JOINT PRESS RELEASE
Brussels, 29 October 2018

COST Action on Ageism final conference

Let’s fight ageism together… and allow our ageing society to realize its full potential!

On October 26, COST Action IS1402 on Ageism, AGE Platform Europe and the Committee of the Regions organized an international event to advocate for a future world for all ages, in which age is no longer a barrier. This event summarizes the work done on the topic of ageism by more than 200 researchers and policy stakeholders from 35 different countries, as part of a COST Action on ageism.

“70 years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations and in a context of increasing life expectancy in Europe, ageism is a nonsense and a clear obstacle to the development of inclusive and sustainable societies”, stresses Maciej Kucharczyk, AGE Platform Europe Policy Director.

“Ageism impacts all of us. In contrast to racism or sexism, ageism is the only ‘ism’ to which all of us are exposed. Therefore, we are all going to benefit from eradicating ageism and living in a society for all ages, in which age is no longer a barrier or a burden”, adds Liat Ayalon, Bar Ilan University, chair COST Action on ageism.

While the EU population is rapidly ageing, ageism is the most commonly experienced form of discrimination and a major barrier to the social inclusion and equal participation of older persons, with negative evidence-based consequences at the individual, familial, and societal levels.

Ageism is manifested in the way we think, feel and act towards ageing and is embedded in our cultures, institutions and policies. Research has shown that ageism impacts all aspect of our lives. It is particularly prevalent in the health care system and the labour force, but also in other fields, such
as the built environment or the media. The age limits in access to health treatments and work-related training are only a few examples among many others.

Ageism has a very negative impact on older adults’ physical and mental health and social interactions, resulting in greater risk of impairment, depression, loneliness and even premature death. According to research older adults who think negatively about their own ageing are likely to die 7.5 years before those who think more positively about their ageing.

So, to live in a world for all ages, there is an urgent need to change the way we think, feel and act towards old age and ageing. This requires action at all political levels, including in local communities where older persons’ daily lives take place.

As Luc Van den Brande, member of the Committee of the Regions and host of the event, points out, “the role of regional and local authorities in combating ageism is crucial. From eradicating structural ageism in local policies to initiatives combating stereotypes that picture older persons as frail, slow, incompetent and costly to society, regional and local authorities are at the forefront to create inclusive communities for all ages”.

To effectively combat ageism, the COST Action on Ageism has identified several operative steps that should be taken:

1. **Age is just a number and therefore, should not be used to categorize individuals. There is a high heterogeneity in older age** that should be acknowledged;
2. **The way we talk about older age makes a difference.** Talking about older people as elderly or seniors evokes images of frailty and incompetence. Policies, legislations and news articles that present demographic changes like a tsunami or a crisis and attempt to tackle “the problem of ageing” further enhance or perpetuate ageism;
3. Anti-discrimination laws and regulations should explicitly prohibit age discrimination, using a **human rights-based approach.** Laws and regulations should be developed where they do not exist, or revised where necessary to also include age grounds, and mechanisms should be devised to adequately enforce them. Such laws should cover all areas, and move beyond the narrow focus that is seen today on employment;
4. Interventions that challenge ageist stereotypes and prejudice through **intergenerational contact or education** need to be implemented since there is wide evidence of their effectiveness;
5. **Support the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism** initiated by the World Health Organization and the #AgeingEqual campaign launched by AGE Platform Europe.

The COST Action has collaborated on a **special issue** on the topic of ageism, a **book on ageism**, and a series of short **videos** to disseminate information about ageism to the general public.

*Read more on the [COST Action website](http://cost-europe.eu).*
Useful links:

- COST Action on Ageism conference ‘Towards a society for all ages: Why and how should regional authorities combat ageism’: http://notoageism.com/brussels/
- WHO Global Campaign to Combat Ageism: http://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/campaign/en/
- #AgeingEqual campaign: http://ageing-equal.org

Note to the editor

About AGE Platform Europe:
AGE is a European network of organisations of and for people aged 50+ aiming to voice and promote the interests of the 190 million citizens aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most. www.age-platform.eu

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AGE policy work is co-funded by the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of AGE Platform Europe and ENNHRI and cannot be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.