REPORT

Overcoming ageism through education, intergenerational exchange, and law and policies

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D2.2 Report on ageism

Overcoming ageism through education, intergenerational exchange, and law and policies: facts and guidelines

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Abstract

This report examines the issue of ageism and its impact on societal resilience, offering recommendations to mitigate its negative effects. The deliverable is divided into two sections. The first section explores the concept of ageism and its relationship with resilience in longevity societies, highlighting the role of educational initiatives, intergenerational programs, and laws and policies, in addressing age-based discrimination. The second section presents insights from the FutuRes project's civil society workshops, which provided a valuable opportunity to explore how European citizens perceive and experience ageism, as well as to identify effective strategies for counteracting it. The report concludes with actionable recommendations to reduce ageism, recognizing it as a significant barrier to resilience across the life course. It underscores the critical role of educational programs, intergenerational initiatives, and inclusive policies, in fostering resilience and promoting social inclusion.

Keywords: ageism, resilience, policies, education, intergenerational exchange

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Introduction

The world population is progressively ageing. Over the last century, a substantial increase in life expectancy coupled with a decrease in the average number of children born per woman has significantly altered the age composition of most populations. The proportion of people aged 60 and older globally has increased from 5% in 1950 to 9% in 2020, with this figure projected to more than double by 2050 (United Nations, 2020). The ageing process has emerged as a particularly significant challenge in high-income countries, where reductions in both mortality and fertility rates have been most pronounced. This trend is especially evident in Europe, where the percentage of the population aged 65 and older has risen from 9% in 1950 to 21% in 2020, and the share of individuals aged 80 and above has increased from 1% to 6% during the same period (Eurostat, 2024). In this demographic context, ensuring adequate well-being and health among older adults has become a key policy priority (Goujon et al., 2021). Nevertheless, population ageing has also sharply increased the old-age dependency ratio, placing greater pressure on a shrinking workforce to fund public services, including, but not limited to crucial policy areas such as healthcare and pensions (OECD, 2023). This demographic shift has fuelled European public debate on social resource allocation, often inciting ageist rhetoric and intergenerational tensions that undermine solidarity (FRA, 2018). In modern Western societies—particularly those that value competitiveness and dynamism—ageing is increasingly perceived negatively, a trend persisting over the past two centuries (Ng et al., 2015). Consequently, ageism continues to rise.

Ageism, is defined as "prejudice by one age group against another age group", or more broadly, as discrimination based on age (Butler, 1969). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines age discrimination as stereotypes (how we think), prejudices (how we feel) and discrimination (how we behave) against others or ourselves based on age (WHO, 2024). In this discrimination process, prejudice and stereotypes against older individuals are internalized and transferred from society to the individual and from childhood to old age (Levy, 2009). It is quite widely confirmed that ageism creates both individual and social challenges (UNECE, 2019). These negative stereotypes, which reveal negative self-perceptions of old age, ageing anxiety and health problems in the individual dimension, cause different problems with age discrimination in the social dimension (Diehl et al., 2014; Levy, 2003). Ageism against older people has been widely recognized as a major threat to active ageing and a significant public health issue (Alvarez-Galvez & Salvador-Carulla, 2013; Kim & Jung, 2021; Mikton et al., 2021).

Numerous studies have shown that ageist attitudes, particularly ageist stereotypes, negatively impact older people across various domains (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018). For instance, a recurrent stereotype linked to ageism is that older people are a burden, characterised as unproductive, frail and incapable (Hövermann & Messner, 2023). At a societal level, such ageist

perceptions can reinforce exclusion, discrimination and marginalisation and affect intergenerational solidarity by putting younger people against older people (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; FRA, 2018). Furthermore, such negative societal attitudes affect policy responses related to old age, which can undermine the potential positive contributions of older people to economic, social, and cultural life (AGE Platform, 2021; FRA, 2018; JRC, 2024). Emerging scientific evidence contradicts these stereotypes, demonstrating the valuable and important contributions of older people to their families and communities (Beverfelt, 1984; Carmichael & G. Ercolani, 2014; Cook, 2011; Stephens et al., 2015; Wiles & Jayasinha, 2013). Moving away from viewing old age merely in terms of burden or loss and towards acknowledging the positive role of older persons in the community and the respect of older people as human being across the lifespan is crucial to respect their human rights and dignity, thus contributing to foster a more cohesive and resilient society. A resilient society is defined by its capacity to adapt to challenges and foster inclusivity (Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of The Council of Europe). In times of crisis—be it economic, environmental, or social—intergenerational cooperation is essential (Aassve & Bastianelli, 2024). However, ageism poses a threat to societal resilience by perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination that marginalize older adults. Such attitudes erode social cohesion by creating distrust and division between generations, weakening collective responses to shared challenges. In ageing societies such as those in Europe, addressing ageism is pivotal for enhancing societal resilience and transition from an ageing society to one that embraces longevity as a strength.

This report is organized as follows: Part I defines ageism and explores its impact on societal resilience, followed by an analysis of existing laws and policies addressing ageism within the European Union. It then outlines strategies for combating ageism through education, intergenerational initiatives, and legislative measures. Part II presents key insights and recommendations from the *"Ageism and the Next EU Agenda"* citizens' workshop, conducted as part of the FutuRes project, highlighting participants' experiences with age discrimination and proposed solutions. The conclusion reflects on the findings in light of these insights, offering policy recommendations to be further developed during the final year of the FutuRes project.

PART I - Background literature review

Ageism and discrimination on the grounds of age

The concept of ageism was first adopted by Robert Butler in the late 1960s, to describe prejudice between different age groups (Butler, 1969). Butler originally characterized ageism as discrimination primarily by the middle-aged against both younger and older age groups, viewing these groups as dependent and less capable. He drew parallels between ageism and other forms of discrimination like racism and classism, highlighting their intersecting impacts on societal disempowerment (Butler, 1969, 1980). A broader definition of ageism considers it discrimination based solely on age (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018). Younger people often experience ageism in areas such as employment (with younger people being perceived an unreliable), health (with younger people's concerns being minimized) housing (with younger people being considered financially instable or irresponsible) and in social life (with younger people being patronized or excluded from conversations). Ageism creates intergenerational conflict, with older individuals discriminating against the young and vice-versa (AGE, 2021). Nevertheless, in the literature, the term is most used to refer to discrimination against older adults (Ayalon & Rothermund, 2018). Three types of ageism are described and recognized in the literature: self-direct, interpersonal, and institutional (WHO, 2021).

- *Self-directed ageism*, refers to the internalisation of ageist messages and prejudice, leading to the self-regulation of behaviour and thinking (Schuurman et al., 2022). Additionally, ageism, typically results in negative outcomes by perpetuating stereotypes that influence self-fulfilling prophecies (Butler, 1980). A self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a belief or expectation—whether true or not—affects a person's behaviour in a way that causes the belief to come true. If older individuals internalize negative stereotypes—such as being less capable or productive—they may begin to act in ways that align with these stereotypes, reinforcing the original belief. For example, if society expects older people to be less competent at work, they may be given fewer opportunities, leading to diminished performance and confirming the stereotype. Research indicates that older adults often internalize negative ageist beliefs acquired throughout their lives, influencing both their self-perception and their perceptions of others (Schuurman et al., 2022).
- *Interpersonal ageism* materialises in everyday personal interactions. Ageism is said to inhibits older adults from developing relationships with other older adults as well as with people of different age groups. Ageism also serves as a structural barrier in societies that divide young and old, allowing for very little contact between people of different generations. As such, it is linked to risky health behaviours (e.g., unhealthy eating, smoking), social isolation, and loneliness.

- *Institutional ageism* is embedded within legislative and regulatory frameworks, as well as in the design and functioning of public institutions. It occurs when policies or organizational practices systematically favour or discriminate against older individuals—for example, through compulsory retirement age regulations (Iversen et al., 2009).

Discrimination based on age is the most prevalent type of discrimination experienced by Europeans (Ayalon 2014). WHO reports that age discrimination is perpetrated against older people by one in two people worldwide (WHO, 2021). The findings of the 2023 Eurobarometer Report on Discrimination in the EU reveal that 45% of Europeans believe that age discrimination, whether being considered too old or too young, is prevalent across the EU. This figure reflects a five-percentage point increase compared to the preceding Eurobarometer survey conducted in 2019 (JRC, 2024).

Ageism comprises three main components: attributing negative characteristics to individuals or groups (stereotypes), expressing negative feelings toward them (prejudice), and engaging in negative actions as a result (discrimination) (Rupp et al., 2005; Swift et al., 2017). In this process of discrimination, stereotypes against older individuals are internalized and learned from society, beginning in childhood and continuing into old age (Levy, 2009). No one is born with ageism; age-related prejudices, stereotypes, and fears are learned over time (Allport, 1954; Couper and Pratt, 1999; Patterson & Bigler, 2006; Pauker et al., 2010; Shutts, 2015; Mulvey et al., 2010). Research shows that even children as young as five years old hold age stereotypes that influence their social interactions (Patterson & Bigler, 2006). These stereotypes are acquired early from parents, peers, teachers, and environmental factors, including visual, audio, and print media (Avcı & Erhan, 2022; Dabak Özdemir & Yıldıran Önk, 2020; Linewear et al., 2017; Robinson & Anderson, 2006; Robinson et al., 2007). A 2021 study conducted by the World Health Organization found that ageism begins in early childhood. When preschool and primary school children were shown illustrations of a man at different life stages, two-thirds perceived the oldest man as "helpless, unable to care for himself, and generally passive" (WHO, 2021). Furthermore, children often describe older adults with terms like "sick, tired, and ugly" and express their avoidance of ageing with words such as "scary" (Seefeldt et al., 1977; Zandi et al., 1990).

Generally, the prejudices and stereotypes surrounding ageing tend to emphasize the associated problems and pathologies. Common stereotypes attributed to older adults include: (1) they are often viewed as depressed, lonely individuals with emotional disorders and lacking family or close friends; (2) they are perceived as homogeneous, with ageing seen as a one-dimensional process that does not vary; (3) they are considered fragile, ill, and in need of care; and (4) they are viewed as cognitively and psychologically deficient (Whitbourne & Sneed, 2002). Embedded in societal norms, these age-related stereotypes often go unnoticed, yet their effects are profound (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018). Unlike other forms of discrimination, ageism affects nearly everyone both

individually and socially as they age, making its impact substantial (Palmore, 2004; Ayalon, 2014). According to Levy's (2009) Stereotype Embodiment Theory, people internalize these stereotypes about ageing and the older people throughout their lives and unconsciously tend to exhibit behaviours that confirm these perceptions. With the negative feedback loop, these components are maintained bidirectionally over time from society to the individual and from childhood to old age (Levy, 2009; Ryan et al., 1986). Individuals who have higher negative stereotypes in the internalization process also have negative self-perceptions about their own ageing (Demir Dikmen, 2023).

Ageism intersects with other factors like gender, race, and disability, leading to multiple forms of discrimination, such as against older women or older people with disabilities (Krekula, et al., 2018). Such intersections (e.g. age and race) exacerbate the discrimination and limitations of people in unique ways, summing up on the singular factor. The intersection of ageism with gender shows a striking 26% gender gap in pensions in the EU, poverty and social exclusion rates being about 6 percentage points higher for older women than for older men (65+, 2022). The intersection of ageism and disability has also many consequences and results on, e.g., older persons with disabilities experiencing different access to the same kinds of services and social benefits than younger persons with disabilities. Racialised older persons may suffer from types of discrimination, for example 55% of women over 50 identifying as Roma suffer from bad health compared to 29% of non-Roma women. Older LGBTQI+ are pushed to hide their sexual orientation in collective living settings amongst other issues, when looking for long-term care services.

Ageism and resilient societies

Ageism has consistently been shown to have detrimental effects on both individuals and societies (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018; FRA, 2018). Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals who internalize negative stereotypes about ageing are more likely to experience declines in both physical and cognitive abilities, as well as an increased dependency on others, compared to those who hold more positive or neutral views about ageing (Barrett & Von, 2008; Levy et al., 2016; Martens et al., 2004). Specifically, research has found that those who endorse ageist stereotypes live shorter lives, are more susceptible to addictions, exhibit higher rates of depressive symptoms, suffer from cognitive impairments, and experience more pronounced physical health deterioration, including functional impairments and chronic conditions (Chang et al., 2020; Levy et al., 2016). The consequences of ageism, therefore, appear far-reaching and significantly undermine the well-being of older individuals. At the societal level, ageist attitudes contribute to the weakening of social bonds, obstruct social inclusion, and foster divisions between generations (FRA, 2018; JRC, 2024). Thus, ageism not only harms individuals' health and well-being but may also undermine societal

resilience by eroding societal cohesion, fostering intergenerational tensions, and hindering the full participation of all age groups in social, economic, and political life.

In the context of European policies, **resilience** is defined as a country's "ability to face economic, social, and environmental shocks or persistent structural changes in a fair, sustainable, and inclusive way", emphasizing the centrality of the social dimension of resilience in European policymaking (Regulation (EU) 2021/241 of the European Parliament and of The Council of Europe, 12 February 2021). According to this definition, a resilient society is one that can adapt to challenges and foster inclusivity. Ageism, however, may erode these qualities by perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination that marginalize older adults, leading to their exclusion from key decision-making processes, workforce participation, and community-building activities. When ageist attitudes are embedded in societal structures, such as policies, laws, and cultural norms, they limit the potential of older individuals to contribute to the economy and society and they hinder the enjoyment of their human rights in old age (AGE, 2021; JRC, 2024). Older adults may face barriers to employment, healthcare, or housing, and are often excluded from technological and social innovations. This exclusion not only harms older individuals but also deprives society of the valuable experience, wisdom, and expertise that older people may bring.

Furthermore, ageism can strain intergenerational relationships and hinder the development of social networks that foster solidarity and mutual support (Ayalon & Rothermund, 2018). In times of crisis—whether economic, environmental, or social—a resilient society relies on strong intergenerational cooperation (Aassve & Bastianelli, 2024). Ageist attitudes, however, create barriers to these types of connections, as they foster distrust and division between generations, undermining collective efforts to address shared challenges. For instance, policies that pit younger and older generations against each other for limited resources—such as healthcare, pensions, or employment opportunities—can exacerbate tensions and reduce societal solidarity, weakening resilience in the face of crises. As a result, a society that does not value its older population is less likely to adapt to demographic shifts and effectively address the challenges of an ageing population.

Therefore, addressing ageism is crucial for building a resilient society. By combating discriminatory attitudes and ensuring equal opportunities for individuals of all ages, societies can tap into the full potential of their populations, fostering greater social cohesion, economic stability, and the ability to adapt to future challenges. A society that values people across the lifespan—rather than marginalizing them based on age—can more effectively respond to crises, promote long-term well-being, and ensure that everyone can contribute to and benefit from a shared, sustainable future.

EU legislative framework on age discrimination

In the EU legislative framework, age discrimination is covered only by the *Employment Equality Directive 2000/78EC*, which includes protection from discrimination on different grounds, including age. Only on age, it however contains an explicit exception for training and social protection systems.

Specifically, Article 6 provides grounds for differences in treatment based on age: '*shall not constitute discrimination, if, within the context of national law, they are objectively and reasonably justified by a legitimate aim, including legitimate employment policy, labour market, and vocational training objectives, and if the means of achieving that aim are appropriate and necessary.*' In essence, the directive proscribes direct age discrimination which is not justified by a legitimate aim (Doron et al., 2018).

Furthermore, AGE Platform Europe's analysis (2021a) highlights that the *Employment Equality Directive (Directive 2000/78EC)*, designed to protect against age-based discrimination at work, has been ineffective at preventing stigmatization and ageism due to its uneven application across the EU. In the implementation of the directive, some Member State have gone beyond the minimum provisions, though, and have adopted national horizontal legislation on age discrimination (cf. the European network of Equality bodies, Equinet's report, that reviewed Member States law and policies to combat discrimination on the ground of age and recommended further evaluation in the field of health care systems and of multiple discrimination).

AGE Platform Europe's analysis (2021a) also highlights other legislative shortcoming in addressing ageism:

- The Work–Life Balance Directive (European Parliament and Council 2019) also falls short by not adequately considering middle-aged informal caregivers balancing work and caregiving responsibilities.
- The adoption of the Horizontal Equal Treatment Directive (European Commission 2008) would be crucial for banning age discrimination across all areas of society, beyond employment– this draft would include protection from age discrimination in the areas of goods and services. However, progress on this draft directive has been stalled by member states since 2008, despite long-term lobbying by civil society organizations.

Additional relevant frameworks include the 2020 European Council's notable conclusions on human rights in older age and on mainstreaming ageing. On international level, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) has been adopted in 2002 and reviewed every five years, for the European region the last time in 2022. The United Nations Decade on Ageing intends to sustain an enabling environment to age well across the world and makes available a platform to

support transversal and transregional collaboration on ageing (age-friendly environments, long-terms care, integrated care, and against ageism).

On national level, many initiatives are worth even shortly being mentioned, such as 'positive ageing strategy' in Ireland (IE Gov, 2013), a regular ageing report in Germany or a national strategic policy for active ageing in Malta. In many European countries there are programs and media awareness campaigns which try to fight ageism as recommended by WHO.

Beyond policies, European Social Partners have an autonomous Framework Agreement on Active Ageing and an Intergenerational Approach signed in 2017 which led to some initiatives in social dialogue about ageing and age discrimination, detailed in an implementation report in 2021. Civil society organisations have been mobilising, such as AGE Platform Europe has for an EU Age Equality Strategy.

Finally, there are some employer-led initiatives focussed on the workplace, such as Club Landoy in France. On EU level, employers are encouraged to join 'Diversity Charters' to improve equal treatment policies in the workplace (UNECE, 2019).

Leveraging education, intergenerational exchange, and law and policies to overcome ageism and build resilience

The WHO advocates addressing age-based discrimination and ageism through educational interventions, intergenerational exchanges, and comprehensive laws and policies (WHO, 2021). These three domains are moreover strongly interconnected. Educational activities can include intergenerational exchanges, and vice versa, while policy programs and laws can introduce and promote tailored educational curricula and intergenerational activities.

Education. Education plays a crucial role in cultivating a more inclusive and respectful view of ageing, as well as fostering the social inclusion of older individuals (Chonody, 2015; Knight, 2007). Educational initiatives that highlight the contributions of older people—by emphasizing their skills, wisdom, and experience—can counteract stereotypes and promote a more positive perception of ageing. However, it is equally important that educational efforts encourage the respect and inclusion of older adults, not solely for their societal contributions but as human beings, regardless of age. Indeed, many studies indicated that educational interventions aimed at increasing awareness of ageing resulted in better attitudes toward older persons and more understanding of ageing (Chonody, 2015).

Eliminating negative attitudes and beliefs and replacing them with more positive perspectives can be one of the most effective strategies for preventing discrimination. Since it is easier to intervene in the formation of stereotypes and prejudices during early childhood than to reverse them later, it is crucial to provide children with this information from a young age (McGuire & Mefford, 2007). Early intervention ensures that future generations will grow up with a more positive self-image of

old age, free from anxiety and misconceptions (Donizzetti, 2019). Educating young children about ageing, including age-related facts and positive role models of older adults, can help develop accurate and positive representations of older people (Levy, 2018). Curricula that incorporate knowledge about ageing have proven to be effective in reducing stereotypes and fostering positive attitudes (Blunk & Williams, 1997; Demir Dikmen, 2023; Hembacher & Cruise, 2006). For instance, Hembacher and Cruise (2006) observed a positive shift in children's perceptions of ageing when their second-grade social studies curriculum included techniques such as literary works that portrayed older people positively, question-and-answer activities, and interviews with older individuals. Furthermore, children's picture books, particularly those used in curriculum adaptation studies, also serve as valuable tools for helping young children develop a well-rounded perspective on ageing. These books can foster acceptance of individual diversity in old age by illustrating various ways of being active (Avcı & Erhan, 2022). For example, books with positive depictions of older adults can promote empathy and understanding.

Effective educational initiatives on ageing require careful consideration of educators' capacity to manage such programs. Notably, fostering positive attitudes toward ageing among students necessitates that educators themselves hold informed and favorable views about ageing and older adults. While recent ageing education and intergenerational programs in schools primarily emphasize children's perspectives and their interactions with older adults, they often overlook the role and attitudes of instructors (Avcı et al., 2024; Feldman et al., 2003; Giraudeau & Bailly, 2019). Research indicates that older teachers and female teachers with high levels of ageing anxiety tend to hold more negative stereotypes about older adults (Avcı et al., 2024). Consequently, for these programs to achieve their intended outcomes, it is essential to ensure that those delivering the interventions possess a positive outlook on ageing. Additionally, equipping educators with the knowledge and skills to integrate ageing-related topics into the curriculum is a critical prerequisite for the success of such initiatives (Hembacher & Cruise, 2006).

Intergenerational exchange. Evidence demonstrates that intergenerational initiatives can effectively reduce or eliminate discrimination across all age groups (Christian, et a., 2014; WHO, 2021). Programs that facilitate interaction between younger and older individuals—through community projects, mentoring, and shared activities—can dismantle stereotypes and foster mutual understanding. For example, intergenerational mentoring, where older individuals share their knowledge and experience with younger generations (and vice versa), establishes a two-way communication channel that promotes respect and appreciation between the groups. Similarly, collaborative activities, such as volunteering or community projects, provide opportunities for dialogue and relationship-building, challenging negative attitudes toward ageing and enhancing social cohesion (WHO, 2021).

The effectiveness of intergenerational programs has been the subject of debate in the literature. Some studies suggest that these initiatives may unintentionally reinforce negative perceptions, as

children interacting with frail or ill older adults might view them as passive, dependent, or helpless (Middlecamp & Gross, 2002; Rosenwasser et al., 1986; Seefeldt, 1987). Consequently, some researchers have argued that intergenerational programs alone may be insufficient to achieve lasting positive outcomes. Instead, integrating these interactions with educational components embedded within the school curriculum has been shown to yield more effective results (Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1991; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002). For instance, following intergenerational visits, programs that incorporate supplementary activities such as reading age-appropriate books, watching videos, or viewing photographs that depict older adults in diverse and non-stereotypical roles have demonstrated greater success in reducing children's negative stereotypes (Dellman-Jenkins et al., 1991; Middlecamp & Gross, 2002).

Adequate law and policies. The formulation of policies that explicitly acknowledge ageing as a natural part of life, that guarantees the enjoyment of all human rights across the life-span and that considers all ages' needs and contributions can effectively mitigate ageism. Conversely, policy responses, which focus on the loss of physical and mental capabilities of people as they age and on meeting 'vulnerabilities' and 'needs' contribute to a negative narrative of ageing, which neglects older people's agency, their experiences, their potential, and their contribution to society (AGE Platform, 2021). By ensuring that no demographic group is marginalized, societies can foster inclusivity and promote equitable opportunities across the life course. For instance, the establishment of employment opportunities for older adults—such as flexible work arrangements or provisions for later retirement—can also transform perceptions regarding their capabilities and contributions. This approach reinforces the notion that older adults remain integral participants in both the workforce and the broader societal context. Moreover, as mentioned above, policies and laws are an essential tool to promote educational initiatives and intergenerational exchanges.

While the three areas of intervention identified by the WHO appear as crucial, it is essential to understand the experiences and needs of citizens regarding age discrimination to ensure that interventions are effectively tailored to their purposes. In this context, the "Ageism and the Next EU Agenda – Citizens' Workshop" organized as part of the FutuRes project, aimed not only to highlight the role of ageism as a key barrier to resilience throughout various life course events, but also to engage with citizens, listen to their concerns, and discuss effective solutions. This approach ensured that the proposals developed were aligned with citizens' perspectives. A detailed report on the outcomes of this event is provided in Part II of this deliverable.

PART II – FutuRes citizens' workshop "Ageism and the next EU Agenda"

The FutuRes project organized an online public workshop aimed at gathering insights, examples of best practices, and diverse perspectives on educational and intergenerational interventions and policies to combat ageism. Held on September 26, 2024, the workshop attracted 130 external participants, including members of civil society organizations, volunteers, engaged citizens, community organizers, care workers, and educators. Participants engaged in discussions conducted in a structured and interactive environment, and this in five European languages: English, Spanish, German, French, and Italian. The online event was organized around the three main pillars of actions to challenge ageism, which are educational interventions; intergenerational exchanges; policies and laws as defined by WHO (2020) After being introduced to each pillar and responding to short quizzes and polls, participants were invited to discuss possible solutions to prevent age discrimination. In this context, they identified some solutions, which are summarized in the following table and discussed in detail below.

Educational interventions	- Life-long learning on ageing and old age - Awareness within families - Campaigning and adding value - A broader target group for educational interventions
Intergenerational exchanges	- Nurturing intergenerational interactions - Communicating intergenerational activities properly
Policies and laws	- Addressing age discrimination policies and lack of accountability in institutions - Health policies better mainstreaming ageing and eradicate ageism - Increase representation of older politicians to adequate represent older people - UN Convention on the rights of older people

Table 1: Summary of key areas of intervention

Educational interventions

The WHO Report on Ageism cites examples of educational interventions. These include workshops with lectures directly involving older people, with life-story documentaries, homework to students to practice new skills with older people in their lives and virtual reality activities to foster empathy for older adults. Research however states that the impact of educational interventions on ageism

against younger people remains underexplored. Such interventions do not require massive investments and are considered affordable.

Many participants at the workshop emphasised that ageism awareness should be integrated into school curricula. Asked about at what age educational interventions could be more effective to contrast ageism, 96 participants replied to a proposed poll, giving most relevance to the 13-18 age range, as showed below.

1. When would educational interventions against ageism have the most impact? ¿Cuándo serían más eficaces las intervenciones educativas contro el edadismo? Wann wären pädagogische Maßnahmen gegen Altersdiskriminierung wirksamer? Quand est-ce que les interventions éducatives contre l'âgisme seraient plus efficaces ? Quando gli interventi educativi per contrastare l'ageismo sarebbero più efficaci? (Scelta multipla)
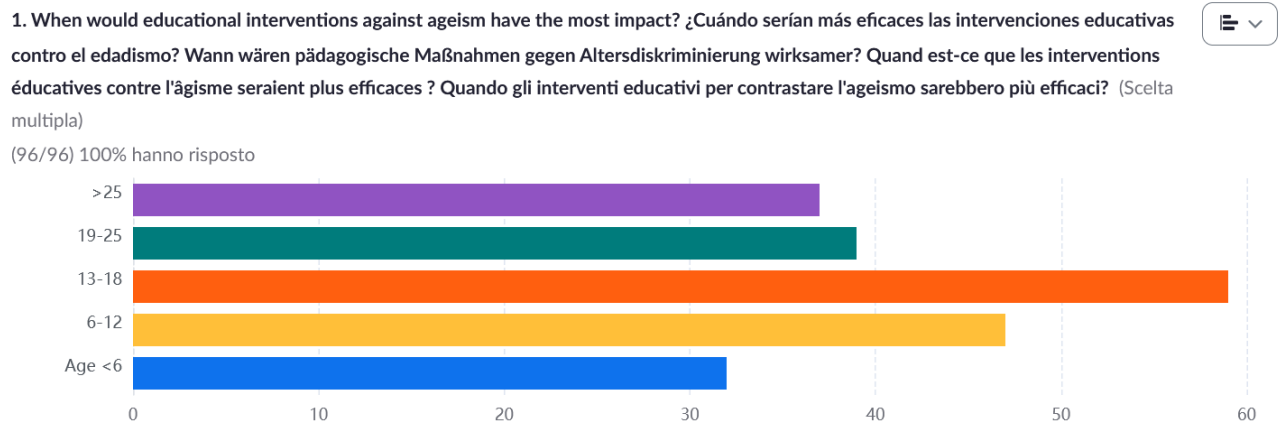
(96/96) 100% hanno risposto

Figure 1: Results of the poll on educational interventions

Across the replies, however, a life-course approach emerges, with educational interventions being considered impactful since the earliest age until adulthood. During the open discussion, the following comments and feedback were provided:

- Early childhood is the age range where educational interventions are considered to have most impact, as interventions at the earliest age can more efficiently contrast internalized ageism.

- A publication explaining the attitudes and perspectives of young children towards older adults was shared: "Young children's attitudes and perceptions of older adults".

- Training on ageing awareness should not be learnt only from books but in the real daily life and should start from family level.

- Age-related education could be included in the curricula of trainings in social sciences, health education, psychology.

- Advertising can be an effective way to break down cultural barriers in society.

- The meaning of "successful ageing" should be reconsidered. Quoting a participant: *"successful ageing is often associated with some kind of eternal youth. I think successful ageing is being ok with the process of ageing and having access to whatever is needed to have a meaningful life at all stages."*

- Longevity not only offers a new approach for society to live longer, but it can also provide economic benefits. One participant mentioned the book from the economist Andrew Scott

"The Longevity Imperative" which provides economic arguments to policymakers about the benefits of longevity.

- A comment concerned the age of politicians and considered important that education against age discrimination is provided not only to children but also to politicians, parliamentarians and decision-makers.

- It was suggested that training for employers would be very useful as workplaces often see much age discrimination. In addition, a participant stated that: *"in our research we found that often people working in job centres do not consider older people 'capable' of taking certain jobs based on ageist perceptions."*

- It was pointed out that the older people in Italy do not receive much attention and that the current government has not addressed ageism, not yet through the work of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Policies.

- Learning to live together does not only come from books and trainings, but also from everyday life and family, and it is a continuous experience, across the life-course. One participant held these views: *"This seems to be a kind of paradox. In order to protect the many rights of everyone we are separating the many segments of our life from childhood to old age…"*

- Participants emphasized the importance of encouraging older adults to take a more active role in civil society. One participant proposed initiatives like #AgePride to advocate for the visibility of ageing and frailty in public spaces as a normal part of life, and stated: *"it is okay to display frail bodies in public spaces and to acknowledge that we may become frailer with age."*

Additional quotes are relevant for deepening the work on education against ageism:

- *"I also think if we can incorporate age - related topics in social studies, health education and psychology classes and develop lesson plans addressing age stereotypes, bias, and discrimination. For teaching strategies, we can use case studies, role playing, and group discussion. Invite guest speakers from diverse age groups to share their experience. This can be done by use age neutral language."*

- *"Education can be effective when directed at historical "perpetrators" i.e., employers, healthcare providers."*

- *"…educate employers on the importance of age equity across the age spectrum…"*

- *"Education for employers would also be very useful as this is often where we see lots of ageism causing issues for older persons. Also, education for those working in state job centres supporting older persons into work - in our research we have found that often those working in job centres do not consider older people "capable" of taking certain jobs based on ageist perceptions."*

- *"Education for human resource departments, employment agencies…"*
- *"Government and NGO needs to raise public awareness campaigns to educate people on what's ageism and the impact on older people."*
- *"Education about Ageism must be implemented in schools (all levels), in a way that will allow for interaction/ discussion."*
- *"Intergrate ageism awareness into school curricula and promote intergenerational learning programs that bring together people of different ages."*
- *"…One key issue is the lack of focus on gerontology in medical school curricula…"*
- *"We learn from childhood that being old is bad."*
- *"I think that when talking about ageing, people usually think to older cohorts who are already old or getting older but one does not think about own ageing process. I think it would be good to start teaching people to think over own path to old age since very early stage and starting from schools."*

Intergenerational contacts initiatives

Intergenerational interventions seek to encourage interactions between different age groups. They can take the shape of mentorship programmes, intergenerational workshops or trainings, exchanges, community service projects, volunteering, co-housing initiatives, digital literacy programmes.

Participants were encouraged to reflect on their own intergenerational relationships and the discussion opened on attitudes towards older adults across the generations. The following comments were shared:

- Images of old age have changed, but many people have not yet realised this, and more is needed to reduce prejudices. Supporting this statement, a participant said that: *"the more we talk to each other, the more prejudices fall away"*. Beyond the issue of the images of older people and of age, the question of people's attitude towards different generations was raised, underlining the need to challenge both images and attitudes to combat ageism towards both young and old generations.
- A publication about this topic was shared: "Intergenerational Contact Predicts Attitudes Toward Older Adults Through Inclusion of the Outgroup in the Self".
- The significance of intergenerational interactions was highlighted, and a practical project implemented in Italy was briefly described, showing encouraging results in connecting different generations. More information through this project by the Italian association ATDAL "Tales in the kitchen – Grandmothers shares memories and recipes in Italy"
- The role of games and fun activities involving young people and older adults was also underlined.

- Various campaigns were shared, such as a <u>campaign to combat ageism in Zurich</u>, an ongoing <u>campaign where we invite people of all ages to get photographed in Greece</u> sending messages of social cohesion, and the existence of programmes such as "Adopt- a Granny/Grandpa". Also, the <u>project "Be the Change"</u> by INRCA (National Italian Institute on Ageing) was mentioned in the field of employment, to ease the transfer of skills from older entrepreneurs to young people who are not working or not educated.

- It was moreover highlighted that these interventions put different age groups at the same level, meaning that sharing of knowledge and experience is not unilateral. *"When we think about interventions we need to consider the power relations between participants. So, we need to stop having programmes where only young people share knowledge with older people (namely about tech training)…"*

- Instead of framing activities expressively for older people when they actually are open to people of all ages, such as *"pilates for the older people"*, it may be effective to name and conceive such learning activities for all ages.

- Last, the report "<u>Rigeneriamoci</u> (in Italian, "Let's regenerate" in English) was shared by INRCA as an additional resource.

The following quotes are particularly relevant in the discussion about intergenerational issues to provide additional grounds for initiatives, both at societal and individual levels:

- *"This seems to be a kind of a paradox. To protect the many rights of everyone we are separating the many segments of our life from childhood to old age. Education to live together doesn't comes only from books and formula but stems from everyday life, family… it's a continued experience."*

- *"Because of the segmented society we all live in, I believe we need to take advantage of intergenerational contact daily (family, nursing homes, community, etc.) and create educational interventions in those settings, instead of just trying to do interventions on a formal education setting."*

- *"An ongoing campaign where we invite people of all ages to get photographed, sending a message about the importance of social cohesion. This campaign becomes the beginning for discussions about ageism and the importance of intergenerational connections and interventions."*

- *"Practicing arts and playing/singing music may be valuable and effective means for making in contact people of different generations because arts have a universal communicative power and because in such context age does not matter but competences and having a common goal that is creating something beautiful."*

- *"Mentoring and reverse mentoring activities in the schools or in the community have the potential to let both old people and young people to teach to and learn from each other's and let both to be the active part, at turn, in this process, instead of being the passive*

recipients. Activities should be ongoing (regular) instead of low level of contact ones (occasional)."

- *"I think a golden rule for these intergenerational actions is that interventions put both groups at the same level, meaning that sharing of knowledge and experience is not unilateral. When we think about interventions we need to consider the power relations between participants. So, we need to stop having programmes where only young people share knowledge with older people (namely about tech training) …"*

- *"Usually, leisure activities are often organised in age groups (for instance music lessons, or language lessons, 'Pilates for seniors', etc). However, when it is not the case, the learning experience is usually richer. Promoting all-ages learning activities may be a clue."*

Policies and laws

Policies and laws establish a framework for combating ageism. Policies are plans or commitments that address specific issues, while laws are rules recognized by a country or community to govern the behavior of its members, enforceable through penalties. To combat ageism, policies and laws may include legislation targeting age discrimination and inequalities, initiatives promoting respect for the dignity of individuals of all ages, and human rights laws that safeguard these principles. Governments and public bodies must ensure the rights of individuals across the lifespan. If they fail to do so, they can hold accountable.

When participants were polled about the areas where they felt ageism was most prevalent, the results showed that work and occupation, along with health, were among the top areas. The following figure presents the ranking of the major areas exposed to ageism, as identified in the poll. These results further highlight how ageism permeates every sphere of our individual and social lives.

The following is a compilation of the main comments regarding the pillar of policies and laws aimed at combating ageism.

Participants underscored the need for special interventions to raise awareness of ageism, particularly among employers and healthcare providers, sharing their own and their relatives' experiences of discrimination in these areas and drawing attention to discriminatory age-related policies and the lack of accountability within institutions. Some participants highlighted difficulties in accessing healthcare, with health problems frequently dismissed by doctors as a normal part of ageing, leading to inadequate care.

Work/Occupation - Trabajo/Ocupación - Arbeit/Beruf - Travail/Profession - Lavoro/Occupazione	47/73 (64%)
Health - Salud - Gesundheit - Santé - Salute	40/73 (55%)
Transport - Transporte - Transport - Transport - Trasporti	28/73 (38%)
Technology - Tecnología - Techologie - Technologie - Tecnologia	27/73 (37%)
Care - Cuidado - Pflege - Soins - Assistenza	25/73 (34%)
Media - Medien - Médias	22/73 (30%)
Justice and safety - Justicia y seguridad - Justiz und Sicherheit - Justice et sécurité - Giustizia e sicurezza	22/73 (30%)
Housing - Alojamento - Wohnun- Logement - Abitazione	22/73 (30%)
Education - Educación - Bildung - Education - Istruzione	17/73 (23%)
I don't know - Non se - Ich weiss nicht - Je ne sais pas - Non so	1/73 (1%)
Other - Otros - Andere - Autres - Altro	1/73 (1%)

Figure 2: Perceived areas where ageism hits the most

- The bank sector was also brought forward, with some comments finding it increasingly difficult to access basic banking services, while lacking the necessary digital skills.
- It was suggested that parliaments and governments closely monitor demographic surveys and adjust their policies accordingly. Increasing the representation of older politicians in parliaments was seen as a way to ensure that the needs of the older population are adequately represented. It was reminded that there is an age-related problem regarding the preservation of the driver's license.
- It was underlined that the area of ageism suffers from a relevant lack of action and that we should all collectively and strategically look at what is missing and speed up action on those fronts.

Some additional quotes are relevant to further deepen the discussion on laws and policies against ageism and to provide insights of where and how laws and policies should better perform:

- *Advertising: "I think that advertising can be used as it has been done in other fields because what we must do is to kill some barriers which are cultural."*
- *Volunteering: "It is important to show that greater consideration to the economic power of the voluntary work of older people."*

- *Lobbying: "Being so numerous, older people should be more conscious about the fact that we are a strong group able to move votes when it comes to national or EU elections. We should be more incisive in the lobbying activity."*

- *Implementation: "It's important to have laws but even more important is their implementation!" and "We are all in the same boat, so I think it is important to communicate at eye level..."*

- *Accountability: "And accountability - meaning that those who are setting a good example be recognised and those who are violating policy and guidelines should be recognised and penalised. That gets everyone's attention!"*

- *Governance: "In Spain we have a Minister of Equality, to promote equality between women and men due to the high level of discrimination related to the women, my proposal is to include in this Minister the competence for avoid age discrimination and not only gender discrimination and promote all polices to avoid this ageism that all Europe is suffering."*

- *Funding: "Senior cohousing and intergenerational cohousing are mentioned in the recent Italian legislation about health and social welfare for older persons, but unfortunately, this law has not additional fundings, and the financing of activities will need other and future laws."*

– *International recognition: "I think that a UN convention to protect the rights of older people (included the right not to be discriminated) could be a good starting point to stimulate EU (another pan-national organisations) and national governments to act against ageism."*

– *Changing the image of old age: "It is very important to show the added value created by the senior people" and "the more we talk to each other, the more prejudices fall away. 53% of respondents say that older people hinder social progress, do not do enough for climate change, are not efficient enough and not fit enough. 51% would agree that people over the age of 70 should no longer be allowed to hold political office. So, we must talk, come in contact. Images of old age have changed, but many people have not yet realised this."*
Awareness of rights: "...And knowledge dissemination too, I think. Because many people have rights and don't know. It also has to do with the perception of oneself as rights holder. Internalized ageism is also impacting people by affecting their image as rights holders."

Conclusions

This report addresses ageism within the framework of societal resilience and explores strategies for its mitigation. Drawing on an extensive literature review and insights from a workshop conducted as part of the FutuRes project, this deliverable outlines the challenges of ageism while offering practical solutions aligned with the World Health Organization's work. It highlights the persistence of ageism within current policy frameworks, identifies elements that perpetuate ageist attitudes, and emphasizes the importance of educational initiatives, intergenerational exchanges, and effective policies in combating discrimination and fostering inclusivity and resilience. These three areas of intervention are deeply interconnected and should not be considered in isolation.

➢ To effectively counter ageism, it is essential to first understand its underlying causes and develop measures that prevent discrimination and mitigate its effects. Early insights into how discrimination forms can inform more effective interventions, particularly by addressing the formation of age-related prejudices and stereotypes (Mendonça et al., 2018). Educational initiatives at an early age can serve as a tool to challenge these stereotypes, while lifelong learning and adult education are vital for the active inclusion of older adults in society.

➢ Ageism can strain intergenerational relationships and hinder the development of social networks. In times of crisis—whether economic, environmental, or social—a resilient society depends on strong intergenerational cooperation. However, ageist attitudes create barriers to these vital connections, fostering distrust and division between generations. Intergenerational activities are therefore crucial for building cohesion and solidarity, as demonstrated by the experiences shared by workshop participants.

➢ Policies and laws play a critical role in providing a framework for educational interventions and intergenerational exchange. These frameworks must be revised to be inclusive of all age groups. Conversely, policies that create competition between younger and older generations for limited resources—such as healthcare, pensions, or employment opportunities—can exacerbate tensions and undermine societal solidarity, weakening resilience in the face of crises.

A resilient society is one that can adapt to challenges and foster inclusivity. Ageism, however, can erode these qualities by perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination that marginalize older adults, leading to their social exclusion. When ageist attitudes become embedded in societal structures—such as policies, laws, and cultural norms—they restrict the potential of older individuals to contribute meaningfully to the economy and society, while also denying them their basic human rights in old age. This exclusion harms not only older individuals but also deprives society of the valuable experience, wisdom, and expertise that older people can offer.

Addressing ageism is therefore essential to building a resilient society. By combating discriminatory attitudes and ensuring equal opportunities for people of all ages, societies can tap into the full potential of their populations, fostering greater social cohesion and the ability to adapt to future challenges. A society that values individuals across the lifespan—rather than marginalizing them based on age—will be better equipped to respond to crises, promote long-term well-being, and ensure that everyone can contribute to and benefit from a shared, sustainable future.

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