

Enabling Environments

Mainstreaming Ageing

Policy Position Paper August 2024

Introduction

Ireland is a signatory to the Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing (2022) which pledges member states to mainstream ageing in order ‘to advance a society for all ages’. Guidelines for mainstreaming ageing prepared by the United Nations (UN) define it as the ‘systematic integration of ageing issues across all relevant policy fields and at all levels of government.’ Age & Opportunity believe that mainstreaming is a crucial part of a fundamental shift in thinking about ageing and older persons which will lead to a more equal society for all of us as we age.

We agree with the claim made by Robert Venne in his work for the UN Department on Economic and Social Affairs that ‘Mainstreaming, along with other active efforts to promote social integration, is necessary because most decision making has not been sufficiently inclusive. This has led to the exclusion of certain groups from participating fully in societal activities.’

Leaving nobody behind

To mitigate this exclusion the expectations, potentials and needs of older persons must be considered in the decision-making processes and policies of governments and other public bodies, whether at national, regional, or local level. Older persons are not a homogenous group and will have diverse needs, preferences, and opportunities throughout the course of their lives. Crucial therefore to the successful mainstreaming of ageing is a life-course approach which considers how our accumulated life experiences contribute to our experience of ageing. This perspective expands the narrative about older persons which is

often restricted to health and care. It is a cross-cutting approach which mirrors mainstreaming in its consideration of all domains of life. To leave nobody behind, the life-course approach is useful for policy makers to ensure that policies are inclusive of all older persons and to put effective measures in place to mitigate the accumulation of disadvantage for all age groups.

Consultation and collaboration

Robert Venne recommends that ‘Mainstreaming the concerns of older persons should not be undertaken as a top-down activity. It is of utmost importance that the older persons most affected by exclusion are heard and can bring their own perspectives to the discussions and approaches for furthering their rights and integration.’ To this end, Age & Opportunity recommend more consultation with a diverse representation of older persons and age sector NGOs as well as meaningful collaboration between all relevant stakeholders in the public and private sector, academia, social partners, and civil society.

Gathering evidence

Effective mainstreaming will be reinforced by robust evidence about the experiences of older persons. Recognising that we are not all the same, research should differentiate between age and circumstance. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights points out that ‘Disaggregation by age and other critical sociodemographic variables such as gender, living arrangements, education, employment and income, means that data can be properly analysed and compared with other population groups.’ Research should take a human rights-based approach including meaningful participation of older persons in research teams at all research stages.

Putting structures in place

Claudia Mahler is the United Nations Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of all Human Rights by Older Persons. In her introduction to Age Platform Europe's rallying call for a UN

Convention on the rights of older persons she writes that 'the lack of a dedicated and comprehensive international legal instrument to promote and protect the rights and dignity of older persons has practical implications as the issues of ageing remain inconspicuous, insufficient and fragmented in existing human rights frameworks'.

The state is responsible for respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights but when human rights principles do not underpin all our public services state obligations can be eclipsed by the real and present pressures of balancing budgets and meeting targets. Mainstreaming ageing in Ireland would be facilitated by a UN convention on the rights of older persons that applies to older persons everywhere and Ireland should support this call.

In the meantime, the 2022 Rome Ministerial Declaration on Ageing encourages 'the establishment of independent bodies, for example, ombudspersons, at national, subnational, and local levels that can mediate the rights, needs and interests of older persons in all areas of society.' Age & Opportunity, along with other age sector organisations, have called for an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People to fulfil this role in Ireland. One of the main functions of this role is to monitor Ireland's pledge, as part of its adoption of the Declaration, to work towards achieving three policy goals, one of which is mainstreaming ageing. In adopting the Declaration Ministers pledged to:

- develop or strengthen national frameworks for mainstreaming ageing and building capacity for implementing them.
- coordinate ageing-related policies across all levels of government.
- develop a participatory stakeholder engagement approach to mainstreaming ageing, involving all relevant actors, including older persons and their representatives.

Age & Opportunity believe that by bringing issues that have not received the consideration they deserve to the centre of attention, mainstreaming can be an important catalyst for focus and inclusion into all aspects of social, political, economic and cultural life.

Age & Opportunity is working to mainstream ageing by:

- Raising awareness among policy makers about Ireland's commitment to mainstream ageing under the Rome Ministerial Declaration.
- Supporting actions to mainstream ageing and the concerns of older persons into national frameworks and strategies.
- Supporting advocacy, awareness raising, and public education about the importance of mainstreaming ageing and its benefits for all age groups.
- Promoting inclusion of a diverse representation of older persons more visible in words and images in all relevant public policy and strategy documents.
- Calling on Government for greater investment in research and data collection relating to ageing and older persons including the meaningful participation of older persons in research teams at all research stages.
- Calling on Government for the development of tools to screen and evaluate existing laws, policies, and programmes to ensure the needs of all generations are considered.
- Creating opportunities for meaningful consultation with a diverse representation of older persons in all instances where policy is being developed that might impact on older persons.
- Promoting active citizenship and meaningful participation of older people at all levels of Government on an ongoing basis.
- Calling on Government for implementation plans for all policies and ensuring appropriate monitoring and tracking across Government departments.
- Calling on Government to establish of an Independent Commissioner for Ageing and Older People to further and monitor the mainstreaming of ageing.
- Calling on Government to support the global movement for a United Nations Convention on the Rights of Older Persons.

References

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- Age Platform Europe (2021), Human Rights are for all Ages - The EU must lead the rallying for a UN Convention.
- The Alliance of Age Sector NGOs (2023), Telling It Like It Is, Combatting Ageism.

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Age & Opportunity's policy positions support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals