



ESO (European Senior Organisation) – PES-seniors

Rue Guimard, 10 1040 Brussels

eso@socialistseniors.eu

On Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanSeniorOrganisation/>

On Web : <https://socialistseniors.eu/>

ESO - Contribution to the Commission's public consultation on the new action plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights

As umbrella organization of socialist and social-democratic senior organizations in Europe, ESO–PES seniors bring together representatives from Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Malta, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Switzerland.

ESO aims to improve the position of senior citizens in Europe, their access to fundamental rights, and their participation in political decision-making processes. Therefore, we need a fundamental shift in the narrative about older persons and a rights-based approach to ageing. **This narrative sees “older persons” as full contributors to society from the perspectives of “active-citizenship, self-determination, emancipation and equality,” where solidarity is an indispensable component.** That is why ESO attaches great importance to solidarity among all generations.

We care about the well-being of each individual regardless of age. **The needs and rights of older persons must be on the European agenda:** building towards an age friendly society, a decent income for seniors, addressing the problem of housing and adapted housing, accessible and face to face services in the era of digitalization, sustainable and good quality care and healthcare, ageism, discrimination, and disrespect of human rights of older people.

To this end, ESO represents the interests of senior citizens and their organizations in the European governing bodies. ESO contributes to the public debate on ageing, inter-generational solidarity, consumer protection, social security and economic protection (pensions and adequate income), housing, health-care, care, and long-term care, communicating its position in the most effective way possible. For example, ESO contributes regularly in the consultation initiatives of the European Commission, and participates actively in AGE-Europe Platform.

General remarks and proposals concerning the new Action-Plan.

ESO welcomes the initiative of the European Commission to work out a new action plan to implement the European-Pillar of Social Rights, while highlighting its own [ESO Work Programme for 2024–2029](#), approved at the ESO seminar in November 2024, and which contains concrete proposals for a European policy on ageing and the rights for older persons.

Given the many new challenges and priorities, the challenge of the rapidly increasing ageing of the population and its consequences for our social systems, has faded into the background in recent years. However, ageing is and remains a very important challenge and the concerns of older persons need to be fully included in social policy agendas and plans. Therefore, similarly to other civil society organisations, and in particular AGE-Europe platform, **ESO calls for a rights-based, intersectional and life-course approach to social policy and an age equality perspective in the new action plan to implement the Pillar of Social Rights.** In concrete terms, ESO advocates **mainstreaming age equality across all 20 areas of the European Pillar of Social Rights**, in line with what we also address in our [contribution to the European Intergenerational Fairness Strategy](#): the development of **a European strategy for older people, including a European care guarantee.**

ESO is deeply concerned that access to rights is increasingly being hampered by all sorts of administrative procedures and requirements, and by widespread digitalization that affects older people more than others. That is why we **advocate for simple and accessible procedures and personalized, face-to-face guidance when applying for social benefits and rights and, where possible, an automatic entitlement to social benefits and security.**

ESO is asking for stricter monitoring of the access of older persons to fundamental rights both at European and at member state levels. In this context, we advocate **for strengthening the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), enabling it to regularly monitor older people's access to their rights at all levels.** This strengthening concerns its remit, staffing, and links to the competent services and administrations in the Member States. In line with this, we also expect the European Union and its Member States to support and commit to the realization of a United Nations Convention on Older Persons Rights.

ESO also advocates for **public funding of civil society organisations that work** for awareness-raising, participation and education of their target-groups.

ESO is also requesting sufficient **budgetary and human resources to support, to follow-up and to implement the action-plan.**

As active member from the AGE-Europe platform, ESO endorses the contribution of the AGE-Platform Europe. In addition, we would like to emphasize the following points regarding the 3 chapters and 20 principles/areas of the European Social Pillar:

Chapter 1 Equal opportunities and access to the labour market.

Ad 1 Education, training and LLL.

Permanent education should be accessible and affordable for all without age-distinction.

The objective of reaching 80% of people having at least basic digital skills must be kept and expanded beyond the current 75 years age limit.

Therefore, age limits must be abolished and equal access to education must be expanded beyond the labour market.

Ad 2 Gender equality.

Initiatives to **address the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination** in every aspect of daily life, including in all relevant social, economic, and political domains, with attention to the lived experiences and challenges of older women.

Combat violence against older persons, particularly older women, by strengthening cooperation between key services and agencies to ensure better support services for older persons, including those staying in collective facilities and women victims of domestic or gender based violence.

Ad 3 Equal opportunities

An **intergenerational pact based on intergenerational solidarity** bringing together all generations, promoting more equality and inclusion, combating unwanted loneliness and exclusion.

Proposal for **an action programme against ageism and discrimination on age** and for promoting intergenerational solidarity.

Reopening of the discussion on the Commission Proposal for a Council Directive on implementing the principle of **equal treatment** outside the labour market, irrespective of age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religious belief. Such a Directive provides a comprehensive protection against discrimination in key areas of life, such as - for example - loans, assurances, driving-licences,

Intersectionality and mainstreaming of age equality in all European Union existing strategies such as those in relation to equality between women and men, LGTBI, migrants and different minority groups. Better mainstreaming of “ageing” as a touchstone for the development of new policies can be achieved by setting up a specific service within the Commission.

Ad 4 Active support to employment

Regarding the Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC): reassessment of the age-based exceptions and the permissible limitations regarding age discrimination in the field of employment at national level, which currently limits **equal access and participation in the labour market** and hinders efforts to promote longer, healthier working lives.

Promote the value of age-diverse workforces by encouraging employers, policymakers, and judiciary bodies to recognize the benefits of recruiting and retaining workers across all ages, challenging ageist stereotypes and discriminatory hiring practices.

Reflection on a European labour market policy in the care and health sector; investment at the European and national levels to foster a favourable national context for working in the care

sector and to improve the working conditions and skills of formal and informal carers, often women. **Creation of a European curriculum for care professions** that guarantees good practice, working conditions and remuneration for employees in this sector.

Chapter 2 Fair working conditions

Ad 5 secure and adaptable employment.

Recognition and **taking into account the silver-economy and its effect on employment.**

Attention to the **working conditions of older workers and end-of-career situations**, with a specific focus on an intergenerational approach for transferring knowledge and skills between generations.

Ad 6 Wages

Initiatives to **close the pay-gap between men and women, as this has consequences for the pensions and the pension gap between women and men.** The risk continues to be higher for specific groups such as women who tend to earn less, have shorter, less linear careers, work part-time and take on more unpaid care responsibilities.

Ad 7 Information about employment conditions and protection in case of dismissals

Ad 8 Social dialogue and involvement of workers

Ad 9 Work Life balance

Strengthening of carers' leave by ensuring adequate amounts of paid leave and the right to flexible work, with clear EU standards and employer accountability. **Caregiving leave should be financially and structurally supported, with continued full social protection coverage, pension credits, and access to services.**

Broaden the definition of informal carers in EU law to ensure equal rights for all, including the self-employed and retired, while promoting the equal sharing of care responsibilities between women and men.

Ad 10 Healthy, safe and well-adapted work environment and data protection

Improve physical working conditions along the working lives: reduce physical strain and ensure occupational health policies reflect ageing over the life course.

Promote mental wellbeing at all ages in the workplace culture: shape wellbeing policies, fostering an open and age-positive work environment, and addressing age-related health topics, such as menopause, without stigma.

Bridge the digital divide and design inclusive digital tools: offer tailored digital training and ensure workplace technologies are accessible to all, including those facing sensory or cognitive challenges.

Chapter 3 social protection and inclusion

Ad 11 Childcare and support to children

Child-care shall be included into our proposal for a **European Care Guarantee** (see below) as a project for intergenerational solidarity.

Ad 12 Social protection

On social protection and inclusion, we ask for **stronger income support systems, indexing incomes and pensions to the cost of living, and ensuring that minimum income schemes provide a dignified standard of living.**

Simple and accessible procedures and **personalized, face-to-face guidance when applying for social benefits and rights and, where possible, an automatic entitlement to social benefits and social protection.**

Ad 13: Unemployment benefits

Ad 14: Minimum income

Minimum-income should be higher than the poverty-level and should be indexed to the cost of living, ensuring that **minimum income schemes provide a dignified standard of living.**

Ad 15: Old-age income and pensions

Old-age income and pensions should enable older persons to live in dignity with access to adapted housing, health care, care and long-term care and to participate in all aspects of community life.

Measures to close the pay and pension gap between men and women. The risk continues to be higher for specific groups such as women who tend to earn less, have shorter, less linear careers, work part-time and take on more unpaid care responsibilities.

Ad 16 Healthcare

Presentation of an **EU Strategy for health promotion** and prevention and promotion of Prevention Agreements at European and national level amongst stakeholders ensuring a healthy live for everyone.

Address the shortage of healthcare workers, raise the status of less valued professions, and propose an initiative to develop geriatric skills across all healthcare professions in line with demographic change.

Address the issue of ‘medical deserts’, by mapping the proximity of generalist, specialist and hospital care services in the EU’s regions and encourage the creation of mobile or rural health centres through EU funds.

Boost age-related health research and care: invest in research on diseases affecting older people’s autonomy, ensure vaccination in old age, and address bias through an intersectional approach.

Reintroduce the objective to increase healthy life years in the EU’s research programme

Achievement of a **European Health Union**.

Ad 17: inclusion of people with disabilities

Ad 18: Long-term care

Creation of a “**European care guarantee**” (including childcare, longtime-care and care) that supports Member States and Regions in care policies and investment in care services and facilities. Strengthening local services with the objective to enable older persons to live their lives as independently as possible and to remain in their homes and environments, if they so wish.

Investment at European and national level to foster a favourable national context for working in the care sector and to improve the working conditions and skills of formal and informal carers, often women.

Ad 19 Housing and assistance for the homeless

A specific conceptual focus on “building for life” and “adapted housing” for older persons based on the principle of age equality, as well as providing a framework for redesigning the habitat conducive to a better quality of life and an enhanced community life, making the streets and open spaces more accessible for all ages.

Support for strong social and cultural movements for the re-invention of our Cities, Towns and Villages with the perspective of age equality. **Adhesion and support from the European Union to the WHO programme “age-friendly cities and communities”.**

Support for the concept of the ‘ten or fifteen-minute city’ wherein all the essential services are within a short walking distance from each other.

Ad 20 Access to essential services.

Investment for systems ensuring age equality in the provision of goods, services, and the habitat, and to sustain older people's autonomy at all levels. Taking into serious consideration the rapidly growing digital divide and the fact that many older people, due to the digitalisation of services, are deprived of access to essential services. Digitalisation must serve the citizen, for example, by strengthening face-to-face service provisions, and not the other way around.

In-depth reflection on the Digital exclusion and ensuing lack of access and a moratorium on the further digitalisation of services to the public. **Face-to-face service provision must remain the basis of all service provision;** digitalisation can contribute to strengthening this face-to-face service provision. **Beneficiaries should be involved in the design of services and regularly consulted to ensure their views and experiences are taken on board.**

Legally binding regulation that oblige service providers (especially in the financial sector) and public authorities to offer non-discriminatory face-to-face services in line with consumer protection regulations.

Prioritize **accessible and affordable public transport** in its funding programs to ensure door-to-door mobility, notably for people living in remote and/or segregated community/area.

Brussels, September 1, 2025