

## 14th session of OEWGA - Participation in public life and decision-making processes

### National and local legal and policy framework

#### What steps have been taken to ensure participation in public life and in decision-making processes without discrimination?

The EU recognises and respects the rights of older people to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life. The **EU Charter of Fundamental Rights** provides for the protection of older persons against any form of discrimination and ageism. To support the recognition of the rights of older people, several initiatives have been adopted to establish a rights-based approach towards ageing by promoting their fundamental rights, including the right of equal treatment, regardless of age.

The European Commission adopted a strategy to foster awareness and ensure the effective implementation of the Charter. Every year, **the Commission adopts thematic reports on the application of the Charter**. In this context, the Commission dedicated the 2021 Charter report to “Protecting Fundamental Rights in the Digital Age”. The report discussed, amongst other topics, the way to address the digital divide and enable active participation in society.

The European Commission has been supporting exchanges of good electoral practices among EU Member States in the framework of the **European Cooperation Network on Elections**<sup>1</sup> that help different groups of citizens participate in elections, including older persons. In 2023, the European Commission adopted **measures**<sup>2</sup> to strengthen EU citizenship rights across the Union. These included a guide of good electoral practices for citizens with disabilities, and a compendium of e-voting and other ICT practices. The benefits of these practices are not limited to certain groups, as they may extend to the access to elections of all groups, including older persons.

A **Defence of Democracy package**<sup>3</sup> was published in December 2023 and includes a **Recommendation on inclusive and resilient elections**, which incorporates various measures promoting participation of different groups in elections, including older persons. Member States are also encouraged to note that different groups, including older persons, may face obstacles when accessing internet and digital technologies or may lack skills to effectively use them. A **Recommendation on civic participation** invites Member States to prevent and remove obstacles to participation of underrepresented groups, by taking into account specific needs, including of persons with disabilities, children, youth, older persons, citizens with migrant background and mobile Union citizens. Councils for older persons and persons with disabilities are promoted as good examples to embed citizens’ views in public policymaking. The Conference on the Future of Europe, and its subsequent European Citizens Panels, include the active participation of citizens of all ages, including older persons, as part of its regular deliberations. This highlights the importance the European Commission attaches to intergenerational dialogue and solidarity.

Older persons are included as beneficiaries of all projects dedicated to increased participation in public life and decision-making processes. Within the **Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values (CERV)** Framework, partners receiving operating grants, such as the organisation “Age Platform Europe”, support equal participation and autonomy and raising the voice of older persons. Furthermore, older persons are also the specific focus of several CERV-funded projects. For instance, a project awarded under the CIV 2022 call<sup>4</sup> aims to promote the participation of senior citizens in the civic and democratic life of the EU through the organisation of a series of local events in several Member States. Under the Networks of Towns 2024 call, other projects seek to increase the

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<sup>1</sup> See more [here](#).

<sup>2</sup> See more [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> See more [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> A call for proposals under the Citizens’ engagement strand of the CERV programme.

awareness, knowledge, and interest of the European citizens and decision-makers regarding ageism and the position of the older population and to involve older citizens in local decision making, including by focusing on intergenerational dialogue.

The European Commission provides **technical support** to the Member States in the area of participation in public life and decision-making processes, among others, through capacity-building focusing on improving civil participation and the empowerment of women in political decision-making and by helping them deliver more user-centric administrative services<sup>5</sup>.

The **EU Strategic Framework for Roma equality, inclusion, and participation 2020-2030** introduces a three-pillar approach of: equality with all other members of society, social and economic inclusion, and participation in political, social, economic and cultural life. It calls on Member States to promote diversity in their national Roma strategic frameworks by empowering different groups, including elderly Roma, to overcome socio-economic gaps, fully exercise their rights, realise their potential and be active agents of change.

The **Council Recommendation on access to affordable high-quality long-term care**<sup>6</sup> invites Member States to continuously align the offer of long-term care services to needs, support freedom of choice and participation in decision-making of people in need of care.

### **Data and research**

**What data and research are available regarding older persons' participation in public life and in decision-making processes? Please indicate how national or sub-national data is disaggregated by sex, age and inequality dimensions, and what indicators are used to monitor older persons' participation in public life and in decision-making processes.**

EUROSTAT provides equality statistics, including by age group, in specific domains. A dedicated section on equality data is under revision and will cover different areas of life including demography, participation in society and experience of discrimination. Depending on the statistical indicator, EUROSTAT statistics are disaggregated by age together with a combination of dimensions, such as sex, disability status and foreign background. This allows to analyse intersectionality and multiple forms of discrimination. EUROSTAT's data provide information on social and civil participation (also online), perceived experience of discrimination (also online) and e-government activities. To continue improving the harmonisation and coverage of equality statistics for the six grounds of discrimination protected by the EU Treaties, EUROSTAT has set up a **Task Force on Equality and Non-discrimination**.

The **EU anti-racism action plan** highlights that data collection on democratic participation of minorities is key. The Subgroup of the **High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity on Equality Data**<sup>7</sup> published the **Guidance note on the collection and use of equality data based on racial or ethnic origin** to capture in a harmonised way both subjective experiences of discrimination and victimisation and structural aspects of racism and racial discrimination. It also published the **Guidance note on the collection and use of data for LGBTIQ equality** for the same purpose in the areas of sexual orientation, sex and gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

### **Equality and non-discrimination**

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<sup>5</sup> Regulation 2021/240 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 of 10 February 2021 establishing a Technical Support Instrument.

<sup>6</sup> Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care 2022/C 476/01.

<sup>7</sup> See more information below and [here](#).

**What are the challenges and barriers that older persons face regarding participation in public life and in decision-making processes, including the impact of intersectional discrimination and inequality based on age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, migratory status and other grounds?**

Ageism concerns all phases and spheres, including political participation and participation in decision-making. It can limit opportunities to participate in social and community activities, which can lead to social exclusion as well as to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. This can negatively impact people's overall quality of life, with potential negative consequences on physical and mental health, accompanied with the risk of economic and financial exclusion.

Particular attention should be paid to **multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination** and ageism and the challenges faced in that respect by economically disadvantaged groups, women, people from ethnic/racial or religious minorities, migrants, LGBTIQ persons, persons with disabilities and people in rural and remote areas.

The European Commission under the leadership of President Ursula Von der Leyen, has made achieving a **Union of Equality** a political priority. This means creating the conditions for everyone to live, thrive and lead regardless of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, sexual orientation or age. To achieve this goal, EU tools and strategies on equality take account of multiple and intersecting dimensions of discrimination, including those relating to age. This applies to 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)**, the **LGBTIQ Equality Strategy (2020-2025)** and the **Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2021-2030)**.

The European Commission is working closely with the Member States in the **High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity** to promote exchanges of practices on age equality and combating ageism, including the preparation of an output paper on age, announced in the "Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action".

### **Accountability**

**What judicial and non-judicial mechanisms are in place for older persons to complain and seek redress when their right to participate in public life and in decision-making processes is violated?**

The European Commission, within the limits of its competence, monitors that fundamental rights as provided under the Charter are effectively implemented by Member States, through the continuous dialogue and enforcement action at the Court of Justice of the EU. To facilitate this work and to further strengthen its application both in the Member States and at the EU level, the European Commission adopted a **Charter Strategy**<sup>8</sup> to foster awareness and effective use of the Charter and in line with which, every year in December, thematic reports on the application of the Charter are adopted. The 2021 report was dedicated to "**Protecting Fundamental Rights in the Digital Age**" and discussed amongst other topics, how to address the digital divide and overcome the challenges of being digitally disconnected to enable active participation in society, in view of the increasing number of essential activities are moving to the online sphere.

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<sup>8</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Strategy to strengthen the application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the EU, 2 December 2020, COM/2020/711.

The European Commission supports exchanges of good electoral practices among Member States in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, including on mechanisms of election dispute resolution available to citizens participating in elections, also for older persons<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> For example, see the guide of good electoral practices of the Citizenship package and the Defence of Democracy package mentioned above.