

## European Commission Green Paper on Ageing

In January 2021 The European Commission published a [Green Paper](#) to seek a broad policy debate on ageing to discuss options on how to anticipate and respond to the challenges and opportunities of an ageing society.

This follows the [joint Declaration on ageing](#) in December 2020 by the Trio Presidency of the Council of the European Union, composed of Germany, Portugal and Slovenia.

The ambition and leadership to invite debate to shape policies which are fit for purpose for our challenged, rapidly changing and diverse society is to be warmly welcomed.

The green paper invites taking a holistic approach in adapting to demographic change in the light of the 'twin green and digital transition' as well as of the ongoing pandemic.

CPA wholeheartedly endorses the Calls made by the Trio Presidency in particular: -

1. Adopting an age-integrated, rights-based, life-course perspective approach to ageing, also by dedicating a chapter to the rights of older persons in the European Commission's "Green Paper on Ageing".
2. Mainstreaming ageing in all policy fields in order to help societies and economies adapt appropriately to demographic change with a view to societies that accommodate the needs and interests of all ages, strengthening social inclusion and solidarity between the generations.
3. Adopting a life-course approach to ageing to the benefit of all generations and society as a whole.

CPA looks forward to the outcomes of the Slovenian presidency's leadership in promoting the life course approach to ageing in the forthcoming organised discussions.

### CPA's key comments and observations on the Green Paper

Whilst the Green Paper emphasises a life course approach to ageing this still takes a traditional Public Health view of focusing upon actions and issues taking place downstream in the life course in order to benefit up stream outcomes in later life.

Hence the term 'ageing' is still associated with focusing upon older people and later life.

The substance of the report therefore is weighted towards responding to the 'challenges' of supporting larger numbers of older people. Ageing is not just about old people, but concerns us all at every step in our lives. Viewing life through the lenses of traditional stages of life is a too narrow approach given the longer life expectancy today, allowing for different planning of the various life stages.

In order to consider a more holistic picture of the implications and impact of an ageing society we should consider ageing from birth and use the lens of a life course trajectory, our ageing population consists of people being born.

# Centre for Policy on Ageing

In total, an estimated 140 million children will be born in 2021. Their average life expectancy is expected to be 82 years, [according to UNICEF](#).

The policies associated with adapting to an ageing society need to go beyond only focusing upon supporting the health and wellbeing of older people, albeit by promoting healthy life style in younger cohorts. Our life course trajectories are changing – our outlook needs to adjust.

We need holistic policies to modernise the current prescriptive social norms of yesteryear!

Our western societies have an increasingly youth centric focus; the dominant narrative that youth and looking and feeling young is more valued than ageing or being older (Ylänne, 2015; Williams et al. 2010).

We need to change these repressive social norms and stereotyped pressures affecting lifestyle and behaviour which only value “youth” with its attendant pressures.

## **Ageism Generational Cohesion**

The Green Paper is surprisingly silent on the issue of ageism; as the recently launched [WHO Global Campaign to Combat Ageism](#) highlighted, ageism affects all ages and has an adverse effect of health and wellbeing throughout life. Most of us fear ageing, our fear of ageing becomes installed from an early age - Children as young as 4 years are aware of their cultures’ age stereotypes and these are reinforced across the lifespan.

We refer to the Royal Society of Public Health 2018 report [RSPH | That Age Old Question](#) which emphasised the need for educating young people.

*“It is during childhood that people are often highly susceptible to absorption of prejudice, and so a better understanding of older people and the ageing process among younger demographics is important for stimulating long term integration across the generations. Educating younger people in positive ageing would be a crucial step in directly targeting a reduction in ageism in society. This would involve young people developing notions of interdependence between generations, understanding the biological and psychological realities of the ageing process, and understanding the wider effects of negative age stereotypes.”*

This would lay a foundation to respond to the questions posed by the Green Paper: -

1. How can healthy and active ageing policies be promoted from an early age and throughout the life span for everyone? How can children and young people be better equipped for the prospect of a longer life expectancy? What kind of support can the EU provide to the Member States?

## **Generational Cohesion**

Responses to the Pandemic and indeed much of the debate about combatting Climate Change has exposed and exacerbated intergenerational conflict. Intergenerational solidarity, collaboration and understanding are important ingredients to adapt our societies

## Centre for Policy on Ageing

to demographic change. Media (including social media) and public speaking incitement to intergenerational conflict should be curbed by enforced protocols; treat “age” as a protected characteristic in community standards on hate speech and journalism.

Although intergenerational programmes and initiatives such as multigenerational living and housing are clearly beneficial and to be supported more fundamental and innovative action is required to redress the inequalities and dis-benefits of our compartmentalised society.

We would urge more vision for age diversity across all forms of activity throughout the life course; to challenge the age segregation in policy and practice. There is far more commonality in life transitions much would be gained by removing age restrictions and compartmentalizing.

In response to the question posed:-

3. What innovative policy measures to improve participation in the labour market, in particular by older workers, should be considered more closely?

Further than simply... *support senior entrepreneurs by removing disincentives in tax and social security systems, providing well-targeted advice and ensuring access to finance. And* as well as promoting age diversity in the workplace and encouraging intergenerational interaction by say, mentoring **why not support innovative age diverse startups** – in particular focusing upon technology and ecofriendly, sustainable activities?

**The Green Paper on Ageing by the European Commission intended to kickstart a broader discussion on the effects of demographic change on people’s way of lives. CPA urges the UK to undertake similar such inclusive broad debate; gathering the insights and perspectives of all generations.**