



Smart
Against
Ageism

GAME GUIDE



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The Erasmus+ project 'Smart against Ageism' (SAA) (January 2022 – June 2024) aims at raising awareness about age discrimination. The project involves seven partner organisations from six European countries:

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Introduction

Ageism refers to how we **think** (stereotypes), **feel** (prejudice) and **act** (discrimination) towards others or ourselves based on age. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), ageist attitudes against older adults are a very widespread phenomenon.¹

Despite being one of the most widespread forms of discrimination, ageism is also very much internalised and less perceived. Ageism affects everyone, everywhere. It can intersect with and exacerbate other forms of discrimination including those related to sexism, racism, and ableism.

This guide intends to provide learners of the SAA learning offer with background knowledge on different areas of everyday life, in which ageism constantly appears (**Job, Health, Social, Advocacy, Built**)². Here you will find tips to combat ageism. Moreover, you will find references to the game situations in each chapter. At the end of the document, you can also discover an overview of the results of the SAA project, which you can access with just a few clicks.



Understanding ageing

Ageing is a natural and ongoing process: we all age from the moment we are born. It is not something that only happens to us in the second half of our life. In the general narrative of ageing, older people are characterised as inherently weaker, passive, and vulnerable. Here it is important to realise, that ageing is not only connected with losses, but also benefits that result from the combination of chronological, physiological, and social age and involve different mechanisms.

Chronological age is measured in years from the moment we are born while **biological age** refers to how our body changes in time. It is often associated with the loss of functional (physical and/or mental) capacities. Finally, **social age** refers to attitudes and behaviours that are seen as appropriate for a certain age group. It is based on stereotypes and biases that are associated with age. Social age will vary from one culture to another and from one socio-economic, cultural, and political context to another.

¹ World Health Organization. (2021). *Ageing: Ageism*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>

² During the interviews, five areas were identified which were often mentioned by people affected by ageism. These are the labour market, the health sector, the social sphere, legal advice and the built environment. In the learning game, the areas were named 'Job, Health, Social, Advocacy and Built' in order to address the experiences.

Understanding ageism

Discrimination based on age affects both younger and older adults. For instance, a teenager might be seen as less experienced at starting a political movement while an older person might be seen as less able to use a computer compared to younger people; both younger and older people might not get a job because of their age; an older person might be denied medical treatment.

Ageism arises when age is used to categorize and divide people in ways that lead to harm, disadvantage, injustice and erode solidarity across generations.³ It is associated with earlier death (by ~7.5 years), poorer physical and mental health, and slower recovery from disability in older age. Overall, ageism reduces our quality of life.⁴

Ageism may intersect with other forms of discrimination, such as sexism, racism, and ableism. For example, when looking at the intersection between ageism and disability, older persons with disabilities are more likely to receive low standards of care and support, to be excluded from benefits and other support schemes, and to end up in residential institutions due to lack of alternatives.

However, counteracting ageism is possible: through laws and policies, educational interventions, and intergenerational contacts. It is important to invest in strategies to tackle ageism, to improve data and research to better understand and eliminate it, and to build a movement for changing the narrative around age and ageing. Challenging ageism will allow us to change how we view ourselves and others, foster solidarity between generations, value how we can benefit from younger and older people's contributions, and positively impact our health, longevity, and well-being.



³ World Health Organization, Global Report on Ageism (2021), page 2, <https://www.who.int/teams/social-determinants-of-health/demographic-change-and-healthy-ageing/combating-ageism/global-report-on-ageism> and the AGE Platform Europe #AgeingEqual campaign, <https://ageing-equal.org/>

⁴ World Health Organization. (2021). Ageing: Ageism. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/ageing-ageism>

Ageism as an omnipresent phenomenon

In a Europe-wide study⁵, respondents were asked how widespread they thought age discrimination was. While 52% of people in Portugal (only France has higher figures at 54%) said it is very widespread, Germany brought up the rear in the survey with 20%. The survey shows that there is a very different level of awareness on the topic in Europe. The widespread use of stereotypes and the low level of sensitivity to the issue contribute significantly to the normality of ageism. Because of this, a high number of unreported cases are suspected. At the same time, ageism also shown to have an impact on the interviewee's self-esteem. Several responded that solely because of their age they gave up certain social activities, such as dancing, even though they enjoyed the activity.

As a specific form of ageism, elder abuse (abuse of older people) is an intentional act, or failure to act, by a caregiver or another person in a relationship involving any expectations of trust that cause harm to an older person.⁶ It may take several forms: physical, sexual, psychological, and/or financial. It may take place in the victim's own house or public settings such as urban spaces, health services, care homes etc. It constitutes a violation of human dignity. To conclude, elder abuse, and ageism in general, are issues that remain invisible and underreported. This can be explained partly because victims may feel ashamed and fear the consequences that this might have on the support and care they receive.

Interviews with older adults in five European countries within the "Smart Against Ageism" project show that ageism is a phenomenon that can be observed in many areas of everyday life. In this game guide, background knowledge and tips will be presented to prevent ageism in different sectors. On the following pages, you will therefore find information tackling age discrimination in the **Job**, **Health**, **Social**, **Advocacy** and **Built** areas.

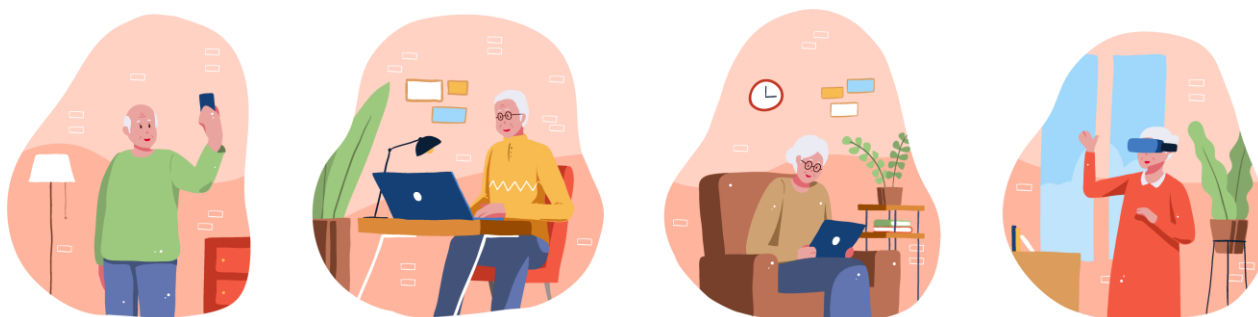


⁵ European Commission 2019: „Special Eurobarometer 439: Discrimination in the European Union“, available at: <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2251>, p.75

⁶ World Health Organization. *Abuse of older persons*. https://www.who.int/health-topics/abuse-of-older-people#tab=tab_1

Ageism in the Job area

In the European framework, age discrimination is addressed in the field of employment and vocational training, under the European Union (EU) Employment Framework Directive. However, discrimination against older adults in the workplace is still a reality for many people and there is little awareness of the topic. Within the labour market, older persons do not have the same possibilities as their younger counterparts. Current research has shown that older workers are discriminated against within recruiting processes, and within their job itself as well as regarding the decision when to retire.⁷ Those discriminatory acts are mostly driven by stereotypical beliefs and behaviours. Those stereotypes imply that older workers are on the one hand more reliable and committed, but on the other hand, they are less productive and efficient and not capable anymore of learning new things.⁸ In this regard, the European Commission gathered some data via a special Eurobarometer. It was found that around 70% of the respondents thought that older adults are falling out of employment because they are being excluded from training in the workplace or because they are not viewed positively by employers.⁹



The labour market is the area where age discrimination has been reported in all consortium partner countries at manifold levels, whether it is already in the application process, when young employees are sought, or when older people are simply not even invited to job interviews. It is evident, that older people are discriminated against both on a personal and structural level. Sometimes the company decides to rejuvenate the team for a more youthful perspective and attitude, or internal regulations impose age limits. Explicit age limits are even prohibited by the Acts of Law.¹⁰ Also, in voluntary work age limits may exist and are criticised by the interviewees.

⁷ UNECE 2019: „Bekämpfung von Altersdiskriminierung in der Arbeitswelt“, In: UNECE Kurzdossier zum Thema Altern Nr.21, p.3

⁸ UNECE 2019: „Bekämpfung von Altersdiskriminierung in der Arbeitswelt“, In: UNECE Kurzdossier zum Thema Altern Nr.21, p.5

⁹ European Commission 2012: “Special Eurobarometer 378 – Active Ageing”, p.47, available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/MEMO_12_10

¹⁰ EUR-Lex 2023: “Council Directive 2000/78/EC of 27 November 2000”. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32000L0078>

Principles to prevent ageism in the Job area

The assessment of workers should be based on performance and not on age.

Older adults should have equal rights with everyone else, also with respect to learning opportunities in the workplace.

Job vacancies must not relate to attributes like searching only for “younger” employees.

Neither the age of an applicant nor a photo should be included as a requirement when applying for a job.

Job area in the SAA game

Below you will find a reference to the cases of the SAA game that deal with ageism in the Job area. If you would like to learn more about ageism in these cases, click on the button below and launch the SAA game.



Johanna

Johanna experienced ageism as she is considered unqualified due to her higher age.



Felix

Felix is being disadvantaged because older workers are being deprived of further training opportunities.

[PLAY THE SAA GAME](#)

Ageism in the Health area

In the context of ageism against older adults, the issue of health plays a very central role. With increasing age, illnesses can occur more frequently, or health-supporting measures become necessary.¹¹ However, the resulting prejudices generalise this fact and attribute health problems to all older people. Growing older is seen in this sense as a progressive process of decay in which individual situations fade into the background. This has already been shown in different international studies: In this context, it had been examined, that based on stereotypes against older people and ageing, medical students partly consider the care for older patients as a less interesting field of study and work.¹² In addition, medical care for older patients suffers because the affected cannot be provided with adequate medication as they are being overlooked in clinical trials.¹³



The mentioned, this treatment undermines the **autonomy and independence** of the affected older adults. As guiding principles, these values must be respected in health and long-term care in line with Article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Following this information, the decision of medical professionals is not allowed to be based on assumptions about old age, including ageist perceptions.

¹¹ Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung (2022): „Viele Erkrankungen werden mit dem Alter häufig“, available at: <https://www.gesundheitsforschung-bmbf.de/de/viele-erkrankungen-werden-mit-dem-alter-haufig-6786.php>

¹² Higashi, R., Tillack, A., Steinman, M., Harper, M. & Johnston, C. (2012): “Elder care as “frustrating” and “boring”: Understanding the persistence of negative attitudes toward older patients among physicians-in-training.”, In: Journal of Ageing Studies, 26, 476-483.

¹³ Cherubini, A., Del Signore, S., Ouslander, J., Semla, T. & Michel, J. (2010): “Fighting Against Age Discrimination in Clinical Trials.”, In: Journal of American Geriatrics Society, 58, 1791-1796.

Principles to prevent ageism in the Health area

Prejudices and stereotypes should not guide any decision, including medical assessments.

Treatment options should not be presented as final decisions rather than options for the patients.

Cooperation with social workers is recommended so that an individual treatment perspective is ensured.

A check of local social offers such as neighborhood services should be considered.

Health area in the SAA game

Below you will find a reference to the cases of the SAA game that deal with ageism in the Health sector. If you would like to learn more about age discrimination in these cases, click on the button below and launch the SAA game.



Marc

Marc is being diminished as his health problem has not been taken seriously enough by his doctor, which could have posed a danger to him.



Monika

In Monika's case, an alternative treatment was neglected because she was considered too old.

[PLAY THE SAA GAME](#)

Ageism in the Social area

Ageism also affects the private and social environment. Due to ageism and age discrimination, older persons face barriers that devalue their positive contributions to society and limit their right to equally participate. This has a negative impact on their mental and physical health, hinders their opportunities to participate in social life, and puts them at risk of poverty and abuse. Ageism also undermines our sense of autonomy and self-esteem.



Older people often experience discrimination in their social environments such as in contact with friends, neighbours or even family.¹⁴ Examples in this regard are, for instance, when children try to manage the daily schedule of their older parents even if they still feel capable of managing it themselves. It could also happen that a friend or another known person reproduces stereotypes that describe how older adults e.g. should behave or dress a certain way. In the context of age discrimination, the word "appropriate" comes up again and again. But how is this measured? What is appropriate and for whom? Here it becomes clear how strongly stereotypes and prejudices influence people's lives.¹⁵ The behaviour of Lucia in the SAA game is probably seen by many people as not fitting her age. The widespread idea of older people is that they are rather passive and imagines them as withdrawn. Partying or the need for relationships and physical closeness, on the other hand, are not attributed to older people.

¹⁴ Bytheway, B., Ward, R., Holland, C. & Peace, S. (2007): "Too old – Older people's accounts of discrimination, exclusion and rejection, available at: https://www.antidiskriminierungsstelle.de/SharedDocs/downloads/EN/publikationen/Too_Old.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2, p.67

¹⁵ Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (2014): „M 01.06 Stereotypen und Vorurteile“, available at: <https://www.bpb.de/lernen/angebote/grafstat/fussball-und-nationalbewusstsein/130843/m-01-06-stereotypen-und-vorurteile/>

Principles to prevent ageism in the Social area

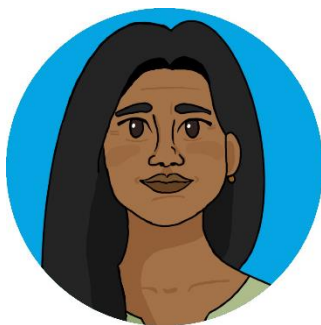
Older adults should not be treated differently in conversations and social situations.

Older adults should not be perceived as different and should have the same personal freedom as younger persons. Ageing is a natural process that starts from the day we are born.

If you detect ageist behavior within your social group: don't be quiet! Actively note that such behaviour is not okay!

Social area in the SAA game

Below you will find a reference to the cases of the SAA game that deal with ageism in the Social area. If you would like to learn more about ageism in these cases, click on the button below and launch the SAA game.



Theresia

Theresia reports that her mom is being disrespected by medical staff, as they talk to her like she was a child.



Lucia

Lucia faces ageism as she is getting judged by her co-workers because she is perceived as too old for her dressing style.

PLAY THE SAA GAME

Ageism in the Advocacy area

Many of the ageist cases described above are so severe for those affected because there is often no real legal recourse. In order to take legal action, existing laws must be violated. These are clear exclusions, insults, or abuse. Many stereotypes and actions fall below these legal boundaries or cannot be proven, while certain behaviours in e.g. the job area are protected by law. For example, a person may not be legally disadvantaged because of age, or certain behaviours may not be permitted in their own country. In some cases, it is possible to act against discriminatory behaviour. For this purpose, there are official anti-discrimination offices in all partner countries where discriminatory behaviour can be reported. This process is described in the Advocacy section, which is primarily intended to raise awareness of the possibility of seeking help.

Advocacy area in the SAA game

Below you will find a reference to the cases of the SAA game that deal with Ageism in the Job Sector. If you would like to learn more about age discrimination in these cases, click on the button below and launch the SAA game.



Ellen

Ellen complains that she is being discriminated against regarding further training opportunities in her job. She contacts an anti-discrimination office to support her.



Petra

Petra realises ageist structures in the recruitment processes. An anti-discrimination adviser is helping her to address her case.

[PLAY THE SAA GAME](#)

Ageism in the Built environment

While stairs and landings are not a challenge for most people and are hardly noticed in everyday life, they might be enormous obstacles for people with physical impairments and can, thus, cause exclusions. Toilets are often neither independently usable for children, nor accessible for people in wheelchairs or often not even present in public space. Many such examples can be found. These environments are planned for healthy adults who are the normative blueprint, or what is thought of as being "normal". Regarding accessibility or age-appropriate environments, efforts have been made for many years to review built environments and adapt planning processes to enable as many people as possible to live and participate.



Principles to prevent ageism in the Built environment

Older adults should not be excluded by architectural elements. Inclusion by design should be fostered.

A diversity and inclusion manager should be installed as a fixed point of contact for impaired visitors.

A board should be installed where older visitors and visitors in need can put forward their needs and doubts already within the planning phases.

Implementation of inclusion-fostering building frameworks that contain several barrier-free elements as standard options (more railings, wide doors, lifts no stairs etc.).

Built environment in the SAA Game

Below you will find a reference to the cases of the SAA game that deal with ageism in the Job Sector. If you would like to learn more about age discrimination in these cases, click on the button below and launch the SAA game.



Piet

Piet experiences that older adults are often excluded by construction design, so that architectural elements may act as obstacles for impaired or older individuals.



Mathilda

Mathilda reports that older visitors are being overlooked by planning activities, as their needs and wishes are not being considered from the beginning.

[PLAY THE SAA GAME](#)

Have a look at all our SAA learning materials!

The SAA game / Gamified learning with SAA

The SAA game serves to identify ageism in various areas of everyday life. In the game, players take on the role of an equality manager who helps a large healthcare institution deal with complaints based on ageism. The aim is to better understand the different fates of fictional individuals and to identify ageism more clearly in everyday life. A special feature is that the content of the game can be chosen by the trainers or learning groups regarding different topics. Therefore, the SAA game can be adapted to the specific needs of workshops. If you are interested in playing the game as a learner or using it in workshop environments for other learners, click one of the buttons below.

[PLAY THE SAA GAME](#)[CREATE A WORKSHOP](#)

The SAA compendium / Learning about ageism

The compendium 'Responding to ageism' gathers personal experiences of ageism and strategies to deal with it. It is based on information collected in five European countries (Portugal, the Netherlands, Lithuania, Bulgaria as well as in Germany). In this context, interviews with people affected by ageism and desk research were conducted. The outcomes had been compiled in the compendium and hence built the fundament for most of the SAA materials. If you want to have a look at the compendium, please access the document by clicking the button below.

[SAA COMPENDIUM](#)

The SAA toolkit for trainers / Creating workshops with SAA

The toolkit for trainers is specially designed for coaches who want to educate on identifying ageism. It describes various methods of imparting knowledge on the topic of ageism that match the content of the SAA game so that the participants can talk together about possible intervention strategies and their own experiences in such situations.

[SAA TRAINER TOOLKIT](#)[CREATE A WORKSHOP](#)

The SAA Recommendations for policymakers / Motivate structural changes with SAA

As a further result, the SAA Recommendations for policymakers were developed, in which corresponding policy guidelines from the European partner countries concerning age discrimination were compiled. The collection of examples of good practices that have emerged from research is aimed at political decision-makers and associations. By addressing ageism at a higher level, the policy recommendations can serve to support and inspire decision-makers and lobby groups to implement future measures against age discrimination. To have a look at the document, please click below.

[SAA RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS](#)

The SAA E-learning platform

If you want more background information about the SAA learning materials, please visit our e-learning platform.

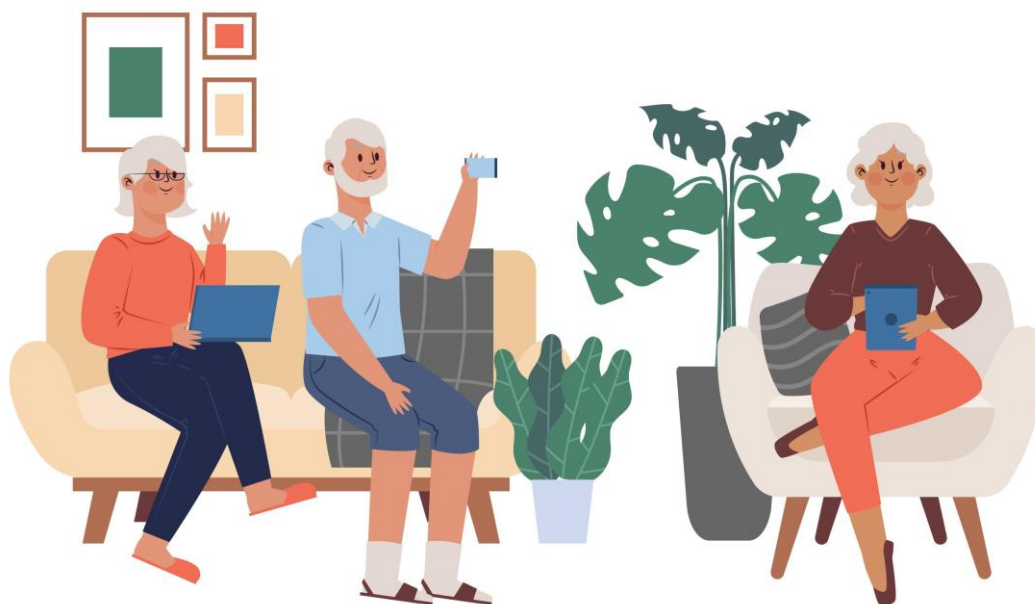
[SAA E-LEARNING PLATFORM](#)



Further learning resources to combat ageism

If you are looking for further information and knowledge on ageism, you can have a look at the reports below, by clicking on their titles:

- [*AGE Manifesto to the European Elections 2024 \(2024\)*](#)
- [*AGE Barometer: Empowering older people in the labour market for sustainable and quality working lives \(2023\)*](#)
- [*AGE Barometer: on life-long learning, education, volunteering, intergenerational exchanges, consultation and participation \(2021\)*](#)
- [*AGE Position Paper: Care must empower us throughout our lives \(2021\)*](#)
- [*AGE Report: The right to work in old age \(2021\)*](#)
- [*AGE Paper: Towards an EU Age Equality Strategy: Delivering equal rights at all ages \(2021\)*](#)





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