

14th July 2015

## SIXTH SESSION OF UN OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON AGEING

### Statement by AGE Platform Europe

*on recent policy developments and initiatives concerning the human rights of older persons*

Distinguished chair, members of the Bureau and delegates,

I am speaking on behalf of AGE Platform Europe (AGE), the self-advocacy network representing directly over 40 million older people in the European Union. AGE is represented in this Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) for the fourth time and we are very happy to welcome in our delegation this year the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI), one of our main partners, which to date does not have participation rights in this meeting, which is why we wish to reiterate our call to grant the possibility for participation to NHRIs in future OEWG meetings.

With regard to the discussions of this panel on recent policy developments on the rights of older people, I would like to stress AGE's work to promote age friendly environments. Many solutions for active and healthy ageing have been developed as pilots across the EU, but they remain isolated and do not get scaled up, not even in their own country. This means that their impact remains limited. Often the various governance levels that need to work together to support age-friendly environments do not coordinate their action and there is no structure at EU level to coordinate local/regional/national actors. For this reason, AGE is working towards the adoption of an **EU Covenant on Demographic Change**, which aims to gather all local, regional and national authorities, and other stakeholders, that commit to cooperate and implement evidence-based solutions to support active and healthy ageing as a comprehensive answer to Europe's demographic challenge. This work is co-ordinated through a large EU-funded project and we are very happy that the city of Manchester represented here is one of our project's ambassadors.

The Covenant on Demographic Change will be open to all interested parties across the EU and will be officially launched in Brussels in December. It will connect and align with existing initiatives such as the World Health Organisation Global Network on Age-Friendly Cities and Communities and its affiliated programmes. The Covenant will help members build 'action plans' starting with a 'mapping of the needs' together with citizens, notably older people, detailing what already exists to meet these needs and what is still needed.

AGE sees an opportunity in linking the development of age-friendly environments with a **rights-based approach** and would like to invite also other regions, firstly to ensure the **involvement of older people** in the development of age-friendly initiatives and secondly to identify the barriers to the realisation of older people's rights and what can be achieved at different levels. For example, whereas changes at the local level can considerably improve every day living in cities, national law reforms are also needed to ensure that people are not discriminated in access to essential financial services, complementary health insurance, disability benefits, surgical and preventive treatment, employment and training.

Unless there is a **comprehensive rights-based framework**, barriers to the enjoyment of older people's rights will persist. Human rights are not up for cherry-picking; for example, alongside improvements of



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transport systems, member states need to ensure that the current context of austerity does not increase the risk of human rights violations against older persons. Unfortunately within the EU, an increasing number of services are now at the individual expense of older people, including health and long-term care and other essential services, such as housing or even transport. This is in particular the case of the 'oldest old' – mainly women but also older migrants or people with disabilities – some of them facing the dramatic dilemma of having to choose between eating a proper meal, heating their home or having the dental care they need. National and regional policies need to ensure that nobody is left behind. They need to be based on clear human rights standards and allow Member States to be accountable about the progress achieved as well as the impact of policies and structural reforms on the rights of older persons. Unfortunately to date this is not possible; whereas there are some good practices in specific areas, older people are still denied the **full enjoyment of their human rights**.

Under these considerations we urge Member States to move from ad hoc solutions to ageing issues to a new vision of older people as rights holders and the equal recognition of their rights under international standards.

Thank you

**Ebbe JOHANSEN**

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