

Striving for solidarity between all generations in Europe

**Demands placed on the European
legislator, 2024 to 2029**

Introduction

As the voice of Germany's older generations, BAGSO, the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations, is committed to supporting a vibrant democracy, and to cohesion and peace in Europe and the wider world. It, therefore, sees bringing the concerns of older people to the attention of candidates for the European Parliament as one of its key tasks.

BAGSO welcomes initiatives by the European Union (EU) which aimed at enabling people in all Member States to live well in old age. For example, during the German EU Council Presidency in 2020, conclusions were adopted that concern the human rights of older people in times of digitalisation, and during the Portuguese EU Council Presidency in 2021, conclusions were adopted that call for

ageing to be taken into account in all policy areas (mainstreaming ageing).

In 2021, the European Commission published the "Green Paper on Ageing". As a result, the European Strategy for Care and Support was adopted in 2022. Another important source of impetus was an opinion issued by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in July 2023. It recommended that the European Commission develop a European strategy for older people with the aim of making them visible as active agents, and giving centre stage to the importance of a self-determined life. The EESC called for this strategy to be presented during the current legislative period, in order to create a foundation for concrete, future EU policy measures.

We all know that Europe's population structure is undergoing significant change: the group of older citizens is growing, while the proportion of younger people is decreasing. Parliamentarians are, therefore, called upon to initiate EU Directives that promote solidarity between the generations, and put an

end to discrimination against older people. For example, as part of the fight against poverty and social inequality, the European Parliament should also address the social participation of older people and intergenerational coexistence.

Efforts are also being made at international level to strengthen human rights in old age, and improve the lives of older people, their families and communities. The Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) as proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) should be mentioned here. The UN Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing of 2002 should also continue to be used as an important political instrument here.

Together with hundreds of non-governmental organisations, BAGSO has been calling for years for a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons to protect the rights of older people worldwide. The EU plays an important role in international efforts to strengthen the human rights of older people and ensure their equal participation in society. We, therefore, expect the EU to fulfil its responsibility within the international community, and actively support the plan for a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons at the United Nations.

Demands

As a non-partisan umbrella organisation of about 125 federal associations, BAGSO is

calling on the future members of the European Parliament to strengthen the social participation of older people and the coexistence of the generations in the coming legislative period. Specifically, we are calling for the following mutually dependent goals to be firmly anchored in the agenda:


- End age discrimination as well as multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination,
- Create age-friendly environments,
- Combat social inequality and poverty.

The European Parliament can render an important contribution to a democratic society rooted in a spirit of solidarity in which everyone – young and old – can grow old well. The prerequisite is that members of the European Parliament take account of ageing as a lifelong process in all relevant policy areas, develop an overall political concept for older people, stand up resolutely for the human rights of older people, and thus strengthen civil society as a whole.

What does this mean for EU policy-making?

End age discrimination

Age discrimination is widespread: according to the 2019 Eurobarometer, age discrimination – along with gender discrimination – is one of the most common forms of discrimination in the EU¹. This applies, for example, to insurance transactions, lending or access

 1 AGE Platform Europe: New EU Report shows lack of protection from age discrimination beyond employment. www.age-platform.eu (accessed on 14/12/2023).

to medical care. The increasing digitalisation of services and the lack of analogue alternatives also mean that older people are only able to exercise their right to social participation to a limited extent, if at all. A significant number of older people suffer multiple forms of discrimination: because of their age, their gender, their ethnicity, a disability, their sexual orientation or gender identity.

The EU possesses an important range of competence in this area. It has been endeavouring for many years to adopt a Directive for all grounds of discrimination, the so-called Horizontal Equal Treatment/Anti-Discrimination Directive, in order to prevent discrimination. However, this proposal is being blocked in the EU Council, among others, by Germany.

We are calling on the European Parliament to lend greater emphasis to this endeavour, and also to work at national level to ensure that Germany lifts its blockade. We are also calling for age limits to be critically scrutinised in all European Commission proposals and, if not objectively justified, to be removed. EU Member States must prohibit age as a ground for discrimination in their constitutions.

Creating age-friendly environments

The immediate living environment plays a central role in ensuring a good quality of life in old age, and the solidarity between different generations. Quality of life in old

age depends to a large extent on whether it is possible to grow old in familiar surroundings.

In view of rising life expectancy and the associated increase of the population of older people, the living environment must be designed in such a way that it is age-friendly, and guarantees the fundamental human right to participation and health. This presupposes that the diversity of life situations and lifestyles in old age is taken into account. An age-friendly environment that responds to the needs of an ageing society does not represent special treatment for older people, but rather brings benefits for all generations.

The global age-friendly cities and communities movement launched by the World Health Organisation (WHO) offers some key pointers on how age-friendly environments can be created. They relate to the important topics of mobility, design of the spatial environment and accessibility. In addition, municipal services, the social environment and offers for social participation must be organised in such a way that all people can participate and have a say.

BAGSO is calling on the European Parliament to pay greater attention to the needs of older people and demographic change when implementing and monitoring existing instruments. This applies, for example, to the European Accessibility Act, the Directive on the accessibility of websites and the

legislation on accessibility in transport. It should be stipulated that accessibility should also be taken into account in the production of household appliances. And, last but not least, accessibility means that fundamental goods and services must also be accessible in analogue form.

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) provides an important legal framework for strengthening participation and inclusion. Almost half of all people with disabilities in the EU are already over 65², and their proportion will continue to rise.

We are calling on the European Parliament to insist on the comprehensive implementation of the UN Convention in the Member States. This also includes the promotion of EU-wide initiatives and strategies that are in line with the UN CRPD.


Combating social inequality and poverty

The EU's range of competence include fighting against social exclusion, creating gender equality, improving the working environment and conditions, as well as social security and the social protection of employees. In BAGSO's view, the diversity of life situations and lifestyles must be taken into account. All people must be treated with equal respect, and their inclusion and participation must be promoted.

In the opinion of BAGSO, it is essential to take greater account of the life course, in order to combat social inequality and poverty. This perspective must play a central role in the drafting of EU regulations and in the application of the European Social Fund Plus. Disadvantages suffered by children and young people in education, for example, harbour consequences in adulthood and pose a risk of poverty in old age. The earlier that measures are taken to combat social inequality, the lower the risk of health impairments and social disadvantages in old age.

Older people must be able to exercise their rights, such as the right to education, social security or work.

We call on the European Parliament to promote comprehensive educational programmes that take into account the diverse life situations and interests of older people. The European Social Fund Plus should also finance programmes for exercising the rights of older people. The European Parliament must prioritise loneliness as a social and health policy issue.

 2 European Council (2023): Infographic – Disability in the EU: facts and figures. www.consilium.europa.eu (accessed on 14/12/2023).



Growing older together – For greater solidarity and democracy

In the face of significant global changes – such as climate change and digitalisation, the policies of future Members of the European Parliament should help to ensure that the EU and its Member States are ready for tomorrow's world. This includes creating a society that enables generations to live together in solidarity.

As a diverse society based on solidarity is of immeasurable value, BAGSO is committed to respectful co-operation between the generations. It also has a keen sense of responsibility for ensuring that future generations will find a world with good living conditions. What all people have in common is that they are getting older. And the earlier in life that measures are taken to improve living conditions, the greater the chances of a good and dignified life in old age. The European Parliament can contribute to this by considering ageing as a lifelong process in all relevant policy areas. The conclusions on mainstreaming ageing provide a good basis for this.

A European strategy for older people, as called for by the EESC, can render an important contribution to achieving the

three objectives set out by BAGSO. Such an EU strategy can make it clear that everyone benefits from enhanced protection of the human rights of older people: today's older people, those who support and care for older people, and tomorrow's older persons. In addition, the European Commission's work on ageing should be more closely coordinated as part of the strategy and treated as a gender equality policy issue.

The EU should also do much more to promote the human rights of older people worldwide, and ensure that everyone can age well while respecting their human rights. In order to achieve this, the Members of the European Parliament must also take a firm stand in favour of a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons at national level.

Finally, as the voice of older people, we call for the participation of civil society in all its diversity to be strengthened. A democratic society thrives on all people having the same opportunities to participate and make decisions. The European Parliament must ensure that civil society can participate in EU legislative projects and initiatives and provide it with the necessary resources. This is the only way we can grow older together and in solidarity.

This statement was adopted by the BAGSO board in December 2023.

BAGSO – The voice of older people

BAGSO, the German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations, represents the interests of older generations in Germany. It stands up for active, healthy and selfdetermined ageing in social security. BAGSO is an umbrella organisation of about 125 civil society organisations that are run by or work for older people.

In a colourful and diverse society, BAGSO promotes a differentiated image of old age. This includes both the various opportunities arising from longer lives as well as times of vulnerability and the need for care. BAGSO calls on politicians, society and businesses to offer conditions that allow for a good and dignified life in older age – in Germany, Europe and worldwide.

In position papers and statements, BAGSO provides impetus and recommendations for political action at federal, state and local level. BAGSO publishes a large number of publications on various topics, which can be ordered free of charge or downloaded from its website.

At the United Nations, BAGSO is actively involved in the advocacy for a UN Convention on the rights of older persons. BAGSO is also a member of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Older People (GAROP), an international alliance of around 400 civil society organisations that advocates for the rights of older people.

BAGSO's Secretariat for International Policy on Ageing provides information on current international developments in ageing policy and contributes the interests of civil society to international processes.

At EU level, BAGSO works closely with AGE Platform Europe, an European network of organisations working for the interests and rights of older people from around 30 European countries, and supports the AGE manifesto "The Europe we want is for all ages" for the European elections.

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