



Age Action Ireland Submission to the Open Ended Working Group on Ageing 14: Normative Input on Social Inclusion

Age Action is Ireland's leading advocacy organisation promoting equality for us all as we age.



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Age Action is part-funded by the Scheme to Support National Organisations 2022-2025, which is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Department of Rural and Community Development

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Supports and Barriers for the Social Inclusion of Older Persons

Ageism

When services and spaces are constructed in ageist ways, they exclude older persons, and when society holds ageist views it deters older persons from participating, and makes people less interested in socializing or collaborating with older persons as equals. Older persons can themselves internalize ageist views that lead them to self-isolate or deem certain kinds of social engagements as inappropriate.

Polling commissioned by Age Action in 2022 found that 1.5 million people in Ireland hold ageist opinions. 37% of adults agreed with two or more ageist statements, 67% agreed with at least one ageist opinion, and 16% agreed with three or more ageist opinions. Those aged 75+ were the third most ageist age cohort, demonstrating the significance of the problem of self-directed ageism

People aged 18-34 were more than two and a half times as likely to agree with three or more ageist opinions. 47% of men agreed with two or more ageist opinions, compared to 28% of women. Men (22%) were more than twice as likely to agree with three or more ageist opinions, compared to women (10%).

Those working in healthcare or agriculture generally demonstrated below average levels of ageism, and these are sectors in which the workers would often spend time with older persons, demonstrating the importance of intergenerational interactions as a means of overcoming ageism.

Ageing in Place

Most older persons want to remain in the homes and communities where they built their lives, yet many are pressured or forced to leave their social or familial network. This can result from inadequate home care provision leading to people being prematurely institutionalized, or societal and cultural pressure for older persons to “right size” and give up their family homes to younger people. Older persons disproportionately occupy poor housing stock, and Age Action estimates that at least 20% of older persons cannot afford maintenance and repairs in their home, and a further 10% cannot afford adaptations.

Digital Exclusion

More than 6 in 10 older persons aged 60 or older either do not use the internet or have below basic digital skills. This puts them at risk of digital exclusion, a form of social exclusion that limits autonomy, prevents older persons from learning about and accessing important services, and creates risks of abuse and mistreatment. Digital exclusion will occur whenever digital services are developed at the expense of high quality, accessible, adequate offline services, for example when a bus or train company introduces disincentives for not booking online in advance.

Choice and Control

Too often older persons do not have choice and control over how they live their lives. Factors discussed above like inadequate supports to remain in place and digital exclusion

limit the opportunities older persons have in their lives, as well as their ability to achieve their desired outcomes. While the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act is now in force, ageist attitudes and engrained practices still lead to others making decisions for older persons. This can happen where a doctor directs medical information to a family member instead of the older person themselves, or where older persons are misled, such as in a case where a man was told he would only be entering a nursing home temporarily when in fact the family members and the social workers knew he would be living there for the rest of his life.

The many older persons in rural areas with unmet transport needs have their choices in how they spend their time and what services they can access unfairly limited, also leading to social exclusion.

Gendered Dimensions of Social Exclusion

Older women are at heightened risk of social exclusion, for many reasons. As a result of living longer, being less likely than men to marry someone younger than them, and being less likely than men to re-marry after divorce or bereavement, women are more likely than men to be living alone, putting them at heightened risk of income inadequacy and unmet housing and transport needs. Older women are more likely to have a disability and to live in residential settings like nursing homes. They are more likely to experience neglect, abuse, or mistreatment. They have lower levels of formal education, are less likely to remain in work past the pension age, less likely to own a car or have a driving license, and have weaker digital skills. Ireland has a gender pension gap of 35%, and research shows that older persons on low incomes often significantly cut down on socialising.