



Pre-budget Submission to Department of Justice from The Alliance of NGOs in the Irish Ageing Sector

September 2018

1. Introduction

This submission is made by an Alliance of the main NGOs working in the ageing sector in Ireland who have come together to address the key issues facing older people. These organisations are Age Action, Active Retirement Ireland, Age & Opportunity, ALONE, Alzheimer's Society of Ireland, The Irish Senior Citizens' Parliament, the Irish Hospice Foundation and Third Age Ireland.

This submission focuses on ageism, which leads to bigotry and discrimination and on steps needed to address it. Ageism is characterised as a form of discrimination that is widespread, overlooked and accepted in western cultures (Department of Health 2015).

The National Positive Ageing Strategy (2013) recognised the pervasive impact of ageism across all policy areas and for that reason it is characterised as a cross-cutting issue that underlies all other policies. Yet despite some positive actions at international and national levels, ageism and the implications of ageist attitudes and policies continue to present significant challenges (Abrams et al., 2009; Gray and Dowds 2010). Demographic ageing should make this issue one of increasing concern.

We set out key aspects of what research tells us about ageism and age discrimination in Ireland, below, but here note how older adults are more likely to be excluded in social situations, have poorer employment prospects than their younger counterparts and are sometimes less likely to be given appropriate medical treatment¹ (Robertson, TILDA, 2016). With the omnipresence of ageism in society, older adults are constantly faced with negative attitudes towards ageing, something that results in social inequalities and even challenges to their health and functioning (Robertson 2016). Furthermore, the contribution of older people to Irish society is not recognised, and there is a strong consensus about this across age groups. Researchers who investigated attitudes to ageing in Ireland (north and south) conclude that this should be of concern to policy makers (Gray and Dowds 2010).

¹ That is, even when treatment is warranted.

The focus of this submission is:

- On the need to address one specific area of age-discrimination - employment, and
- The institution of a campaign to implement societal-wide interventions to target negative attitudes.

Action on these fronts is consistent both with the National Positive Ageing Strategy, with international policies to which Ireland subscribes (like the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing) and it is supported by research evidence. In **Section 3**, below, we substantiate these statements by discussing relevant public policies and research. First, we outline the key asks of this submission.

An all-Ireland survey (Gray and Dowds 2010) documented the need to give policies that combat ageism a more central position in broader strategies addressing discrimination on the island of Ireland.

2. Action on Ageism and Age Discrimination

In this submission, we are prioritising:

- (1) actions to address age-discrimination in employment, and
- (2) a series of steps that amount to a **campaign or broader societal intervention** to address the systemic issue of ageism.

We also suggest how members of this Alliance would be able to contribute to such interventions, along with the older people whose interests they represent.

2.1 Address Employment Discrimination

According to the CSO, amongst those who experienced age discrimination, work was the most frequent arena where they did so (29% of those who experienced discrimination) (CSO 2015) and there is evidence that employers' attitudes remain a barrier to participation by older workers (see William Fry, 2016 and **Section 3.2**, below).

This represents a particularly challenging issue given that the state pension age has been and continues to be increased to a level that is high in international comparison (OECD 2014), which means that many Irish people must work longer. Even though equality legislation prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on age, employers may still to fix ages for retirement and they may operate out of negative assumptions on ageing that affect their general approaches to older workers (see **Section 3.2**, below). Furthermore, people required to retire at the traditional retirement age (of 65), cannot access the state pension until age 66 or (in the future) age 68. Many have to rely on Job Seekers allowance/benefit but they cannot always access activation measures like, for example, JobBridge internships which operate an age-

ceiling of 65² and it is also questionable whether such activation measures would acknowledge their experience or meet their needs.

Thus, the persistence of workplace discrimination leaves people in an invidious position – caught between pensions policies that require them to work longer, employer attitudes that marginalise or exclude them, and activation measures that exclude them or do not meet their needs. **This points to the urgent need for action to tackle ageism in the workplace to ensure that older workers can stay in their jobs or move to others. This involves removing barriers (that are both institutional and attitudinal) to older workers gaining and remaining in employment.**

We suggest the following actions:

1. Develop a plan to address ageist attitudes operating within employment settings that exclude older workers. Some necessary actions:
 - Develop **age-friendly Government Policy on Recruitment/ Employment** aiming to make the public sector a model of good practice on all aspects of employment and retirement (something that could also contribute to their meeting the public-sector duty under human rights legislation³).
 - As part of this, introduce **training measures to tackle ageism** operating amongst managers (often unconsciously), which requires creating greater awareness of ageism. This is supported by research suggesting that before people become motivated to make workplace changes on ageing, they must become aware of their biases (Kroon 2015).
 - Introduce an awareness programme aimed at **private-sector employers** which could also involve training and a public communications aspect (which would link to the societal intervention on ageism that we also recommend, see below).
2. Review whether activation measures serve older workers (that is, up to at least age 68), increase their capacity to meet the needs of older workers, and identify and remove age-ceilings operating (both explicitly and implicitly). (The success of such measures in facilitating people to obtain new jobs would depend, in large measure, on the ability of government action to change ageist attitudes of employers, which signals the importance of an ageism public campaign, see below)

The foregoing actions are not only consistent with the National Positive Ageing Strategy (Goal 1 and cross-cutting objective on combatting ageism) but also with the emphasis on tackling ageism in the workplace in the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing) (Issue 4, objective 1). See section 3, below.

² See web site of the Dept of Employment Affairs and Social Protection: 'An eligible individual can partake on a JobBridge internship from 18 years up to the age of 65 years and their internship must finish the Friday before the individuals 66th birthday.' <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/JobBridge-Interns-FAQs.aspx#g1tive> [accessed 20 June 2018]

³ Specifically, Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014, which requires public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality and protect human rights.

2.2 Campaign or broader Societal intervention

Develop a multi-faceted **Combat Ageism Public Campaign** to address stereotypical thinking on ageing and to promote understanding of the contribution made by older people to society, aiming to create a shift from seeing them as a burden to being recognised as active contributors. This should have a number of aspects to it:

- education and training aimed at different audiences (local authorities, Government departments, private employers),
- a public-facing awareness raising campaign which would facilitate contributions by older people relative to their lives/activities and concerns,
- raising awareness of ageing/ageism as part of the school curriculum,
- building intergenerational projects across communities that challenge negative perceptions of ageing,
- improving consultative processes, enabling the participation of older people and their organisations in mainstream policy-making and in the planning and evaluation of service delivery (including hard to reach groups and those at particular risk of social exclusion).

The organisations in the Alliance wish to contribute to the implementation of these plans and the closeness of their work to older people (and knowledge of their concerns) makes them a vital part of the solution to the problem of ageism. This is consistent with:

- Ireland's commitments under the Madrid International Plan of Action, involving recognition that older persons are the best advocates of their own cause and committing to encourage organisations and mechanisms to represent older persons in decision-making (see National Positive Ageing Strategy, p.61; Regional Implementation Strategy p.3-4), and
- research evidence that facilitating (carefully planned and executed) contact between generations is a main plank in efforts to redress ageism (Christian et al. 2014).

These actions would also be consistent with:

- recommendations from the World Health Organization for a global campaign to end ageism based on how ageism is detrimental to older people's health and on how benefitting from population ageing will depend on the health of older people (Officer et al., 2016),
- the cross-cutting goals of the National Positive Ageing Strategy, and
- actions to which Ireland is committed under the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002) and its Regional Implementation Strategy, involving actions in the media, in education and in facilitating older people to be part of the solution (see below).

3. Background – Public Policies and Research

In this section, we evidence the argument made already in respect of (1) national and international public policies, and (2) research on ageism and to show how they support the recommendations made in this submission.

3.1 Public Policies

3.1.1 National Positive Ageing Strategy

Because ageism was recognised as impacting negatively on social inclusion and quality of life of older people across all policy areas, the National Positive Ageing Strategy includes combating ageism as a cross-cutting objective (p.44). Actions required to meet this objective include:

- Combat ageism through **awareness campaigns** and by encouraging the media and other opinion-making actors to give an age-balanced image of society,
- Encourage the development of **intergenerational initiatives** at local, regional and national level,
- Create a better awareness of the needs and preferences of people as they age during policy and service development by adopting **more comprehensive and inclusive approaches to consultation**.

3.1.2 International Policy Context

The National Positive Ageing Strategy was intended to help Ireland to meet international policy commitments. These include the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002), some key aspects of which are:

- recognition that combating age discrimination and promoting human rights of older people is fundamental to achieving its aims (I.13.18),
- calling for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels (I.10.17),
- emphasising the nurturing of reciprocal relationship among generations to foster a society for all ages (I.13.18), and
- recognising that Governments must collaborate with older persons and their organisations to meet its aims (Article 17).

A positive view of ageing is an integral aspect of the plan because stereotyping of older people reinforces exclusionary practices (Issue 4, 112⁴). A stated objective is '**Enhancement of public recognition of the authority, wisdom, productivity and other important contributions of older persons**' (Issue 4, Objective 1). Proposed actions under this heading include:

- Encourage the **mass media** to promote images that highlight the wisdom, strengths, contributions, courage and resourcefulness of older women and men, including older persons with disabilities,
- Encourage **educators** to recognize and include in their courses the contribution made by persons of all ages, including older persons,
- Facilitate **contributions by older people** to the presentation by the media of their activities and concerns,
- Encourage the media and the private and public sectors **to avoid ageism in the workplace** and to present positive images of older persons,
- Promote a positive image of older women's contributions to increase their self-esteem.

The Plan resulted in a Regional Implementation Strategy (known as an RIS) which specified 10 commitments. Ministerial representative from Ireland (and other

⁴ For example, it instances how older women are often stereotyped as weak and dependent instead of being portrayed in ways that reflect their contributions, strengths, resourcefulness and humanity.

countries) declared support for these commitments. Amongst the actions committed to in the RIS were:

- media campaigns,
- targeted incentives aimed at employers, local communities and other social actors.

It also recognised that the promotion of a positive, active and developmentally-oriented view of ageing may result from action by older persons themselves.

Calling for a global campaign to address ageism, the World Health Organization suggests that pervasive misconceptions, negative attitudes and assumptions about older people are serious barriers to developing good public policy on ageing and health (Officer et al., 2016).

3.2 Research

Societal attitudes towards ageing are predominantly negative (Robertson, 2016). Negative attitudes about ageing result in social inequalities affecting not only how older adults are perceived but also how well they function (Robertson 2016).

Prevalence and Areas of Discrimination in Ireland

Ageism and age discrimination have been identified in Ireland in areas like employment, health and social care and in financial services, and perceptions of discrimination increased between 2003 and 2008 (Gray and Dowds 2010). Age discrimination is one of the most frequent grounds of discrimination experienced in Ireland. For example, the CSO found that, at 24%, age discrimination was the most common ground of discrimination experienced, followed by race (21%) (CSO 2015).

A Department of Health report from 2016 (from the Health and Positive Ageing Initiative 'HAPAI') suggests that 45% of people aged 50+ had experienced discrimination on the grounds of their age in the previous 2 years (Department of Health 2016). A more recent report from HAPAI (Gibney et al., 2018) suggests that amongst people aged 55+, 15% felt isolated often or some of the time and the percentage was higher (18%) for those aged 70+. Feeling isolated is significantly higher than this in some parts of the country (25% in Co. Galway and 31% in Laois, for example for those aged 55+).

We next look at some of these areas of discrimination in more detail:

Ageism in the workplace

Amongst those who experienced age discrimination in the CSO survey, work was the most frequent arena where they did so (29%); 17% experienced it in accessing goods and services (CSO 2015). Confirmation of the findings from the CSO comes from a report from Solicitors William Fry (2016) which found that 42% of employers believe that there is an upper age limited for customer-facing roles⁵. Furthermore, 87% of those currently unemployed at age 55 or

⁵ This was a national survey of 211 employers, 442 employees and 202 unemployed people, currently looking for work

over believed that age has been a factor in their not getting work. Recent news reports of cases taken in the courts (against RTE and UCD) suggest that that age-discrimination in the workplace is alive and well.

Fig 3 Percentage of persons 18+ that experienced discrimination classified by discrimination, Q3 2014



There is also a business case for hiring and retaining older employees, as they engage more in organisational citizenship, have lower rates of absenteeism, and are generally more committed (Kroon 2015). Furthermore, tackling age stereotyping in the workplace requires creating greater awareness, as, before people become motivated to avoid stereotyping, they first must be aware of their biases (Kroon 2015).

Ageism in Health/Social Care

Some older people perceive discrimination in health and social care. Specifically, amongst those aged 65+ in Ireland, 16% felt that they were treated with less dignity and respect by people in the health and social care professions because of their age (Gray and Dowds 2010). The rate had risen from 6% to 16% between 2003 and 2008. In some medical situations older adults are less likely to be given the same treatment as younger adults even when it would likely be effective (Robertson 2016)

Ageism Affects Health

The way we think about, talk about and write about ageing may have direct effects on health. Calling for a global campaign to address ageism, the World Health Organization suggests that pervasive misconceptions, negative attitudes and assumptions about older people are serious barriers to developing good public policy on ageing and health (Officer et al., 2016). Similarly, Irish research from TILDA suggests that if negative attitudes towards ageing are carried throughout life they can have a detrimental, measurable effect on mental, physical and cognitive health (Robertson 2016).

As this research concludes (Robertson 2016), this has important implications for the media, policymakers, practitioners and society more generally suggesting the need to implement societal-wide interventions to target negative attitudes.

ENDS

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