

# Newsletter 08 (June 2026)



## Older socialist militants are keyplayers in global mobilisation (Barcelona, 17 April 2026)

### Intervention of Jos Bertrand, President ESO, in Barcelona GPM2026 fringe meeting

Together with ESO – European Senior Organisation, we organized an exchange of ideas on democracy and solidarity, and the role of the elderly and civil society in politics. We asked **Magda De Meyer** to give an introduction on how we bring together and support senior organizations in Flanders today, and on how our generation engaged in politics.

40 years ago, our generation said “no to war” and “no to dictatorship,” just like Sánchez does now: war in Indochina, Mozambique, Apartheid in Africa, dictatorship in Chile, Argentina, Spain, Portugal, Greece, the Cold War, and nuclear missiles. Bringing millions of people onto the streets via civil society... and they were proven right. Thanks to leaders like Willy Brandt, Francois Mitterand, Filipe González, Mario Soares, and Karel Van Miert, we managed to set things in motion.

If we want to make Pedro Sánchez’s call for peace and solidarity a reality, then we, as socialists and democrats, must win elections. That is also our responsibility as activists. That is why we must once again fully invest in civil society today: rebuilding, shaping people, mobilizing, developing strength, against ‘anti-social’ media and hate preachers.

Socialists must return to what they were strong in, back to our roots, back to civil society.

Thanks to Anthony DeGiovanni for steering the conversation in the right direction.

- <https://socialistseniors.eu/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/202604-GPM2026-ESO-Jos-Bertrand-Speech.mp4>

**Jos Bertrand** President ESO (European Senior Organisation) – PES-seniors



## Strengthening the civil society

Civil society plays a vital role in democracy by defending citizens' rights, influencing public policies, and holding institutions accountable. Throughout history, civil society organizations (CSOs) have contributed to major social and political achievements, such as the fight against apartheid and the abolition of child labor. Their importance is formally recognized within the European Union.

However, civil society is facing increasing pressure, particularly due to the rise of populism and stronger government control over funding mechanisms, which can limit the independence and advocacy capacity of CSOs. This trend threatens the autonomy of civil society and disproportionately affects the most vulnerable groups.

Europe's ageing population continues to grow, yet older people still face widespread ageism and are often portrayed as a burden on society. We want to highlight the importance of valuing older people, who are often subject to ageist stereotypes despite their significant contributions as caregivers, volunteers, grandparents, and active citizens. Their experience, skills, and unpaid work represent an important asset for society.

Another key challenge is maintaining intergenerational solidarity. While older generations tend to engage through structured organizations and younger people often prefer more informal or digital forms of participation, both generations share common interests and can work together to address contemporary challenges.

ESO launches its own survey with these five questions :

- how are older people and your organization involved in party work, or what is your organization's relationship to the party?
- what is the situation regarding the number of over-60s elected in parliaments?

- how is your organization supported: does your organization receive support from the government and what are the conditions?
- how are organizations for the elderly recognized and organized in your country, and how are they involved by the public authorities in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of policy?
- has an evolution been observed in the organization of participatory democracy over the last few decades?

Please send your answer to the following address : [eso@socialistseniors.eu](mailto:eso@socialistseniors.eu)



## Intergenerational strategy event (Brussels, 10 June 26)

On June 10th, young and old socialists, YES and ESO, together with the S&D group in the European Parliament, discussed the European Intergenerational Fairness Strategy proposed by the European Commission in early March. ESO has fundamental criticism of the strategy and particularly denounces the lack of openness and participation of civil society, where the advice and concerns of the older persons organizations advocating for solidarity between generations and a European age equality strategy, were in no way taken into account. Intergenerational fairness must not stand in the way of or replace solidarity.

You can find the reactions of ESO and AGE on our website: [www.europeansocialists.eu](http://www.europeansocialists.eu)

The panel agreed that a fair and democratic Europe requires stronger cooperation between generations and greater attention to the social and economic challenges facing citizens. Several speakers stressed that young people must be better represented in decision-making and that urgent action is needed on housing, income, quality jobs, education, and the skills required to navigate the challenges posed by artificial intelligence.

A recurring theme was the importance of solidarity and dialogue between generations. Speakers argued that young and older people should work together rather than be portrayed as competing groups, and that civil society organisations must be actively consulted if democratic participation is to be meaningful. Older people's experience was highlighted as a valuable resource for shaping policies that benefit all generations.

Finally, there was broad agreement that strategies alone are not enough. Achieving social equity requires adequate funding, concrete measures, and political commitment, particularly in areas such as healthcare, pensions, employment, and social protection. Several speakers expressed concern that current political developments and budgetary choices could weaken Europe's social model and make these goals more difficult to achieve.



## Towards a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons

### What Role for the European Union? (21 April 2026)

Population ageing is a major global demographic trend. Although people are living longer, older persons still face discrimination, exclusion, unequal access to services, and insufficient protection of their human rights. While several international human rights treaties exist, there is currently no specific, legally binding UN convention dedicated to the rights of older persons.

Since 2010, the United Nations has been discussing the need for stronger international protections. In 2024, progress was made with the launch of a new intergovernmental process to develop a **UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons**.

The European Union is encouraged to play a stronger and more coordinated role in this process, consistent with its commitments to human rights, equality, and non-discrimination. The event described aims to bring together EU institutions, UN representatives, and civil society to discuss and strengthen the EU's involvement in developing the convention.

A key goal is to adopt and sign a joint statement calling for a dedicated debate in the European Parliament around the **International Day of Older Persons** on 1 October. This would help raise the political profile of the convention, increase EU engagement in negotiations, and promote coordination between the European Commission and Member States.

**On April 21th**, the EU parliament organised a discussion on this important issue. By bringing together institutional and civil society actors, the event sought to contribute to a more coordinated, ambitious and visible EU approach to the rights of older persons, both within the Union and internationally.

The program included interventions of :

- **Idoia Mendia**, Member of the European Parliament (S&D) Co-Chair, European Parliament Interest Group on Europe for All Ages
- **Michal Szczerba**, Member of the European Parliament (EPP) Co-Chair, European Parliament Interest Group on Europe for All Ages
- **Gordan Bosanac**, Member of the European Parliament (Greens/EFA)

Overall, the event sought to support a more ambitious, coordinated, and visible EU approach to protecting and promoting the rights of older persons both within Europe and globally.

**Idoia Mendia, Member of the European Parliament (S&D)**, Co-Chair, European Parliament Interest Group on Europe for All Ages provided the closing remark of the event.

A resolution was adopted, which you can find at the following link:

[https://www.age-platform.eu/content/uploads/2026/04/Intergenerational\\_Forum\\_Joint-Statement-on-the-EU\\_UN-Convention-on-the-Rights-of-Older-Persons.pdf](https://www.age-platform.eu/content/uploads/2026/04/Intergenerational_Forum_Joint-Statement-on-the-EU_UN-Convention-on-the-Rights-of-Older-Persons.pdf)

See also the contribution of ESO to the Intergenerational Fairness Strategy :

<https://socialistseniors.eu/2026/03/eso-comment-on-the-newly-presented-european-intergenerational-fairness-strategy-from-the-european-commission/>



## Greater Region

**Seniors PS (Belgium)** represents the Province of Luxembourg and Seniors PS on the Council of Seniors of the Greater Region (CSGR).

It recently conducted a large-scale survey on discrimination and the difficulties faced by older people.

The survey focused on people aged 60 to 80 in a region with nearly 2.9 million people are over 65 (out of 11.8 million inhabitants, i.e. 24%), with a balanced representation of urban and rural populations. Respondents mostly lived alone or as couples and were largely retired.

The topics covered in the survey included age-related discrimination, the effects of digitalisation, finances and banking services, employment, social networks and digital participation, mobility and public transport, healthcare, and finally the need for inclusion and accessibility.

The survey shows that older people continue to face many forms of discrimination. These do not result solely from age itself, but from the accumulation of social, digital, economic, and physical barriers.

The main expectations concern respect, accessibility, the maintenance of human contact in essential services, better recognition of their contribution to society, the active participation of seniors in decisions that concern them, and greater consideration of their specific needs in public policies. They also highlight the importance of developing intergenerational projects and strengthening opportunities for meeting and exchange between generations.



## A new era for Hungary

**On April 12th, in the Hungarian elections**, citizens overwhelmingly ousted the right-wing Christian ruling party, FIDESZ, after 16 years in power. The new, center-right TISZA party, which professes European values, won a landslide victory, while the left-wing parties did not enter parliament. Another important factor in this situation was that a significant number of left-wing voters, hoping for left-wing unity and demanding a successful campaign, saw TISZA and Péter Magyar as potential challengers to Viktor Orbán.

The majority of the politically active Hungarian pensioner population – especially the elderly population of small villages – is a sympathizer of the previous ruling party and supported FIDESZ this time as well. However, younger pensioners and city dwellers had a greater say in the final outcome than ever before and contributed to the victory of TISZA.

A month after the victorious election, political euphoria continues in Hungary. The confidence of the broad masses in change is unbroken, but at the same time it is not without belligerent, retaliatory, and demanding voices. In this spirit, the new government embarked on a major transformation, curbing previous harmful processes, exposing those responsible and punishing them if necessary. It began the series of spectacular, well-sounding measures, for example, by significantly reducing the honorarium of members of parliament...

The promises made to Hungarian pensioners sound good and give reason for optimism. However, it is thought-provoking that the new government structure has no place for the elderly (for now), or more precisely, the elderly are "lost" in the scope of activities of 9 ministries.

The improving trends in the economy, the work to create a cheaper state, the promotion of transparent political processes, and the measures taken to eradicate corruption – to name just a few of the many processes that have been launched – give reason for optimism, not only for the elderly, but for the entire Hungarian population.

### **Némethné Jankovics Györgyi**



## Seniors rights must finally become a global priority

As the United Nations prepares to resume negotiations on a future international convention on the rights of older persons, Belgian NGOs and senior citizens' organizations are speaking with one voice: the time to act is now.

United around the Federal Advisory Council for Older Persons, they are calling on Belgium to champion an ambitious position: a strong, legally binding convention that will finally guarantee the fundamental rights of older people everywhere in the world.

Why is this so important?

Because ageism remains a reality today: discrimination in access to healthcare, housing, and employment, as well as the exclusion of older people from political decision-making. Growing older should never mean being excluded from society.

The NGOs emphasize that the rights of older persons are full human rights: dignity, autonomy, access to healthcare, and participation in social and political life. They also insist that older people themselves must be fully involved in international negotiations — nothing about them, without them.

**For the Socialist Party (PS) and its senior members, the stakes are clear:**

- Secure global recognition that rights do not diminish with age.
- Take concrete action against all forms of age-based discrimination.
- Build a truly inclusive society for people of all ages.

This debate at the United Nations is far from symbolic. It will shape the public policies of tomorrow. And it carries a simple but essential demand: respect and justice for everyone, regardless of age.

**Michel Godfroid**

**PS Seniors (Belgium)**



## ONP, the elderly network of the Dutch Labour Party

This week, the party board decided that the elderly network ONP will be established within PRO (Progressive Netherlands). The PvdA Elderly Network ONP will develop into a network of PRO.

Initially, the party board took the position that the ONP should merge with, among others, the healthcare networks of the PvdA and GroenLinks. The ONP board objected to this. Naturally, elderly care is an important focus for us. Just as is the case for housing, pensions and state retirement benefits, mobility, basic security, etc. We indicated to the party board that nearly a quarter of the electorate consists of people over 65. It cannot be the case, then, that there is no room for members who are specifically concerned with policy for this group. And with success.

We are very pleased that the elderly network can proceed. We have assembled a coordination group from the current ONP board. It may consist of a maximum of 6 people. André van Dokkum will assume the chairmanship, Hans Wouters is our secretary, and Bert Oudenaarden will focus on communication, such as the new website. Margot Vliegenthart, Ans Verdonschot, and Frank Duijnhouwer are general members.

We are getting to work quickly to broaden our reach to include PRO members who were previously members of GroenLinks (GreenLeft). GroenLinks does not have an Elderly Network. And naturally, we also hope that new enthusiasts will come forward from the PvdA membership. Within the coordination group, we have agreed to make room for former GroenLinks members, so that we can bring the breadth of our new party into the new network as well. Of course, in the meantime, we will also continue to implement the ONP's work plan.

And we have a new name: PROvO. This stands for: PRO for elderly policy.

The new website will be live soon. We will also launch a new Facebook page in due course.

**André Van Dokkum**

**ONP/ PROvO**

Link ONP / PROvO:

<https://ouderennetwerk.pvda.nl/nieuws/provo-het-netwerk-voor-ouderenbeleid-van-pro/>



## Right to an Analogue Life

**The Austrian Pensioners' Association (PVÖ)** is calling for a legally protected **right to an analogue life**, ensuring that all digital public services are always accompanied by accessible non-digital alternatives. The Association argues that no one should be excluded from public services, financial support, or essential information because they do not use digital technologies.

A recent legal opinion by constitutional expert Prof. Dr. Manfred Matzka supports this position, concluding that digital-only application procedures—such as those used for Austria's Device Repair Bonus—are unconstitutional and discriminatory. The opinion cites the constitutional principle of equality, disability rights legislation, the E-Government Act, and data protection rules as legal grounds against "online-only" public services.

The PVÖ therefore calls for legislation requiring analogue access to all essential public services and funding schemes, whether by paper, telephone, or in person. While supporting digitalisation, the Association insists that it must never replace freedom of choice or create new barriers.

At the same time, the PVÖ promotes digital inclusion by offering training on smartphones, tablets, artificial intelligence, and digital public services. It also works with public authorities to help older people develop digital skills while preserving analogue options.

The Association highlights that digital discrimination is increasingly affecting everyday life through app-only discounts, online-only public subsidies, electronic documents, QR-code-only user manuals, digital ticketing, online appointment systems, and the closure of telephone services. It therefore advocates extending the right to analogue access beyond public administration to essential private services.

The PVÖ has already achieved several successes, including introducing telephone and paper-based access to the federal savings product *Bundesschatz*, preventing app-only retail discount schemes, and securing telephone registration during the COVID-19 vaccination campaign.

With strong legal support, the PVÖ will continue advocating for legislation that guarantees equal access to services and ensures that digital progress does not undermine accessibility, fairness, or social inclusion.

**Sabine Wlazny**

**PVÖ**



## Unemployment among Older Workers

The **Austrian Pensioners' Association (PVÖ)** strongly opposes proposals to further restrict partial retirement schemes as part of current budget discussions. The Association argues that policymakers should address the underlying causes of unemployment among older workers rather than weakening a key labor market instrument.

PVÖ President Birgit Gerstorfer criticizes proposals to significantly reduce access to partial retirement, including limiting eligibility mainly to people with health impairments and introducing stricter income caps. She warns that these measures would gradually undermine a system that has already been tightened several times in recent years.

According to the PVÖ, older workers and pensioners are already contributing disproportionately to budget consolidation through higher health insurance contributions, reduced purchasing power, and rising living costs. Meanwhile, workers aged 55 and over face a much higher risk of long-term unemployment and often struggle to find new employment.

The Association stresses that partial retirement is not a privilege but an essential tool that enables many older employees to remain in the workforce until retirement. Cutting the scheme would increase uncertainty and unfairly burden older generations.

The PVÖ therefore calls for fair and effective labor market policies that tackle structural employment challenges instead of reducing support for older workers.

**Sabine Wlazny**

**PVÖ**



*1 - PVÖ President Birgit Gerstorfer*

## **A Sign for a Social and Open Switzerland**

SP60+CH is relieved and joins SP Switzerland being satisfied by the clear rejection of the popular initiative put forward by the right-wing populist SVP party.

The initiative was voted on mid-June 2026. It sought to ensure that Switzerland's permanent resident population would not exceed ten million before 2050.

If this limit were exceeded, the agreement on the Free Movement of Persons with the EU would have to be terminated.

The voters have said no—and stand by human rights and thus by stable relations with the EU. A political goal that SP60+CH strongly supports.

The populist party called it "sustainability initiative", the SP Switzerland nicknamed it "chaos initiative".

The SVP once again wanted to return to dark times: times when people came to Switzerland with no prospects and no rights and were exploited here as cheap labor.

**Marianne de Mestral**

Carlo Lepori

SP60+CH



## The first Law on the Structure of Care for Older People – in Berlin

On 21 May 2026, the Berlin House of Representatives passed the Law on the Structure of Care for Older People in Berlin. A huge success for Berlin's older people. Susanne Pape, Chair of the SPD 60 plus Berlin working group, and Sebahat Atli, a member of the Berlin House of Representatives and spokesperson for the SPD parliamentary group on matters relating to older people, have been working towards this for several years.

In Germany, there are thirteen books of the Social Security Code (SGB), such as SGB V for statutory health insurance, SGB VI for statutory pension insurance and SGB XII for social assistance.

SGB XII contains provisions on care for the elderly, which are set out in more detail in Section 71 of SGB XII – but unfortunately are not(!) binding on either local authorities or the federal states. Berlin is now the first federal state to have binding state-level legal requirements for care for the elderly.

Specifically, this involves practical information and access to meeting places where people can interact with others rather than being alone. More generally, it concerns access to high-quality support services:

- participation in training programmes on digital literacy,
- assistance in finding opportunities for social engagement,
- information on advice centres for issues relating to ageing,
- referral of requests for assistance,
- assistance with means-tested benefits such as a home emergency call system,
- assistance with relocation-related expenses.

In summary, the aim is to maintain independence for as long as possible and to plan for the transition to care in a forward-looking manner. This means safeguarding the independence, autonomy and social participation of older people on the basis of a state law.

**Lothar Binding**

**Federal Chair of the SPD 60 plus Working Group**

17 June 2026

