



The European Older People's Platform
La Plate-forme européenne des Personnes âgées

AGE General Assembly Declaration, 8 May 2009

Today's demographic reality, together with the current financial and economic crisis, could create tensions between the generations and is forcing us to fundamentally review the way in which our societies operate. European societies have changed rapidly over recent years, and even over months, and the ways in which we respond to these new demands have to be adapted accordingly. While they may vary in their approaches, the economic, fiscal and social systems of all EU Member States are based on solidarity between citizens of all generations. This solidarity is an integral part of our shared heritage and must remain at the heart of any reform. AGE believes that enhancing intergenerational solidarity and cooperation is key to reacting constructively to today's rapidly evolving social and demographic context and that the deteriorating economic situation and climate change adds further dimensions to this challenge. The negative perceptions of ageing should continue to be challenged in this economic downturn and the dignity of older people should be preserved and promoted in all policy reforms.

However, AGE also considers that solidarity between the young, middle and older generations must not be approached solely from a financial perspective. It must be viewed in a broader way, encompassing the promotion of mutual cooperation and exchange between the generations. It must encourage a better and shared understanding of the needs and expectations of all age groups and explore new forms of coexistence. Changes in the age structure of our populations will have a significant impact on the dynamic between the generations and intergenerational solidarity and cooperation will need to be re-invented and sustained by appropriate policies. A more inclusive approach to people of all ages therefore needs to be developed and actively promoted in all social and economic policy responses. More positive attitudes and expectations to older citizens' contributions need to be cultivated and ageist assumptions challenged and banned. People of all ages have a vital role to play in contributing to society and their experience, knowledge and vitality are needed to rebuild a strong Europe.

In response to the recently published [Communication](#)¹ and [Report on Ageing 2009](#)², AGE General Assembly in 2009 calls on Member States and the EU institutions to:

1

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/656&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

- **Pensions reforms**

Opt for strong mandatory state regulated pensions systems (the so-called 1st pillar): The present financial crisis shows that strong mandatory state regulated pensions systems that keep up with the general growth and well being are the best option to ensure an adequate replacement rate. Member States should explore alternative sources of funding to ensure their long term financial sustainability in today's challenging demographic context and a fairer distribution of wealth between young and older people and between rich and poor of all ages.

Put in place an efficient European supervision and regulatory system for financial markets and institutions to provide adequate protection of supplementary pensions systems and individual savings: The present crisis has taught us that financial institutions need regulation and measures to protect citizens' savings and pensions and to ensure that they achieve their social aims. Member States alone cannot achieve that and they should agree to set up a European supervisory and regulatory system to restore sound governance in the financial markets and regain citizens' confidence.

Organise an active civil dialogue on pension reform: More than ever it will be necessary to reform the pensions systems but this should be done in full consultation with the relevant citizens. A strong civil dialogue involving young and older people's organisations should be organised at national level and European level on pension reforms. At European level this should be organised in the framework of the European Pension Forum whose mandate should be extended to cover all pensions pillars and the articulation between them.

Ensure an adequate old age pension to all including those with career breaks: When developing pension reforms, governments should pay specific attention to their potential aggravated impact on vulnerable groups such as women, long term unemployed, migrants with limited careers in the EU. They should include better compensation for informal carers who have left their jobs, taken career breaks or moved to part-time work to care for a dependent relative and for workers in low paid jobs, including migrants.

- **Employment**

Adapt labour market provisions to older workers' needs and the difficulties they face in today's crisis context: The measures to increase the employment rate of older workers that were beginning to deliver results before the crisis are no longer effective. People aged 45+ are more vulnerable than ever on the labour market. Member States should develop innovative solutions including access to continuing education and training to help older workers remain active or "employable" so as to be able to re-enter the labour market quickly when this recession ends.

² http://ec.europa.eu/news/economy/090429_1_en.htm

Propose legislation to provide for carer's leave: New approaches to elder care to support informal carers faced with caring duties are needed to improve gender equality. Public investment in care services for the dependent elderly should be seen as an investment in support of employment (as are childcare provisions) and not merely as a cost to the public budget. Parental leave provisions should be extended to enable all informal carers responsible for dependent relatives to enjoy an adequate protection of their social rights including pension rights.

Put a ban on mandatory retirement ages: Member States should review the mandatory retirement ages (not the age at which one becomes eligible for a pension) and eradicate those which are not genuinely justified to enable individuals to choose freely to continue to work, to phase their retirement, to work part-time or to stop working when they have reached pensionable age.

- **Social Inclusion**

Provide a better assessment of the impact of the crisis on older people and agree specific objectives for poverty reduction per target group: The Social Protection Committee should develop more accurate instruments to assess the short and long term impact of the crisis on all population groups including those who are most vulnerable to social exclusion: people with low income, older women, migrants.

Ensure a decent income for all in old age: Poverty is a reason for social exclusion for all age groups. Use the opportunity of the European Year against poverty and social exclusion 2010 to propose an adequate minimum income at least equal to the poverty threshold to ensure a dignified life for all in old age. Measures in support of older people living in poverty should be implemented in such a way as to respect their dignity and avoid stigmatisation.

Ensure that everyone has access to decent housing: Promote housing construction and renovation to restart the national economy. Invest in social housing that is adapted to the needs of our ageing population and ensure that housing conditions are adequate for living longer at home.

Promote use of public transport among older people: Free or subsidised accessible public transport is a key element to promote older people's inclusion, mobility and participation in the community life. As part of its sustainable development strategy, the EU should encourage Member States to offer special rates or free transport to young people and the retired. The EU structural funds should help Member States implement such mobility plans.

Protect senior and youth fees in new EU non discrimination legislation: Ensure that the proposed directive on equal access to goods and services includes adequate provisions to protect differences of treatment on the ground of age aimed at encouraging younger and older people's participation and social inclusion.

- **Health and long-term care**

Limit the out-of-pocket health and social care expenditures based on the individual's financial resources: ensure that older people's out-of-pocket expenses will not run out of control and that all of them, including those with chronic diseases, will continue to have access to the care they need at an affordable price.

Ensure a more rational use of health and social care resources: In times of limited financial resources, it is important to prioritise health promotion and disease prevention and to promote healthy lifestyles and individual responsibility backed by public policies. AGE calls for a more rational and efficient use of health and long term care resources that is fairer to all generations, fighting over-consumption of medications and developing new ways to provide care using new technologies to improve quality while reducing costs.

Support the introduction of mandatory quality standards for care applying to social services and institutional care and implement adequate measures to fight elder abuse, including in informal care settings.

Raise the social status and qualifications of carers in long term care services in order to increase the caring and nursing workforce and attract more younger people to the caring sector.

Provide adequate support to informal carers including those who have passed retirement age: Develop innovative approaches in support of carers such as carers' leave, respite care services, training and supervision of informal carers, use of ICT.

Address health inequalities faced by older women and men and other vulnerable groups: Based on the results of the European Commission's consultation on health inequalities, develop new strategies to address the health inequalities faced by older people, including in the field of mental health. This includes not allowing insurance companies to discriminate on the ground of gender and/or age in complementary health insurance fees as the present draft directive on equal treatment in access to goods and services would allow.

- **Active civic participation**

Establish and strengthen structures for civil dialogue at local and national level: Member States and the European Parliament should commit to establishing a strong civil dialogue with citizens' organisations using the framework of the Open Method of Coordination. They should express a strong political will to have a constructive debate with citizens.

Raise awareness of the important role that older people play in European societies and adopt policies to support them. The European Commission should propose to have 2012 declared as the European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, and the Council and European Parliament should support this proposal and vote for an adequate budget. Promote

involvement of older people in European lifelong learning and citizens' programmes.

Build the bridge between older citizens and the EU institutions: Adopt the necessary measures to restore citizens' confidence in the EU project. The newly elected European Parliament should support the re-establishment of the Intergroup on Ageing.

Encourage volunteering in times of crisis: Support initiatives which promote a greater involvement of seniors in volunteer activities and a mix of age groups, including a fair refund of the costs incurred by volunteers. Support older volunteering in the framework of the European Year 2011 on Volunteering.

- **Older People in emergency situations**

Adopt and promote the WHO action plan on older people in emergency situations: Build cross-border cooperation to ensure synergies and coordinate an adequate response to emergency situations to provide a better response in case of natural disaster or terrorist attacks, taking on board the short and long term needs of vulnerable groups such as children and older people and making better use of the human capital and skills of older people by involving local NGOs.

Conclusion

The financial and economic crisis is making challenges created by demographic ageing more acute. The development of targeted and well coordinated policy responses which capitalise on the strong potential and contribution that older people have to offer is essential. Enhancing the cooperation between them and facilitating a fruitful and constructive co-existence in which the strengths and capacities of people of all ages can be shared for mutual benefit is central to this.

Reforming social policies where deficiencies have been clearly identified by the crisis must be a top priority for the EU institutions and national, regional and local governments.

AGE General Assembly agrees with these policy recommendations and mandates the Council to do its utmost to ensure that the European institutions and national governments respond to our call. The Council will report back to the General Assembly at their next annual meeting.

AGE - the European Older People's Platform is a large network of organisations of a people aged 50+ which aims to promote the interests of the 150 million senior citizens European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most.
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