

Online Policy Roundtable Report

The missing piece in striving for equality in Europe: the case of age discrimination

6th February 2025

On 6 February 2025, AGE Platform Europe, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), and Equinet – the European Network of Equality Bodies – co-hosted a joint webinar exploring the urgent need to strengthen the protection of the human rights of older persons and to address age-based discrimination in Europe. The discussion brought together civil society organisations (CSOs), equality bodies, national human rights institutions, and European and international policymakers. The webinar aimed to assess existing gaps in the EU legal and policy framework and to map a more inclusive way forward for the benefit of people of all ages.

Acknowledging Longevity, Addressing Inequality

Participants highlighted how Europe’s increasing longevity must be embraced as a shared opportunity across generations. Yet, despite the demographic shift, age discrimination remains one of the most widely accepted and least challenged forms of discrimination in Europe—both in law and society. Older persons continue to face systemic barriers including poverty, social exclusion, inaccessible environments, the digital divide, and insufficient opportunities for participation. The climate crisis and digitalisation pose additional emerging challenges that require urgent and targeted policy responses.

Further reading:

- Joint AGE-OHCHR-WHO-YFJ paper on [Advancing Age Equality and Fighting Ageism for People of All Ages](#)
- Equinet discussion paper: [Fighting discrimination on the ground of age](#)

Equality Cannot Be Secondary to Economic Goals

Speakers warned that while economic competitiveness is a legitimate goal, it should not compromise EU’s commitment to equality. Current EU and national policies often undervalue or even suppress the rich contributions older persons can and do make in all areas of life, instead of

enabling them to be agents of change and growth. The EU must consistently promote age equality, be it in existing laws and policies (such as the Passengers' or victims' rights, equality strategies, the [Action Plan on European Pillar on Social Rights](#), etc.) and upcoming initiatives, like the EU strategy on intergenerational fairness.

Further reading:

- [ENNHRI Website](#) on rights of older persons
- Equinet's website on age equality
- What is a [rights-based approach to ageing](#)

Gaps in Legal Protection: A Need for Broader and Stronger Safeguards

A key theme was the gap between current EU legal frameworks and the realities of Europe's ageing population. Participants pointed out that the [Employment Equality Directive](#), while a landmark measure, allows broad exceptions to the prohibition of age discrimination, which in practice reinforces systemic ageism. Moreover, legal protection remains largely limited to the field of employment, despite widespread age discrimination across other areas—including financial services, healthcare, housing, and access to digital technologies. The long-standing failure to adopt the Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive, first proposed in 2008, was cited as a major barrier to progress. Participants also stressed the need to expand EU legislation to explicitly address hate speech and hate crimes targeting older persons, as these forms of age-based violence and hostility remain insufficiently recognised under current law.

Further reading:

- [Age discrimination law outside the employment field](#)
- Joint [statement](#) on the withdrawal of the draft horizontal equal treatment directive
- [Equinet synthesis report on the future of equality in Europe](#)

The need for an EU Equality Strategy on Age

There was broad consensus on the need for a strategic shift in the EU's approach, calling for a dedicated Age Equality Strategy. This should move away from viewing older people as care recipients or burdens, and instead recognize them as rights-holders entitled to equality, autonomy, dignity, participation, and contribution. The strategy would address current gaps in the EU's equality framework, promote a human rights-based approach, and support better enforcement of anti-discrimination laws. It would also improve data collection -disaggregated by age and other characteristics - informing evidence-based policymaking and guiding inclusive

policies on the ground. An EU Age Equality Strategy must complement existing strategies and be developed with active stakeholder participation and strong monitoring mechanisms.

Further reading:

- AGE Platform Europe [proposal for an Age Equality Strategy](#) and 2-page [summary](#)

Intersectionality and Inclusion

The importance of an intersectional perspective was a recurring theme in the webinar. Specific challenges faced by older women, older persons with disabilities and older LGBTI+ were raised. An overarching action plan on intersectionality at the EU and national level that would work in tandem with ground-specific initiatives could boost robust implementation, monitoring, and coordination between existing and future strategies.

Further reading:

- The [LGBTIQ equality strategy 2020-2025](#)
- The [gender equality strategy 2020-2025](#)
- The [strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030](#)
- The [EU anti-racism action plan 2020-2025](#)
- The [EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion, and participation 2020-2030](#)

Data and Evidence Gaps

Effective policymaking requires a solid evidence base. Participants highlighted the persistent lack of reliable and disaggregated data on age-related discrimination, which severely limits the ability to design inclusive and targeted policies. There was a clear call for improved data collection practices that capture all age groups and account for multiple, intersecting grounds of discrimination. Without such data, the structural and overlapping barriers faced by older persons - especially those from marginalised or underserved groups - remain invisible in policy frameworks.

Further reading:

- [Global report on ageism](#)
- UN Independent Expert report on the [data gap conundrum](#)
- ENNHRI's [Handbook on Monitoring the Human Rights of Older Persons and Long-term Care](#)

Global Momentum and the Role of International Frameworks

Participants welcomed the Council of Europe's recent report and resolution on overcoming age-based discrimination and encouraged greater EU engagement with global processes, particularly renewed support for a United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

Further reading:

- UN Human Rights Council [resolution](#) establishing a working group to start drafting a new UN convention
- Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Report, Resolution and Recommendations on [Overcoming age-based discrimination against older persons](#) (2025)
- Council of Europe [Recommendation \(2014\)02 on the promotion of human rights of older persons](#).
- [ENNHRI guidance paper](#) on current engagement opportunities for European NHRIs to work towards a new UN Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons

Strengthening National Human Rights Institutions and Equality Bodies and Safeguarding Civic Space

National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and Equality Bodies play a vital role in promoting a rights-based approach to ageing and tackling age discrimination. With new EU standards in place, all Member States and candidate countries are now required to ensure that equality bodies cover age discrimination (in the area of employment), as well as that guarantees of independence are in place and that they are equipped with sufficient resources to effectively carry out their mandate. Participants raised concerns about budget cuts for NHRIs, Equality Bodies and lack of funding for CSOs. Safeguarding Equality Bodies, NHRIs, civil society, and other human rights defenders remain a key priority amid shrinking civic space.

Further reading:

- [Equinet's legal digest on standards for equality bodies](#)
- ENNHRI's [proposal](#) for an EU Recommendation on NHRIs
- ENNHRI's [rule of law report](#) on civic space and enabling environment for NHRIs and civil society organisations
- [Summary](#) Equinet-AGE seminar on fighting ageism
- Swedish Institute for Human Rights: [Summary](#) of Study on human rights of older persons in long-term care

- Commissioner for Human Rights of Poland, Letter of intervention: [access to free time activities for older persons offered at local level should be free from a community interview](#).
- Commissioner for Human Rights of Poland, Letter of intervention: [rights of older persons – counteracting ageism](#).
- Finnish Human Rights Centre [Preliminary Study](#) on Ageism and Age Discrimination

The Path Forward: Cooperation and Concrete Action

Stronger collaboration among all stakeholders - civil society organisations, Equality Bodies, NHRIs, EU institutions and other regional and international actors- is essential to dismantle systemic ageism, promote intergenerational solidarity and fairness and to ensure older persons can enjoy full equality. Such progress is only possible through coherent legal frameworks and sustainable political and financial support.

Further reading

- Short [guide to avoid stereotypical communication](#) when talking about ageing and older people
- FUTURES [Citizens' Workshop](#) on Ageism (2024)

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