



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 764632.



01/10/2019

Self-advocacy and empowerment: Effective weapons to combat ageism?

This article is a repost and was originally posted by AGE Platform Europe here:
<https://ageing-equal.org/self-advocacy-and-empowerment-effective-weapons-to-combat-ageism/>

By: Hanna Köttl

Older people are often stereotypically portrayed as vulnerable when they could be powerful drivers for societal change.

To overcome the erroneous and negative representations of ageing as a social and economic burden we need to emphasise the potential of later life and older adults. The immense diversity is, in fact, the result of a tremendous variety of experiences, values, capabilities, interests and life challenges. Those resources are already shared by older adults contributing to society as volunteers, employees or entrepreneurs, mentors, informal caregivers, consumers, etc.

Numerous counter-examples of collective action also prove their crucial roles in shaping the political debates: 'Grannies Against the Right' fighting racism, sexism, antisemitism and fascism in Austria; 'KlimaSeniorInnen' in Switzerland raising awareness regarding consequences of climate change; 'Grandmothers against poverty and Aids' in South Africa combatting the stigma and societal challenges related to HIV or 'The Gray Panthers' in the United States, who tackle ageism at a grassroots level, are just a few examples. This activism counteracts ageist notions by reaching a wide public audience and influencing political decision-making. As older persons themselves, they advocate for social equality and fight for a world for all ages.

Yet, we might be cautious in thinking that ageism can be fought merely by empowering people while ageist societal structures remain unaltered. The individual's scope for action and decision-making is limited by economic, legal, cultural and discursive power relations.

While empowerment, self-advocacy and intergenerational solidarity provide strong support at the individual level, this can only be fully effective, if we as a society also provide the appropriate framework conditions for individuals to drive the change they want to see.

Hanna Köttl is an occupational therapist and PhD student within the EU H2020 MSCA-ITN EuroAgeism at Bar Ilan University. Her research aims at tackling ageism in the context of everyday technology use by applying an empowerment approach. For more information about Hanna's work, visit: <https://euroageism.eu/projects/addressing-ageism-through-empowerment-and-awareness/>

Disclaimer: This article reflects only the author's/authors' view. The Research Executive Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.