



# Proposal for **EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism**

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ENGLISH VERSION



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# Executive Summary

As the EU renews its commitment to equality and intergenerational fairness, it must **close a persistent gap**: the lack of a dedicated, strategic focus on ageism and age discrimination. Despite its far-reaching impact – from the labour market to healthcare, from digital exclusion to political participation – ageism remains one of the least addressed forms of inequality in the EU framework.

The EU now has a historic opportunity to lead by example and develop a **comprehensive EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism**. Grounded in human rights, equality, and solidarity across generations, such a plan would form the backbone of a future EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness and help build a fairer, more dynamic, inclusive, and resilient Union – socially, economically, and democratically.

This vision embraces the advantages of longer lives and the inclusion of all age groups in the green and digital transitions. **Tackling ageism is not only a matter of justice – it is vital to Europe’s growth, competitiveness, innovation, crisis preparedness, and global leadership.**

This paper presents a set of nine actionable, high-impact flagship initiatives aimed at ending ageism and embedding age equality across EU policy. While rooted in the lived realities of older persons, it takes an intersectional and life-course approach, designed to complement existing EU equality strategies and strengthen protections for all generations.



# Proposed Flagship Initiatives

- 1** Review EU law for compliance with age equality principles, issue guidance, and propose new legislation to address legal gaps, especially in cross-border and digital contexts. *[Pages 11-14]*
- 2** Organise a high-level annual event on 1st October (UN International Day of Older Persons) to spotlight older people's rights, foster participation, and share data and best practices among Member States. *[Pages 15-18]*
- 3** Develop a comprehensive package on age-friendly labour markets to raise older workers' employment rates, dismantle structural barriers, promote lifelong learning, and tackle workplace ageism. *[Pages 19-22]*
- 4** Adopt a directive to ensure adequate minimum pensions and income security for older people, with standards adapted for cost of living and cross-border fairness. *[Pages 23-26]*
- 5** Set minimum standards to recognise unpaid care in pension entitlements and enhance social protection and support services for informal carers. *[Pages 23-26]*
- 6** Set EU-wide targets to expand home- and community-based care, benchmark progress using the new EU indicator framework, and support rights-based care models. *[Pages 27-30]*
- 7** Develop EU Guidelines to combat ageism in foreign, development, and humanitarian policy - supporting civil society and championing a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons. *[Pages 31-33]*
- 8** Launch a public campaign to challenge age stereotypes, promote intergenerational solidarity, and raise awareness of older people's rights. *[Page 34-36]*
- 9** Establish a dedicated coordination body or focal point within the Commission to lead EU efforts on age equality, drive policy coherence, and share best practices. *[Page 34-36]*

# Vision and Need for Action

The European Union is anchored in the values of **equality, social and intergenerational fairness, freedom, democracy and human rights**. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union provide the basis to combat all forms of discrimination, establishing equality as a cornerstone of EU policies.

The first and second von der Leyen Commissions have placed equality at the heart of the EU agenda, striving to build a **Union of Equality** where all people can live free from discrimination. During the mandate, the Commission adopted several Equality Strategies to fight discrimination on the basis of sex, gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, or sexual orientation<sup>1</sup>, also considering intersectional discrimination based on these grounds.

The political guidelines for the European Commission 2024-2029<sup>2</sup> refer to the need to ensure increased solidarity and engagement between people of different ages in order to ensure intergenerational fairness, as well as to tackling the challenges of demographic change and adapting to new realities. This Commission has also committed to adopting an **EU Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness**.

As the EU continues to advance its commitments to equality and intergenerational fairness, **it is time to close a critical gap** on age equality. The EU has not yet given ageism and age discrimination the same strategic focus as to other forms of inequality and prejudice. The European Commission has both the responsibility and the opportunity to set an example and develop a comprehensive **EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism** in all its forms. Such an Action Plan would provide the backbone of the EU's Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness and contribute to building fairer, more resilient, competitive and inclusive societies for all generations of today and in the future.

## 1 /

In order to build a Union of Equality, the Commission adopted five key strategies:

- [The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#)
- [The EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025](#)
- [The EU Roma strategic-framework for equality, inclusion, and participation 2020-2030](#)
- [LGBTIQ+ Equality Strategy 2026-2030](#)
- [The Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030](#)

## 2 /

[Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029](#)

# Combating Ageism in the EU: a Matter of Democracy, Cohesion, Competitiveness and Preparedness

**Ageism** – the stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people based on their age – is a pervasive yet often overlooked form of inequality. It affects individuals across the life course, influencing how they are perceived, treated, and included in society. In the EU, **one in three people over 65 years report being the target of ageism**: being insulted, abused, or denied services because of their age.<sup>3</sup>

According to the 2023 Special Eurobarometer on discrimination<sup>4</sup>, 45% of respondents in the EU (5 percentage points more compared to 2019) think that discrimination on the basis of being perceived as too old or too young is widespread in their country. Ageism manifests in many areas of daily life, including employment, healthcare, access to services, digital inclusion, and participation in public and political life.

Ageism often intersects with other forms of discrimination, such as sexism and ableism, compounding the marginalisation and social exclusion experienced by older people. More specifically, older women face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that are the results of accumulated disadvantages during the lifecourse, exacerbated by ageism and age discrimination. As a result, the human rights of older women are violated and they face many structural barriers in different areas, reinforcing inequalities.<sup>5</sup>

The COVID-19 pandemic starkly exposed and exacerbated ageist attitudes across societies. Public discourse and policy responses often portrayed older people as uniformly vulnerable or expendable, reinforcing paternalistic or dehumanizing stereotypes. In some cases, older people's rights were subordinated to the broader public health goals without adequate safeguards – whether through age-based triage decisions, prolonged isolation in care facilities, or exclusion from digital services which were essential during lockdowns. The pandemic also intensified generational

## What is Ageism?

Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination against people based on their age.



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<sup>3/</sup> WHO (2021), [Global Report on Ageism](#)

<sup>4/</sup> [Special Eurobarometer 535, Discrimination in the European Union, April-May 2023](#)

<sup>5/</sup> [Advocacy Brief Older Women: Inequality at the Intersection of Age and Gender, UN, 2022](#)

## COMBATING AGEISM IN THE EU: A MATTER OF DEMOCRACY, COHESION, COMPETITIVENESS AND PREPAREDNESS

divisions, with some narratives blaming older populations for lockdown measures or resource allocation. These trends underscored the urgent need for robust safeguards against age discrimination in both **crisis and recovery contexts**. Major societal debates, from climate change to Brexit, have sparked a troubling rise in ageist narratives, often blaming older people for today's global challenges. Yet to truly tackle these complex issues, what we need is not division, but stronger intergenerational solidarity and cooperation.

Ageism must also be understood in the broader context of Europe's **demographic transformation**. According to Eurostat projections<sup>6</sup>, the share of people aged 65 and over in the EU will rise from 19.2% in 2016 to 29.1% by 2080<sup>7</sup>. Against this fundamental population shift, it is crucial to identify and harness the opportunities that an ageing population presents - not only to mitigate potential negative impacts, but also to ensure long-term resilience and intergenerational fairness, including for younger generations today and in their own ageing process. The EU needs a vision that can exploit the advantages of longer lives aiming for the inclusion and well-being of all age groups.<sup>8</sup> This requires addressing ageism as a key component of intra- and intergenerational solidarity, equality, democracy, competitiveness and crisis preparedness.

For older people, the consequences of ageism are profound. Evidence shows that **ageist attitudes and practices contribute to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, social exclusion, and economic insecurity**. At its most severe form, **ageism can amount to violence and abuse**. It can also take the form of systemic inequalities, such as structural ageism when laws, policies and institutional practices disadvantage certain age groups.

Ageism harms not only the individual. It undermines social cohesion, deepens intergenerational divides, and weakens our societies' resilience in the face of demographic change and future crises. Ageism carries a tangible economic cost: it drives up healthcare spending, contributes to inefficiencies in labour markets, and leads to a loss of productivity and skills - factors that can slow GDP growth and increase fiscal pressure.

**Ageist attitudes and practices** contribute to poorer physical and mental health outcomes, social exclusion, economic insecurity, and can amount to violence and abuse.

<sup>6</sup> / Eurostat (2019), [Ageing Europe - looking at the lives of older people in the EU](#)

<sup>7</sup> / COM(2023) 577 final. See also [Green Paper on Ageing](#), 2021, European Commission

<sup>8</sup> / Joint Research Centre: [Addressing ageism: a key priority for a society of longevity](#)

## COMBATING AGEISM IN THE EU: A MATTER OF DEMOCRACY, COHESION, COMPETITIVENESS AND PREPAREDNESS

The European Commission has placed growth and competitiveness at the core of its policy agenda. But for Europe to develop and remain globally competitive, it must also be inclusive – enabling people of all ages to participate fully in society and the economy.

Older people bring valuable skills, experience, and institutional knowledge that are too often wasted when they are marginalised or excluded. **Reframing ageing not as a story of decline, but of potential, reinforces key EU priorities such as lifelong learning, workforce adaptability, and innovation - all essential drivers of competitiveness.**

Ageism pushes people out of the workforce prematurely and blocks re-entry, reducing tax contributions while increasing public spending on health and long-term care. It also places a disproportionate caregiving burden on people of working age – particularly women – who may be forced to leave the labour market to provide informal care.

Conversely, empowering older people enables them to contribute more – as workers, consumers, volunteers, caregivers, and entrepreneurs. Combating ageism improves both employment and fiscal outcomes. Reducing barriers to affordable, high-quality health and long-term care services not only relieves informal carers but also frees up labour market participation and creates new jobs in the care economy. An age-inclusive approach to crisis response and recovery (e.g. climate, pandemics) leads to **more resilient, equitable, and cost-effective policy outcomes**. Finally, eliminating ageist stereotypes supports age-inclusive innovation – a growing sector where the EU can lead globally, especially as ageing populations reshape markets across the world.

Despite its wide-reaching consequences, ageism remains insufficiently addressed in EU policy frameworks, and dedicated action at Union level is lacking. To build a truly and inclusive resilient and competitive Europe for people of all ages, the EU must take bold and coordinated action to end ageism, by creating a dedicated EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism.



### An age-inclusive approach to crisis response and recovery

(e.g. climate, pandemics) leads to more resilient, equitable, and cost-effective policy outcomes.

# Objective & Approach of the Action Plan

To build a true Union of Equality, the EU must decisively tackle age discrimination and dismantle structural barriers that prevent people of all ages from fully enjoying their rights and opportunities throughout their lives. This requires challenging entrenched ageist narratives and discriminatory practices, as well as reviewing socio-economic policies through the lenses of **intergenerational solidarity** and **fairness**. Only by addressing these divides can we overcome a fragmented society and economy and promote cohesive growth that benefits everyone.

In 2024, the High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity adopted a key conclusion paper on Age Equality and Non-Discrimination on the grounds of Age. It underscored the critical role of the EU in combating ageism, through monitoring the implementation of relevant legislation, providing policy guidance, coordinating Member States' actions, supporting initiatives through EU funds, and facilitating the exchange of good practices. The paper further emphasized that achieving age equality involves not only eliminating age-based discrimination but also fostering inclusive and respectful societies that enable active living and equal participation regardless of age.

The **European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan** proposes headline targets for the EU to reach by 2030, focusing on employment, skills, social protection and inclusion as a shared responsibility among the EU institutions, national, regional and local authorities, social partners and civil society.

Building on these initiatives and commitments, an EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism will be grounded in **human rights, intersectionality, equality, and solidarity** – both within and between generations. It will draw on the World Health Organization's landmark report on ageism and its key recommendations, ensuring that the EU's approach reflects global evidence and best practices in addressing age-based discrimination and promoting healthy, inclusive societies. The Action Plan will promote coherence between the EU's and Member States' commitments to fighting discrimination and advancing equality for people of all ages, while



Only by addressing these divides can we overcome a fragmented society and economy and promote cohesive growth that benefits everyone.

**An EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism will be grounded in human rights, intersectionality, equality, and solidarity – both within and between generations.**

## OBJECTIVE & APPROACH OF THE ACTION PLAN

contributing to sustainable growth, competitiveness, and social cohesion.

This paper outlines a series of **targeted actions** across key thematic areas, setting clear priorities for EU engagement in the coming years. While it recognizes the diversity of population and age groups and adopts an intersectional approach to address overlapping forms of discrimination, it is written from the perspective of old age. In this sense, AGE Platform Europe's proposal for an **EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism** is designed to complement and reinforce existing equality strategies as well as the EU Strategy on the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Its implementation can be aligned with, and strengthened by, broader EU initiatives that cover all age groups and related forms of discrimination.

Furthermore, the proposed Action Plan supports EU's action on the **green and digital transitions**, contributing to a sustainable, resilient, innovative, and fair Union. It also seeks to strengthen Europe's global leadership in combating inequalities, advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and promoting **human rights worldwide** in line with the EU Human Rights and Democracy Action Plan.

**The Action Plan** will promote coherence between the EU's and Member States' commitments to fighting discrimination and advancing equality for people of all ages, while contributing to sustainable growth, competitiveness, and social cohesion.





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE **1**

# Improving Legal Protection: Review and Actions

**The Commission will undertake a comprehensive review of the compliance of EU law with the principle of age equality.**

Based on this review, it will issue recommendations and guidance to improve implementation in both case law and practice. Where necessary, the Commission will also propose new legislation or other measures to address existing inequalities, improve legal clarity and close normative gaps with a particular focus on cross-border situations and online environments.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 1 | IMPROVING LEGAL PROTECTION: REVIEW AND ACTIONS

A cornerstone of the EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism must be a robust and effective legal framework that ensures comprehensive protection against age discrimination across all areas of life. To this end, the European Commission should undertake a **comprehensive assessment of existing legislation** to evaluate how well current laws are implemented, whether they remain fit for purpose, and where gaps exist that require urgent attention.

In particular, enhanced monitoring and review of the **Employment Framework Directive** is critical to ensure stronger protection against age discrimination in the workplace, including addressing justified exceptions and age limits which build upon and reinforce ageist stereotypes. Legal procedures must be made more accessible for claimants raising age discrimination cases, with a clear shift of the burden of proof onto the defense to facilitate justice for victims. Tackling ageism in employment allows older workers to stay active longer if they choose - boosting labour supply, addressing skills shortages, and supporting sustainable social security systems.

Protection must extend beyond employment covering access to goods and services, where discriminatory age limits continue to exclude and marginalize people on the basis of their age. In this regard, the proposed **Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive** is still very much needed. Ageism alienates a large and growing group of consumers and prevents older people from accessing goods and services that are necessary to exercise their fundamental rights to health, social and economic participation, and housing among others. It also impinges on their right to freedom of movement within the EU when age discrimination affects opportunities for travel and relocation in other EU countries. The Commission should work closely with Member States to enable the adoption of the 2008 proposal for a horizontal directive on implementing the principle of equal treatment outside the field of employment including age.

As part of the application of the EU directive on **standards for equality bodies**, particular attention must be given to age discrimination, including by ensuring that national

**Protection must extend beyond employment** covering access to goods and services, where discriminatory age limits continue to exclude and marginalize people on the basis of their age. competitiveness, and social cohesion.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 1 | IMPROVING LEGAL PROTECTION: REVIEW AND ACTIONS

equality bodies have a broad mandate to address ageism across the life course and in all areas of life.

The lack of coherent legal protection against elder abuse continues to affect many older people across EU Member States. Cases of violence, abuse, and neglect in old age are frequently underreported, inconsistently defined, subject to fragmented legal frameworks, and poorly prosecuted - particularly when they occur across borders or in online environments. To strengthen the protection of older people in such crossborder contexts - such as those living abroad, in care facilities managed by foreign entities, or holding property in another Member State - it is essential to harmonise legal definitions and establish coordinated protection mechanisms.

The EU should act to set **minimum standards** for the prevention, reporting, and prosecution of elder abuse, and consider its inclusion in the **list of EU crimes** under Article 83(1) TFEU, given its serious and cross-border nature. In parallel, EU action against violence and abuse, including through the implementation of the Istanbul Convention, must explicitly address the risks and realities of elder abuse.

Moreover, in recognition of the harm caused by hate speech and hate crime, the **European Commission should expand the list of EU crimes to explicitly include age-based hate speech and hate-motivated offences**. Such recognition would raise awareness of ageism among law enforcement and justice professionals and ensure appropriate training and responses to these forms of abuse.

The legislative proposals initiated by the European Commission on the protection of vulnerable adults in cross-border situations represent an important opportunity to support older people in asserting their rights abroad - particularly in areas such as consumer protection, housing, inheritance, or protection from abuse. However, there is a risk that these proposals may unintentionally reinforce outdated, paternalistic approaches, rather than promoting autonomy and a rights-based model of support. To align with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCPRD) and emerging



### The EU should act to set minimum standards

for the prevention, reporting, and prosecution of elder abuse, and consider its inclusion in the list of EU crimes.

The European Commission should expand the list of **EU crimes** to explicitly include **age-based hate speech** and **hate-motivated offences**.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 1 | IMPROVING LEGAL PROTECTION: REVIEW AND ACTIONS

international standards on the rights of older persons, the proposed legislative package should be revised to ensure legal clarity while prioritising supported decision-making and the enhancement of individual autonomy. This requires moving beyond stereotypes about capacity in old age and **embedding a genuine commitment to dignity, independence, and equal recognition before the law.**

**Mainstreaming age equality into all relevant legislative initiatives is vital.** This includes revisiting and reinforcing past initiatives such as the Driving License Directive, but also ongoing initiatives, including the Proposed Revised Victims' Directive and anticipated ones, in particular those preparing for emerging challenges related to new technologies and artificial intelligence (AI), which risk embedding ageist biases if not properly regulated. The EU should proactively integrate measures to prevent ageism in AI and digital tools, ensuring that technology serves all generations equitably.

**Mainstreaming age equality into all relevant legislative initiatives is vital.**





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE **2**

# Participation & Inclusion

**The Commission, in collaboration with the European Parliament, will establish an annual EU dialogue on the rights of older people, as a dedicated forum to ensure their civic, social, and political participation.**

Inspired by the European Youth Event or EU Disability Rights Week, this flagship event would mark the **International Day of Older Persons on 1 October** and enable older people to actively contribute to the shaping, implementation, and monitoring of EU policies and legislation that affect them. It will include the presentation of new data about older persons' situation in Europe, take stock of current EU policy developments and facilitate mutual learning among Member States on fostering the political participation of older persons through mechanisms such as senior councils or older persons' parliaments.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 2 | PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

Full and effective participation and inclusion in society is a fundamental right for everyone, regardless of age. This broad area encompasses diverse aspects such as involvement in decision-making, lifelong learning, access to culture, civic and political engagement. Central to achieving meaningful inclusion are **enabling environments, accessibility and affordability** – prerequisites that profoundly influence individuals' capacity to engage in and contribute to their communities. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the crucial role digitalisation can play in maintaining social connections, while also exposing and deepening barriers for those already at risk of exclusion and isolation.

To address these challenges and promote age-inclusive societies, the EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism should prioritize the following actions:

- **Ensure civic, social and political participation of older people as equal partners** in shaping, implementing, and monitoring policies, laws, and public programmes affecting their rights and interests. Guaranteeing that all age groups are represented in decision-making, by promoting mutual respect, and encouraging shared responsibility for building inclusive and equitable communities. This includes their meaningful involvement in EU political processes such as the European Parliament elections and consultations organised by the European Commission.
- Establish a **yearly dialogue with older people co-organised by the European Commission and the European Parliament would be a meaningful way to engage with older people**. Mutual learning or peer exchanges between Member States on the political participation of older persons – via local, regional, or national senior councils or older persons' parliaments – could support the development of ageing-aware, inclusive policies. Likewise, it is critical to involve older people in the development of disaster preparedness and climate adaptation plans for extreme weather events such as heatwaves or floods.



**Central to achieving meaningful inclusion are enabling environments, accessibility and affordability.**

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 2 | PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

- **Foster accessibility** by guaranteeing the full implementation and rigorous monitoring of existing legal instruments such as the European Accessibility Act, the Web Accessibility Directive, and transport legislation, including passengers' rights regulations, i.e. support the autonomy and independence of everyone, as well as the competitiveness effort. The EU should continue developing and expanding legal tools and standards in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), while supporting Member States in accelerating their compliance efforts. Beyond legal instruments, EU funding support should be made available to support local and regional authorities in enhancing accessibility of the built environment, outdoor environment and public transport.
- **Tackle barriers to freedom of movement for older people by initiating a comprehensive study** on the legal, administrative, and practical challenges when travelling, relocating, or retiring in another Member State. These include **age-based** or pensioner **status-related benefits** - such as public transport or cultural events reductions. The study should also explore the **potential for mutual recognition of senior or pensioner cards** across the EU, which could enhance consistency, equal treatment, inclusion and mobility for older persons. It should identify good practices, gaps, and opportunities for action at both national and EU levels to ensure older people can move freely - without losing access to key rights, benefits, or services.
- **Support initiatives aligned with Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**, which guarantees the right to live independently and be included in the community at all ages. Older people must have genuine choice and control over where and with whom they live, enabling independence and social connection within communities. Guidance issued by the European Commission towards Member States in this area should be extended to older people. Reinforced action is needed from both the Commission and Member States to assist national, regional, and local authorities in supporting independent

**The EU should continue developing and expanding legal tools and standards in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.**

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 2 | PARTICIPATION & INCLUSION

living, including through EU funding programmes such as the Renovation Wave and more largely the regional funds. Last but not least, this should be taken on board in the forthcoming European Affordable Housing Plan.

- **Tackle the digital divide and digital poverty** by funding infrastructure improvements such as broadband access and electricity in underserved areas, providing equipment like computers and smartphones, supporting digital literacy programs for all ages, and ensuring that new essential applications and service portals remain compatible with older hardware. Alongside digitalisation, the EU should ensure equal access to mainstream services by maintaining face-to-face and analog options in public administration, transport, banking, and other essential services. Tailored solutions should also be supported for people living in rural and remote areas. Through these coordinated and targeted actions, the EU can create societies where people of all ages can participate fully, equally, and with dignity.





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE **3**

# Employment & Skills

**The Commission will launch a comprehensive package to support Member States in boosting labour market participation of older persons and fostering age-diverse workforces.**

**This initiative will make full use of EU funds and set targets for increasing the employment rate of older workers, provide guidance on dismantling structural barriers to working at an older age, and promote a life-course approach to career development and upskilling. It will also address improving workplace safety and work-life balance and facilitate mutual learning on tackling ageism and advancing age equality at work.**

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 3 | EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

The current EU approach to encouraging longer working lives has focused predominantly on pension reforms, with limited success in addressing the realities faced by older workers, especially those who are unemployed and face significant barriers to re-entering the labor market. Notably, this approach overlooks the persistent gender gaps that widen sharply before retirement, including the gender career and pay gaps, and poverty risk. Currently, only three in five women 55-64 are employed, and more than one third of this age group are not participating in the labour market.<sup>9</sup> These inequalities remain insufficiently addressed in both the EU Employment Strategy and the Gender Equality Strategy.

The EU must adopt a more flexible, **life course approach** where individuals transition multiple times between learning, work, family care, inactivity, and retirement, including after having reached statutory retirement age. This model recognizes diverse life paths and the need for continuous support throughout working lives and beyond. Removing age bias in the labour market improves talent retention and diversity. It unlocks the full potential of the workforce and allows for intergenerational teams, which are often more productive, resilient, and innovative.

The EU Action Plan should advance the following priorities to foster an inclusive, age-equal labour market:

- **Promote the value of age-diverse workforces** by encouraging employers, policymakers, and judicial bodies to recognise and seize the benefits of recruiting and retaining workers of all ages, challenging ageist stereotypes and discriminatory hiring practices.<sup>10</sup> Also make use of EU funds to promote diverse, fair and inclusive labour markets.
- **Shift from managing unemployment to managing careers by:**
  - Encouraging **career reviews at several stages of life** to assess employees' challenges, skills, aspirations, and barriers to participation, and to also better understand everyone's aspirations approaching retirement age.



The EU must adopt a more flexible, **life course approach** where individuals transition multiple times between learning, work, family care, inactivity, and retirement, including after having reached statutory retirement age.

<sup>9</sup> / [Employment and activity by sex and age - annual data](#)

<sup>10</sup> / [Promoting an Age-Inclusive Workforce - Living, Learning and Earning Longer - OECD](#)

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 3 | EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

- Strengthening implementation of the Council Recommendations on **Upskilling Pathways** and **Individual Learning accounts** and ensuring **initiatives developed under the Union of Skills are inclusive of older adults** and responsive to their specific learning and employment needs. This means promoting a person-centred approach that empowers individuals of all ages, including through access to paid educational leave, the removal of age limits to training, and alignment of learning opportunities with the evolving demands of the green and digital transitions.
- Supporting the **European Network of Public Employment Services** and strengthening the implementation of the **Long-Term Unemployment Recommendation** to better address the needs of older jobseekers, particularly women, through a person-centered approach.
- **Improve the reconciliation of work and private life across all ages** through enhanced social protection and services for informal carers. A forthcoming Council recommendation should strengthen carers' income security, access to health (including mental health) services, training, and peer support. A review of the **Work-Life Balance Directive** should propose increasing carers' leave days, guaranteeing minimum remuneration standards, and protecting carers - especially older women - from dismissal or forced early retirement.
- **Combat physical and psychosocial risks at work**, including stress and burnout, by prioritizing mental health in the next EU Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Framework. Health and safety measures must be better tailored to the evolving needs of ageing workers, taking into account the current and upcoming challenges and opportunities from the digital and green transitions.
- **Shift away from rigid statutory retirement ages by removing barriers to continued work**, such as mandatory retirement policies and restrictions on combining pensions with employment income. Older workers should be empowered to participate in the labour



**Improve the reconciliation of work and private life across all ages** through enhanced social protection and services for informal carers.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 3 | EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS

market according to their capacity and choice.

- **Promote longer and more fulfilling working lives by addressing structural and policy barriers**, such as pension disincentives that limit older adults' ability to remain economically active, whether through employment, entrepreneurship, or hybrid models. This includes adapting pension systems to support flexible transitions between work and retirement. The EU should fund and promote initiatives such as incubators for intergenerational coentrepreneurship, fostering inclusive economic participation beyond traditional employment.
- **Develop EU-level guidance and recommendations** for companies on adopting **age equality plans** and creating job opportunities beyond statutory retirement ages.

This Action Plan must embed a strong commitment to equality and nondiscrimination, recognising the intersectional realities faced by older workers, particularly women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups. Only through such an inclusive and flexible approach can the EU foster a labour market where people of all ages can thrive and contribute meaningfully throughout their lives.





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES **4** and **5**

# Adequate Income & Social Protection

### Flagship Initiative 4

**The Commission will propose an EU Framework Directive on Minimum Income Throughout Life**, setting minimum standards for non-contributory minimum pensions to ensure a dignified standard of living for older people across the Union. This framework will include robust mechanisms to adjust benefits in line with the cost of living, safeguarding income adequacy in old age taking due account of intersectionalities and cross border situations.

### Flagship Initiative 5

**Complete the Work-Life Balance Directive with a Council Recommendation establishing minimum standards to ensure care periods count toward pension entitlements**, to formally recognise unpaid caregiving, reduce the gender pension gap and tackle inequalities faced by cross-border carers. This initiative should also strengthen social protection and improve access to support services for informal carers.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES 4 AND 5 | ADEQUATE INCOME & SOCIAL PROTECTION

A cornerstone of the EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism must be a firm commitment to **adequate income and robust social protection systems** that uphold equality and non-discrimination. The Action Plan needs to fully recognize the intersectional realities faced by older people - particularly women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalised groups - who are disproportionately at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Eurostat data shows that older women's poverty rate is 7.5 percentage points higher than men's over 75<sup>11</sup>. Without financial security, meaningful participation and inclusion in society remain out of reach.

The following key actions should guide the EU's efforts to guarantee adequate income and social protection throughout life:

- **Adopt a Framework Directive on Minimum Income throughout Life**, establishing minimum standards for **non-contributory minimum pension schemes** that guarantee a dignified standard of living for older people. This framework should include a reference budget mechanism which is based on a basket of goods and services. It is indispensable to determine the adequacy of the minimum old-age income and ensure that older people can live with dignity and according to their specific needs. The reference budget goes beyond just poverty thresholds and considers the actual cost of living, including essential goods and services, healthcare, and social participation. The Directive should also encourage common principles to prevent poverty in old age, especially for mobile workers or women with care gaps, including fair requirements for maintaining non-contributory benefits, such as social assistance, when older persons exercise their freedom of movement (i.e. during prolonged visits to family across the EU, seeking medical or care services or offering caregiving to relatives abroad). Until such a directive is in place, particular attention must be paid to the situation of older people in the implementation of the recommendation on adequate minimum income.
- **Integrate ageism as a critical factor to the EU Anti-Poverty Strategy** by explicitly addressing and combating



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**A cornerstone of the EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism**

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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES 4 AND 5 | ADEQUATE INCOME & SOCIAL PROTECTION

discriminatory practices that contribute to poverty among older people.

- **Strengthen action on pension adequacy within the EU Semester process**, ensuring that Member States prioritise pension systems which provide sustainable and sufficient income to live in dignity and fairness for the monetary and non-monetary contributions made during earlier life.
- **Maintain and enhance solidarity mechanisms within statutory pension schemes** to cover periods of disability, sickness, and unemployment during working lives, irrespective of pension system design.
- **Develop a framework to ensure universal access to pension rights accrual**, encompassing all workers - including men and women, the selfemployed, those in new forms of employment, persons with disabilities, and those excluded from formal employment - and guarantee pension adequacy over time through mandatory, regular pension indexation at least in line with inflation, with additional consideration for age-specific expenses such as healthcare and long-term care.
- **Promote the introduction and harmonisation of care credits** across all Member States' pension systems as a targeted measure to reduce the gender pension gap and formally recognize the value of unpaid caregiving work. Complement this with a **dedicated EU initiative on social protection and services for informal carers**, ensuring their financial security, access to services, and recognition of their vital economic and social contributions.
- Explore **innovative and fair funding solutions** for social protection systems such as taxes on profits, financial transactions, digital services or environmental pollution - while applying a **life course perspective** to better measure and optimise the impact of social investment.
- **Regularly assess occupational pension coverage** through mechanisms such as EIOPA's consumer trends

**Strengthen action on pension adequacy** within the EU Semester process, ensuring that Member States prioritise pension systems which provide sustainable and sufficient income to live in dignity and fairness.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES 4 AND 5 | ADEQUATE INCOME & SOCIAL PROTECTION

report, with special focus on gaps linked to gender, sector, and contract type; promote policies which allow a broader coverage of both women and men, as well as care leaves, in Member States where occupational pensions play a strong role.

- **Follow up rigorously on the recommendations of the High-Level Group on Supplementary Pensions (2019)** to modernise and strengthen occupational pensions across the EU.

By adopting these comprehensive measures, the EU can ensure that social protection systems deliver adequate, equitable, and dignified income security for all older people, fostering inclusion and competitiveness and reducing poverty rooted in age-based discrimination.





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE **6**

# Health & Long-Term Care

**Use the newly developed EU-wide indicator framework for long-term care and support, to enable transparent benchmarking and accountability.**

**The EU should set compulsory access targets, inspired by the Barcelona targets for childcare, to track progress in expanding community and home-based care in line with the CRPD and the European Pillar of Social Rights. At the same time, the EU should support the transition to rights-based, person-centred care models through research, funding for transformation of services and peer reviews.**

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 6 | HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

To combat ageism and promote **equality in health and long-term care** (LTC), the EU must place non-discrimination and human rights at the heart of its health and care policies, in line with Article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). A **lifecourse approach** is essential, combining sustained investment in health promotion, disease prevention, and crisis preparedness with universal access to age-inclusive, rightsbased care.

Older people consistently face barriers to affordable, high-quality health and care services, disproportionately affecting those from marginalised groups. Many are excluded from or underserved by long-term care systems, which often lack adequate home and community-based services. In particular, the lack of accessible home and community-based options results in care gaps and reinforces the unpaid care burden on family members - especially women - who provide care to 60% of older persons in need of care.<sup>12</sup>

Geographic disparities also create indirect age discrimination, as regions with older populations frequently lack sufficient access to primary, specialist, and social care services.

**To uphold the right to quality care** (European Pillar of Social Rights, Principle 18) **Member States should invest in local care infrastructures, strengthen working conditions, and support staff recruitment, training and retention - particularly in geriatrics and rural care provision.** Embedding prevention and early intervention into care models will improve both health outcomes and the sustainability of public budgets.

To address these challenges, the EU Action Plan to Combat Ageism should prioritise the following actions:

- **Mainstream Age Equality in Health Systems**  
The EU should develop dedicated guidance to eliminate age-based discrimination in all aspects of healthcare, including health promotion, prevention, diagnosis, treatment, medicines, research, and health financing, covering both mental and physical health. Universal

**A lifecourse approach is essential,** combining sustained investment in health promotion, disease prevention, and crisis preparedness with universal access to age-inclusive, rightsbased care.



**Member States should invest in local care infrastructures,** strengthen working conditions, and support staff recruitment, training and retention.

<sup>12/</sup> Also: around 14% of the population over 50 provides informal care. [Source](#)

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 6 | HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

health coverage must be actively inclusive of older adults, ensuring equitable access to essential medicines, assistive technologies, and geriatric care. The EU should also encourage early and equitable access to comprehensive palliative and rehabilitative care. Decisions on care and support should always be made by the person in need of care, if needed via a supported decision-making procedure, rather than being taken by institutions or health professionals themselves. This also requires investment in the training of health professionals to identify and counter both implicit and explicit age bias, alongside a systematic approach to collecting and using age-disaggregated health data to monitor and address inequalities.

- **Expand Rights-Based Long-Term Care Systems**  
This will require effective use of the new EU indicator framework to benchmark access, quality, and outcomes. The EU should introduce access targets for the effective choice between residential, home and community-based care services, inspired by the Barcelona childcare targets, and support Member States in transitioning toward person-centered care models through funding, research, and peer learning mechanisms
- **Addressing Cross-Border Gaps in Health and Care Access**  
Older people retiring or moving across EU borders often face unintended discrimination and unequal access to care, despite the EU's free movement principle. Issues include double payments for health coverage, gaps in care benefits, and lack of mutual recognition of care assessments. For example, some must pay health insurance in their pension country while also paying taxes in their residence country, without guaranteed care access. Others may lose long-term care benefits due to differing insurance requirements. The revision and implementation of Regulation (EC) No 883/2004 should consider these cross-border challenges. An EU-wide study is needed to identify barriers, assess impacts, and recommend best practices to ensure equal health and care access for mobile older citizens and informal carers.



**Universal health coverage** must be actively inclusive of older adults, ensuring equitable access to essential medicines, assistive technologies, and geriatric care.

**The EU should also encourage early and equitable access to comprehensive palliative and rehabilitative care.**

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 6 | HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

- **Empower Care Users as Consumers**

Older people must be recognised under EU law as a vulnerable consumer group in the context of long-term care. Consumer protection rules, such as those under the Unfair Contract Terms Directive, should apply to care service contracts, and there must be a requirement for clear, accessible information on service quality and costs. Strengthening ombudsperson roles, complaints mechanisms, and user involvement in care governance structures is also essential to ensure accountability and respect for rights.

- **Invest in the care workforce to improve care quality and sustainability**

This includes reinforcing the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue for social services and working toward better wages, working conditions, occupational health and safety standards, and professional training. Efforts must also focus on formalizing employment for undocumented or precarious care workers and expanding geriatric and dementia-specific competencies across all care and health professions.

- **Prepare for Health Emergencies and provision with critical medical supplies**

The work of the EU Health Emergency, Preparedness and Response Agency (HERA) should lead to a stable supply of critical medical goods and services where and when they are needed, in all EU Member States and taking into account the specific needs of older persons in emergency situations; its advisory groups should include geriatricians and representatives of older persons.





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE **7**

# Leading the Fight Against Ageism around the World

**The European Commission in collaboration with the EU High Representative of Foreign Affairs will call on the European External Action Service to develop dedicated EU Guidelines to Combat Ageism in External Action.**

These guidelines will address both ageism as a standalone issue and its intersection with other forms of discrimination. They will help the EU to mainstream anti-ageism measures in its development aid, enlargement, and humanitarian programmes, paying particular attention to supporting civil society organisations working with and for older persons.

The guidelines will also steer the EU's active engagement in inclusive, democratic negotiations for a **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons**, ensuring the meaningful participation of civil society and older people in the process.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 7 | LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST AGEISM AROUND THE WORLD

As a values-based global actor and a long-standing advocate for human rights, the European Union is well placed to lead the fight against ageism on the world stage.

Ageism is a global phenomenon that undermines the dignity, rights, and contributions of older people in every region. Yet international responses remain fragmented and underdeveloped. The EU can play a transformative role by mainstreaming age equality across its external action and by championing international efforts to advance the human rights of older persons. By showing leadership in age equality, the EU strengthens its human rights profile and soft power globally - especially important as other regions grapple with similar demographic transitions.

The following actions which will be developed by the European Commission in collaboration with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and the European External Action Services, can help the EU fulfill this global leadership role:

- **Champion the UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons**
  - Actively support and engage in inclusive and democratic negotiations for a new **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons**, ensuring the meaningful participation of civil society organisations and older people themselves.
  - Encourage EU Member States to **include older people's representatives** in their national delegations during UN discussions and meetings on ageing and human rights.
- **Integrate Age Equality in EU Human Rights Policies and Programming**
  - Include the fight against ageism as a strategic objective in the **post-2027 EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy**.
  - Develop dedicated **EU Guidelines to Combat Ageism** in external action, to complement existing human



The EU can play a transformative role by **mainstreaming age equality** across its external action and by championing international efforts to advance the human rights of older persons.

**The EU should actively support and engage in inclusive and democratic negotiations for a new United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.**

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVE 7 | LEADING THE FIGHT AGAINST AGEISM AROUND THE WORLD

rights guidelines on non-discrimination, race, LGBTIQ, and disability. These guidelines should address both standalone ageism and its intersection with other forms of discrimination.

- **Advance Age-Inclusive Global Development and Humanitarian Action**
  - Mainstream anti-ageism measures into the **EU's development aid, enlargement, and humanitarian programmes**, with a focus on supporting civil society organisations working with and for older persons.
  - Promote the visibility and inclusion of older people in humanitarian assistance and recovery programmes, especially in contexts of crisis such as climate emergencies, armed conflict, or displacement.
  - Ensure that **ageism is considered in crisis prevention and response mechanisms**, alongside other risk and vulnerability factors.
- **Align with Global Frameworks on Ageing**
  - Deepen cooperation with the **United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030)** by supporting its priorities in EU-funded external actions.
  - Ensure that older people are **explicitly included in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, particularly in areas such as poverty reduction, health, inequality, and gender equality.





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## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES **8** and **9**

# Awareness, Coordination and Measuring Progress

### Flagship Initiative 8

The Commission will launch an **EU anti-ageism awareness campaign** to promote the value and rights of people of all ages and to dispel myths and stereotypes about different age groups.

### Flagship Initiative 9

The Commission will **establish an inter-institutional EU Anti-Ageism Task Force**, or appoint a dedicated coordinator within DG JUSTICE, to strengthen leadership, ensure systematic coordination, develop capacity and facilitate knowledge-sharing on combating ageism. This body will work to identify effective policies, address existing gaps, and promote the integration of age equality across EU initiatives.

Ageism is often invisible and socially accepted, rooted in stereotypes and prejudices that must be challenged. A dedicated EU-wide strategy will raise awareness of ageism, its impact, and the measures needed to prevent and address it. It will also ensure coordinated and coherent policy implementation, along with regular monitoring through data-driven progress tracking.

The Action Plan should prioritize the following EU-level actions:

- **Launch an EU-wide awareness campaign** to highlight the value and rights of people of all ages and combat myths and stereotypes about different age groups. This should build on the successful WHO campaign against ageism, using an intersectional approach.
- **Establish 29 April as the official EU Day on Solidarity Between Generations**, accompanied by an annual event with EU-wide media coverage to raise awareness of ageism and promote intergenerational fairness.<sup>13</sup>
- **Review the internal rules of the EU institutions on recruitment, staff training and staff retention** with an anti-ageism angle to eliminate age biases and improve access to jobs for workers of all ages. This initiative could include integrating ageism awareness into education and training for public officials.
- **Encourage and support Member States** to develop national action plans on ageism.
- **Ensure active cooperation with civil society organisations by helping to secure adequate financial support for non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations.** To that end, the Commission will aim to create a strong partnership culture with civil society organisations that represent and work with older people to promote intergenerational solidarity and fairness, through the Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV) programme. The Commission should encourage Member States to do the same.



A dedicated EU-wide strategy will raise **awareness of ageism**, its impact, and the measures needed to prevent and address it.

**13 /**

The day has been marked by EU Officials since the idea for it in 2013 in the aftermath of the EU Year on Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations and its Brno conference, but has not found its way on the official list of EU days.

## FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES 8 AND 9 | AWARENESS, COORDINATION AND MEASURING PROGRESS

- **Coordinate closely with the EU Equality Taskforce, the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), and Eurostat, to leverage expertise and develop ageism-specific indicators and data collection mechanisms.** This initiative could include revising survey methodologies used by Eurostat, FRA, and other EU bodies to ensure better data disaggregation by age and gender and eliminate age limits and other biases – particularly in areas such as income, employment, digitalisation, housing, care and gender-based violence.
- **Ensuring that questionnaires used to collect data** are inclusive of everyone, regardless of age or disability, and do not stop at a certain age.
- **Require regular EU-wide progress reports on ageism reduction, with benchmarks, targets, and checks on age discrimination policies.** Include ageism metrics in EU equality reporting frameworks, similar to indicators used for the gender pay gap, racial discrimination complaints, or disability employment rates.
- **Establish an inter-institutional EU Anti-Ageism Task Force or Coordinator or assign institutional leadership to DG JUSTICE** to promote coordination and knowledge-sharing, and to identify effective policies and existing gaps.
- **Conduct periodic EU comparative studies** to quantify the economic impact of ageism at the national level, focusing on key areas, including employment and health.
- **Incorporate an intergenerational perspective into EU programmes,** to remove structural barriers and encourage the social inclusion and participation of younger and older people:
  - **Mainstream age equality** across all EU funding guidelines and monitoring frameworks.
  - **Involve older people and civil society organisations** in the design and evaluation of programmes.
  - **Support intergenerational community and anti-ageism projects** through CERV, Erasmus+, ESF+ and other funding streams.

Establish an inter-institutional **EU Anti-Ageism Task Force** or Coordinator or assign institutional leadership to DG JUSTICE.

# Glossary

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- AI - Artificial Intelligence
- CERV - Citizenship, Equality, Rights and Values
- CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- EC - European Commission
- EIGE - European Institute for Gender Equality
- EIOPA - European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority
- EU - European Union
- FRA - Fundamental Rights Agency
- GDP - Gross Domestic Product
- HERA - EU Health Emergency, Preparedness and Response Agency
- LTC - Long-Term Care
- OSH - Occupational Safety and Health
- SDG - Sustainable Development Goals
- TFEU - Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
- UNCRPD - United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- WHO - World Health Organization

# Contact us

## YOU CAN HELP END AGEISM!

Please read our [one-pager](#) on communicating on older persons in a nonstereotypical way.

## ABOUT AGE PLATFORM EUROPE

**AGE Platform Europe** is the largest European network of non-profit organizations of and for older people. We elevate older people's voice, bringing their experience and aspirations to the table to celebrate ageing and fight for equality at all ages.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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