



**Brussels, 31 March 2025  
(OR. en)**

**7292/25**

**SOC 143  
EMPL 95  
AG 37  
COH 22  
SAN 103  
GENDER 27  
EDUC 68**

**NOTE**

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From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Draft Council Conclusions on Unlocking the potential of older people

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In preparation of the Social Questions Working Party on 7 April 2025, delegations will find attached a set of draft Council Conclusions on “Unlocking the potential of older people” prepared by the Presidency.

**UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF OLDER PEOPLE**

**DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS**

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING:

1. Article 3(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) which states that the Union shall work, among others, towards full employment and social progress, combat social exclusion and discrimination and that it shall promote, among others, social justice and protection, equality between women and men and solidarity between generations, as well as economic, social, and territorial cohesion. Article 145 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFUE) which underlines the Union's commitment to developing a coordinated strategy for employment with a view to achieving the objectives defined in Article 3 TEU, including full employment and social progress.
2. Article 159 TFEU which tasks the Commission with drawing up an annual report to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee on the progress made in achieving the objectives of Article 151 TFEU, that include the promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, proper social protection and the development of human resources with a view to lasting high employment and the combating of exclusion.

3. Article 174 TFEU which stipulates that, in its economic, social and territorial cohesion policy, aimed, among others, at reducing disparities between the levels of development of the various regions and the backwardness of the least favoured regions, the Union shall pay particular attention to rural areas, areas affected by industrial transition, and regions which suffer from severe and permanent natural or demographic handicaps.
4. The **European Council** Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, which resolves to address, in a comprehensive way, demographic challenges and their impact on competitiveness, human capital and equality; to ensure that Europe's economic model and welfare systems support a thriving longevity society; and to invest in people's skills, training and education throughout their lives and encourage talent mobility within the European Union and beyond.
5. The Commission's European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (2021), with its principles and highlighting the importance of increasing the labour market participation of older people to achieve the necessary increase in employment, improve social inclusion, while preventing poverty, including in old age.
6. Council Directive **2000/78/EC** which lays down a general framework for combating discrimination on the ground of age, as well as religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation, in the field of employment and occupation, with a view to putting into effect in the Member States the principle of equal treatment. It also emphasises the need to pay particular attention to supporting older workers to increase their participation in the labour force.
7. Council Directive **(EU) 2024/1499** which lays down standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their age, as well as their religion or belief, disability or sexual orientation.

8. The EU Council Decision (2024)<sup>1</sup> on guidelines for the employment policies, in particular guidelines 6 and 8, called on Member States, respectively, to aim to enhance labour supply and improve access to employment, lifelong acquisition of skills and competences, inter alia, by enhancing inclusiveness and human capital development, fostering the acquisition of skills and competences throughout people's lives, as well as to promote equal opportunities for all, inter alia, by supporting pension reforms by policies that promote active and healthy ageing and extend working lives.
9. The opinions of the European Economic and Social Committee entitled: *Older people in employment – systemic factors in choosing to work for longer*<sup>2</sup>, *European Strategy for Older Persons*<sup>3</sup>, and *Promoting European intergenerational solidarity – towards an EU horizontal approach*<sup>4</sup> emphasising the need for coordinated measures across different areas of public policy to support the employment of older people, as well as the importance of social dialogue in this area.
10. The European Commission's communications on *Demographic change in Europe: toolbox for action*<sup>5</sup> and on the *European Care Strategy* which indicate that active ageing policies, decent and tailored working conditions as well as early intervention, health promotion and disease prevention, can empower older generations to extend their working lives on a voluntary basis and further support longer independent, healthy and active living and delay the onset of care needs.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, longer working lives can allow people to update their skills on the job and remain active, helping employers to retain staff, while promoting knowledge transfers in multi-generational workforces<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Council Decision (EU) 2024/3134 of 2 December 2024 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States.

<sup>2</sup> EESC opinion: *Older people in employment – systemic factors in choosing to work for longer* (SOC/817-EESC-2024), 26 February 2025.

<sup>3</sup> EESC opinion: *European Strategy for Older Persons* (2023/C 349/06), 12 July 2023

<sup>4</sup> EESC opinion: [\*Promoting European intergenerational solidarity – towards an EU horizontal approach\*, \(OJ C, C/2024/6869\), 28 November 2024.](#)

<sup>5</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action, COM(2023)577 final, Brussels, 11.10.2023

<sup>6</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European care strategy, COM(2022) 440 final, Brussels, 07.09.2022.

<sup>7</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action, COM/2023/577 final p.13

11. The European Commission's *Action Plan on labour and skills shortages in the EU*<sup>1</sup>, which stresses the need to further activate older adults to contribute to tackling labour and skills shortages.
12. The European Commission's *Green Paper on Ageing* stating, inter alia, that a thriving ageing society is predicated on healthy and active ageing access to high quality health care and long-term care services, as well as lifelong learning<sup>2</sup>, and noting that, while the competence for dealing with the effects of ageing is largely in the hands of Member States, the EU is well placed to identify and analyse key issues and trends, facilitate exchange of best practices and support action on ageing at national, regional and local level, as well as to develop their own tailor-made policy responses to ageing.
13. The 2024 European Commission and SPC Pension Adequacy Report, observing that inclusive and robust labour markets are key to maintaining adequate pensions in an ageing society, calling for further efforts to ensure fair retirement security for all, including policies to mitigate the impact of care responsibilities, and to promote longer careers, including through positive incentives and flexible retirement pathways, while reducing the gender pension gap, and showing that pension adequacy and fiscal sustainability are goals that are inextricably linked, necessitating an integrated response to the challenge of ageing.<sup>3</sup>
14. The High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity conclusion paper *Age equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of age*<sup>4</sup> addressing the impact of discrimination on the grounds of age and ageism and outlining relevant legal and policy framework while presenting concrete challenges and policy responses implemented at European and national levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region - Labour and skills shortages in the EU: an action plan, COM(2024) 131 final, Brussels, 20.03.2024

<sup>2</sup> The Green Paper on Ageing 'Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations', European Commission, COM(2021) 50 final, Brussels, 27.01.2021

<sup>3</sup> The 2024 pension adequacy report – Current and future income adequacy in old age in the EU. Volume I, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/909323>, pp. 12-13.

<sup>4</sup> Network of experts in the field of anti-discrimination - European Commission

## TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION THE FOLLOWING:

15. Demographic change, including the ageing of societies, is becoming one of the most important challenges facing Member States. According to Eurostat data in 2024, people aged 65 or over accounted for 21.6% of the EU population, a proportion which will increase to 30% by 2060. In the same period, the proportion of people aged 15-64 will fall from 63.8% to 56.6%.<sup>1</sup> The average age of the population increased from 39 years to 44.5 years between 2002 and 2023, and by 2060 it will have reached 48.8 years.<sup>2</sup> Policymakers are therefore facing new challenges and opportunities in terms of living and working conditions, social protection as well as access to care services. Promoting economic activity opportunities for those aged over 55 requires new thinking at company, regional, sectoral, Member State and EU level. There is a need for innovative approaches to working conditions and career paths allowing people over the age of 55 to retain their physical and mental health, together with the development of skills, motivation and productivity, throughout an extended working life.<sup>3</sup>
16. The fact that more people than ever before are living longer and healthier means that they remain active for longer, have longer working lives and participating in social activities after they retire. These new realities are changing the understanding of longevity, shining a light on the important contribution older people make to society and the economy through extended economic activity, intergenerational learning and cohesion.<sup>4</sup>
17. Successful measures to voluntarily extend the economic activity of older workers are predicated on their state of health which is related to their lifestyle, socio-economic conditions as well as to the physical and mental strenuousness of their jobs. Optimisation of health results of older persons requires sustained and comprehensive preventive and curative healthcare, adapted to the specific needs and health issues of both women and men, combined with adequate supportive and occupational health and safety (OHS) measures.

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<sup>1</sup> Eurostat: demo\_pjan, proj\_23np (data extracted on: 17.02.2025 r.).

<sup>2</sup> Eurostat: proj\_23ndbi (data extracted on 17.02.2025).

<sup>3</sup> Eiffe, F.F. et al. (2024), "Keeping older workers engaged: Policies, practices and mechanisms", Eurofound Working Paper WPEF24030, 2024, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-02/wpef24030.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Green Paper on Ageing 'Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations', European Commission, COM (2021) 50 final, Brussels, 27.01.2021.

18. The growing share of older people in the population, in the rapidly developing digital world, requires new approaches to be adopted as regards employment and social policy. Changes in the structure of families, the loosening of social ties, the development of digital media, including social media and new ways of remote communication, as well as remote working, may contribute to a growing sense of isolation and loneliness, though digitisation may also contribute to better connectedness. At older age, this can translate into a faster loss of health and independence, lack of support with care needs and increase in poverty and social exclusion. <sup>1</sup> All of these issues require an appropriate policy response.
19. Active labour market policies in line with the recently proposed overarching strategy *Union of Skills*<sup>2</sup> and the *Action Plan on labour and skills shortages in EU*<sup>3</sup> will be key to enhancing labour market retention and integration and facilitating job-to-job transitions so as to ensure that the potential of the working age population is utilised optimally. In addition, enhancing access to upskilling and reskilling, skills recognition as well as more flexible and adapted workplace accommodations.
20. The European Commission has committed to develop a *Strategy on Intergenerational Fairness to map out how communication between generations can be strengthened and to ensure that the interests of present and future generations are respected throughout policy and law making*<sup>4</sup>.
21. The contribution of older people should be particularly valued in the workplace, where it can foster dynamism and innovation through mutual learning, knowledge sharing, and diverse approaches; in families, where older people can, for example, assist young parents with caregiving responsibilities and in society and local communities, where older people can bridge generational divides, passing on culture, values, and social norms to younger generations, fostering empathy and mutual understanding, and promoting a more cohesive and inclusive society.

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<sup>1</sup> Mahoney, J. et al. (2024), “Measuring social connectedness in OECD countries: A scoping review”, OECD Papers on Well-being and Inequalities, No. 28, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f758bd20-en>

<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region - The Union of Skills, COM (2025) 90 final, Brussels, 05.03.2025.

<sup>3</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region - Labour and skills shortages in the EU: an action plan, COM(2024) 131 final, Brussels, 20.03.2024.

<sup>4</sup> Mission Letter by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission to Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, Brussels, 1 December 2024.

22. The outcome of the discussions initiated under the Polish Presidency in various forums (Ministerial conference in Gdańsk, EPSCO Council, informal SPC) has indicated that the most effective way of addressing challenges related to unlocking the economic potential of older people is through a comprehensive policy package. Respecting that the package should include specific policies, taking into consideration the national context, key areas of this policy package may include incentivising the voluntary extension of professional activity, the promotion of flexible work arrangements and adjusting working conditions, anti-discrimination policy, targeted and inclusive training, health prevention policies, targeted support from Public Employment Services, social partner activities, company policies and practices, improving care and long-term care services and workplace age and preventive health management. Additionally, a shift in mindset is needed to foster societal recognition of the valuable contributions to economic activity made by people aged 55 and over.
23. The respective competences of the Member States and the Union under Titles IX and X of the TFEU, as well as the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and using the momentum created by the European Commission commitment to review the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan in 2025<sup>1</sup>.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION to:

24. Use the planned review of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan to promote active ageing policies encouraging older Europeans to voluntarily participate in the labour market and promote opportunities for economic growth and job creation resulting from the development of the 'silver economy'. This would contribute to improved efficiency and sustainability of public finances, adequacy of social protection as well as intergenerational solidarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, European Commission, Brussels, 4.3.2021, COM(2021) 102 (final), p. 41.



25. Combat negative stereotypes regarding older people in general and workers aged over 55 in particular by raising awareness of the importance and usefulness of the active participation of older people in economic activity, family and community life. This also involves fostering positive perceptions among older persons regarding their role in the economy and society, with a particular emphasis on the benefits of extending their working lives and engaging in community initiatives whilst they enjoy good health.
26. Strengthen efforts for healthy and active ageing, prevention throughout the life course, taking into account the impact of a healthy lifestyle, non-work activities, and social ties on maintaining autonomy and a dignified life in old age. Such efforts should for instance consider the impact that the unequal share of care responsibilities has on women's physical and mental health, career progression and pensions.
27. Encourage the **Employment Committee (EMCO)** and the **Social Protection Committee (SPC)**, to include in their work programmes:
- (a) collection of information and experiences from the Member States, and relevant research institutions and researchers, on best practices regarding the full utilisation of the economic and social activity potential of those aged over 55, optimising the composition of policy packages, the policy instruments used and the integrated provision of support at all levels of government,
  - (b) a thematic discussion of the above best practices in EMCO and the SPC, and
  - (c) the collation of a compendium of such best practices by the end of 2026.
28. Identify, in the forthcoming Joint Employment Reports, policies aimed at improving the voluntary extension of professional and economic activity of older people.

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES to:

29. Take due account of the importance of maintaining and extending the voluntary economic activity of older people including through their National Medium-Term Fiscal-Structural Plans, and, where appropriate, consider the adoption of specific economic activity targets for those aged over 55, taking account of Member States' relative starting positions and national circumstances.

30. Promote the prolonged voluntary economic and social engagement of older people through comprehensive policy package approaches that integrate measures across key policy areas, including employment, occupational health and safety, working conditions, lifelong learning and training, entrepreneurship, digital technologies, taxation, healthcare and long-term care, and social protection. Furthermore, the Member States are encouraged to design all policies taking careful account of the specific needs of older people, ensuring accessibility in terms of physical, cognitive, and organisational aspects. Individual circumstances are recommended to be considered, so the system of incentives to voluntarily extend working life takes into account varied capabilities of different occupational groups, with particular attention to manual labourers, those working in strenuous or otherwise demanding conditions.
31. Integrate delivery of support services across all levels and sectors of government administration and local authorities, as well as among the social partners and other relevant non-government entities, so that it effectively benefits recipients aged over 55 in terms of needs, timeliness, seamlessness and selectiveness. Develop stakeholder consensus over comprehensive policy packaging and integrated delivery by forming close partnerships with trade unions, employers, business and relevant civil society organisations at each stage of policy development, enactment and implementation.
32. Promote, with the cooperation of the social partners, age management of human resources among employers, inter alia by raising their awareness of the benefits of the life-course approach in hiring, training, retaining and reintegrating workers and making the best use of the potential of older people, including by encouraging them to pass on their professional and entrepreneurial expertise to younger generations. It should be recognised that investing in upskilling and reskilling, workplace adaptations, and health services for older people is both feasible and beneficial.
33. Intensify efforts, in cooperation with the social partners, to introduce solutions to encourage people aged over 55 to voluntarily remain in the labour market, in line with the relevant country-specific recommendations of the European Semester, inter alia by restricting early retirement where appropriate, implementing effective incentives for voluntary longer working lives and promoting flexible retirement paths.

34. Promote the exchange of best practices, including in the High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity, to foster more effective national measures including strategies and action plans in addressing key challenges for age equality.
35. Actively engage in the collection of equality data, including intersectional data disaggregated by sex and age, to better identify and address age inequality and discrimination.

INVITES THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION to:

36. Conduct, within regular EU reports or separately, an in-depth assessment of the economic and social potential of those aged over 55, considering strategic perspectives such as life expectancy, socio-economic factors of inequality, including health conditions, emerging enabling technologies, and labour market changes. This assessment should also address the perception of an ageing society, focusing not only on costs and challenges but also on potential benefits.
37. Under the Mutual Learning Programme in 2026 and onwards, provide forms of exchange of information and learning opportunities on the practices which could better activate people aged over 55 years on the labour market, foster entrepreneurship and encourage working beyond retirement age, as well as activities aimed at encouraging social activity and counteracting loneliness, as elements supporting active and healthy ageing and access to high quality long-term care services.
38. Enhance awareness and combat stereotypes as well as promote the positive image of longevity in its relevant awareness raising campaigns. Encourage EU citizens to prepare for longevity and provide them with tools, such as building longevity literacy in order to prepare their future.

39. Strengthen actions for healthy and active ageing, not only among people aged over 55 but also through prevention during the life course, including the impact of a healthy lifestyle, non-work-related activities and social ties on maintaining a life of autonomy and dignity in the old age, taking into account different aspects of life, fighting any discrimination against older people in accessing their rights and ensuring full participation in social, cultural, political and economic life.
40. Ensure that within the comprehensive work on the *Intergenerational Fairness Strategy*, particular attention is also devoted to the needs and interests of the older generation, especially in regard to the economic activation of people aged over 55, by making sure that the *Strategy* acts as a platform for developing initiatives dedicated to older Europeans, enabling their full participation in society and economy as well as fostering increased solidarity and engagement.
41. Secure sufficient EU funding, for instance via the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), to enable persons aged over 55 to develop skills for adapting to modern job markets and technological change, while implementing initiatives to allow them to contribute to the economy and to society.
42. Continue the effective implementation of relevant EU law and the work towards closing the persisting gaps in anti-discrimination legislation.

## References

### 1. EU Legislation

Regulation (EU) 2024/1263 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2024 on the effective coordination of economic policies and on multilateral budgetary surveillance and repealing Council Regulation (EC) No 1466/97

Council Directive (EU) 2024/1499 of 7 May 2024 on standards for equality bodies in the field of equal treatment between persons irrespective of their racial or ethnic origin, equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation between persons irrespective of their religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation, equal treatment between women and men in matters of social security and in the access to and supply of goods and services, and amending Directives 2000/43/EC and 2004/113/EC

Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU

Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation

Council Decision (EU) 2024/3134 of 2 December 2024 on guidelines for the employment policies of the Member States

### 2. European Council

Strategic Agenda 2024-2029, Annex I to the European Council Conclusions of 27 June 2024 (EUCO 15/24)

### 3. Council

Council Recommendation of 8 December 2022 on access to affordable high-quality long-term care 2022/C 476/01

Council Conclusions of 2 December 2024 on ensuring work-life balance and gender equality for all generations in the context of demographic challenges (16065/24)

Council Conclusions of 14 May 2024 on Fiscal sustainability challenges arising from ageing (9160/24)

Council Conclusions of 12 March 2021 on Mainstreaming Ageing in Public Policies (6976/21)

Council Conclusions of 12 October 2020 on Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of Digitalisation (11717/2/20 REV 2)

#### **4. European Commission**

The Union of Skills (Commission reference: COM (2025) 90 final)

Labour and skills shortages in the EU: an action plan (Commission reference: COM(2024) 131 final)

Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action (Commission reference: COM(2023)577 final)

Harnessing talent in Europe's regions, (Commission reference: COM(2023) 23 final)

European care strategy (Commission reference: COM(2022) 440 final)

European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (Commission reference: COM(2021) 102 final)

Union of equality – Strategy for the rights of persons with disabilities 2021-2030 (Commission reference: COM(2021) 110 final)

The Green Paper on Ageing 'Fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations' (Commission reference: COM (2021) 50 final)

Mission Letter by Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission to Glenn Micallef, Commissioner for Intergenerational Fairness, Youth, Culture and Sport, Brussels, 1 December 2024

## **5. European Parliament**

European Parliament resolution of 7 July 2021 on an old continent growing older – possibilities and challenges related to ageing policy post-2020 (2022/C 99/13)

European Parliament resolution of 19 January 2017 on the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017/C 428/09)

European Parliament Resolution of 16 February 2011 on the Green Paper titled "Towards adequate, sustainable and safe European pension systems" (2012/C 188 E/03)

## **6. European Economic and Social Committee**

EESC opinion: Older people in employment – systemic factors in choosing to work for longer (SOC/817 EESC 2024), 26 February 2025

EESC opinion: Promoting European intergenerational solidarity – towards an EU horizontal approach, (OJ C, C/2024/6869), 28 November 2024

EESC opinion: European Strategy for Older Persons (2023/C 349/06), 12 July 2023

EESC opinion: White paper — An agenda for adequate, safe and sustainable pensions (2012/C 299/21), 12 July 2012

## **7. United Nations**

UN General Assembly Resolution of 25 September 2015 on Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, (A/RES/70/1)

## **8. Other (reports, working papers)**

European Commission: Directorate-General for Justice and Consumers, The conclusion paper of the High-Level Group on Non-Discrimination, Equality and Diversity: Age equality and non-discrimination on the grounds of age. Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and Social Protection Committee (SPC), The 2024 pension adequacy report – Current and future income adequacy in old age in the EU. Volume I, Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion and Social Protection Committee (SPC), SPC Annual Report 2024: Review of the Social Protection Performance Monitor (SPPM) and developments in social protection policies - Key social challenges and key messages. Publications Office of the European Union, 2024

European Commission: Secretariat-General, The Impact of Demographic Change in a changing environment. Publications Office of the European Union, 2023

Eiffe, F.F. et al. (2024), “Keeping older workers engaged: Policies, practices and mechanisms”, Eurofound Working Paper WPEF24030, <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-02/wpef24030.pdf>

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“Barometer 2023: Empowering older people in the labour market for sustainable and quality working lives”, AGE Platform, 2023, [https://www.age-platform.eu/content/uploads/2023/11/AGE-Barometer-2023\\_vf\\_EN.pdf](https://www.age-platform.eu/content/uploads/2023/11/AGE-Barometer-2023_vf_EN.pdf)

“Ageing with social rights - AGE Platform Europe’s contribution to the consultation on reinforcing social Europe”, AGE Platform, November 2020, <https://www.age-platform.eu/ageing-with-social-rights-age-contribution-to-the-consultation-on-social-europe/>