

On Strengthening the Pillar of Social Rights: an age perspective

In Europe, life expectancy has increased, generation after generation. This is good news. The problem is not that people age, but how they age. This is not just determined by biology. It is determined by healthy or unhealthy lifestyles, wealth or poverty, and lack of dignity or respect for senior rights. As our societies are growing older, seniors should be able to enjoy their old age in decent conditions and fully participate in society.

The challenges are steep: The working age population is falling throughout Europe, while the number of people aged over 60 is now increasing twice as fast as it did before, and unemployment remains too high in many European countries.

All of this happens at a time when considerable demand for social services remains unserved which is even worsened by the current drive for government spending austerity.

Both decision makers and citizens will have to shape new avenues in terms of life-long education, conditions governing the transition from working age to retirement, the funding of pension systems, but also on solutions that enable our senior citizens to live longer at home, in their communities of choice.

More than ever, we, Greens, find it necessary to strengthen the social dimension of the EU.

Therefore, the European Green Party demands:

Chapter I: Ageing population and employment

- To make ageing workers a specific focus group in the employment targets, as was the case in the Lisbon strategy - to enable ageing workers to work until retirement age if they can and wish so.
- To develop guidelines for job search services that take into account the needs of older workers;
- To fight stereotypes and discrimination by more adequately implementing the Employment equality directive, and by strengthening the promotion of diversity in the workforce;
- To adopt the Horizontal Directive on the principle of equal treatment and make funding available to communicate the value of the directive, especially in fighting ageism, to further support the paradigm shift towards valuing all ages;
- To protect older workers in restructuring cases by intensifying training and placement assistance for those being made redundant, regardless of age;
- To adapt the workplace to workers of all ages by strengthening the preventive approach in occupational health and safety rules and by including all risks, including psycho-social and emerging risk in occupational health and safety regulations; strengthen the EU-OSHA campaign on healthy workplaces for all ages and exchange practices between member states on how to support the adaptation of workplaces to Europe's ageing workforce;

- To specifically focus on older workers in the development and promotion of life-long learning, such as in the EU Skills Agenda; harmonise rules and access to skills validation;
- To bring different employment relationships, such as employment and self-employment, closer together in the acquiring of social protection rights and make the statutes more compatible;
- To mandate public employment agencies to intervene in the management of the transition from work into retirement; allow for flexible retirement pathways where reduced working hours can be combined with part-time pensions, without losing out on pension rights;
- To introduce measures that will establish solidarity between generations, with young people benefiting from the accumulated knowledge and experience of older people and vice-versa.

Chapter 2: Ageing population and income

- To pay special attention to safeguarding or restoring the equity function of social security pensions in pension reforms; strengthen gender equality by recommending to create care credits in pension schemes, at the same time as developing quality long-term care services and facilitating work-life balance for carers;
- To introduce a link between retirement age and the 'healthy life years' indicator. This would create an additional incentive for member states to invest in preventive health and health promotion, as well as strong occupational health and safety rules; ageing people should not only be seen as productive factor for the labour market and get all preventive health offers and health promotion.
- To allow workers with disabilities to retire with a disability pension or an equivalent, rather than to force them to stay in the labour market and to use up unemployment benefits;
- To table a European Framework Directive on Minimum Income Schemes to create benchmarks based on reference budgets and median equivalised income and which address the challenge of non-take up of minimum income; take into account recommendations in setting an old-age minimum income.

Chapter 3: Ageing population and housing

- To adopt the European Accessibility Act and the horizontal equal treatment directive;
- To make sure that elderly can live in adapted and accessible housing that fits their needs. These adaptations and new constructions should be available at an accessible price to ensure older people can stay independent for as long as they wish.