.eu/age-projects](http://www.age-platform.eu/age-projects)

List of AGE members’ initiatives to foster active senior citizenship: <http://tinyurl.com/mzhqr64>

### **Other relevant information**

Your rights as an EU citizen:

<http://europa.eu/europedirect>

[http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/youreurope/citizens/index_en.htm)

The EU Citizenship Report: <http://tinyurl.com/mvpr4fs>

EU Citizens Initiative: <http://tinyurl.com/89otd5k>

The official website of the European Year 2013: [www.europa.eu/citizens-2013](http://www.europa.eu/citizens-2013)

Website of the European Year of Citizens Alliance (EYCA): <http://ey2013-alliance.eu>

Citizens’ Dialogues on the future of the EU: <http://tinyurl.com/n7hvd4p>

Online Debates on the EU citizenship and the EU rights: [www.debatingeurope.eu](http://www.debatingeurope.eu)



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