

What is a rights-based approach to ageing?

In 2018 the EU Fundamental Rights Agency published a landmark [report](#) arguing for the need to move away from thinking about old age in terms of ‘deficits’ that create ‘needs’, towards a ‘rights-based’ approach to ageing. This shift, according to the [Director](#) of the Fundamental Rights Agency, involves four key elements:

✓ Embracing all human rights

A rights-based approach to ageing aims to secure all the human rights that we have as human beings. It is based on the obligations that States and the EU have committed to uphold in European and international human rights treaties. It encompasses all civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights. All human rights are equally important, they are inalienable and interdependent. The ultimate purpose of a rights-based approach is to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights when we are older.

✓ Respecting the principle of equality and non-discrimination

A rights-based approach renders visible and challenges the practices that keep us from living fairly and freely as equals because of our race, gender, nationality, ethnicity, age, disability, or other status. It looks into the ways in which these different factors interact and create unique disadvantages for us as we grow older. A rights-based approach seeks to identify the concrete changes that are necessary to address discriminatory patterns so that people, no matter their age can live in dignity.

✓ Working with older people

A rights-based approach values and supports the genuine participation of older people as equal partners. Participation, especially of those at risk of and of those experiencing some form of vulnerability, is necessary for policy to become more inclusive and appropriate to address diverse forms of disadvantage. Putting older persons in the centre is not a validation process; it’s a process of transformation. It allows marginalized people to be understood, heard and included. Participation also involves empowering individuals to shape the way forward and to claim their rights.

✓ Monitoring, measuring and assessing

A rights-based approach is interested in processes (i.e. are older people involved?) and outcomes (i.e. are rights met?), not just inputs (i.e. means, such as policies or services). It is based on evidence about real barriers and disadvantages, but also what works, what interventions make positive changes in the rights of older people. Monitoring, measuring and assessing the enjoyment of rights over time ensures that there is a gradual improvement rather than deterioration of rights and that governments are held accountable when they do not comply with their obligations.

Needs approach	Rights-based approach
Older people have deficits/ are vulnerable	Older people are rights holders
Older people are objects of assistance	Older people are citizens
Older people are passive	Older people are participants
Focus on vulnerability of the individual/group	Focus on environment and societal factors that create barriers for the equal enjoyment of rights
Older people deserve attention	We have obligations towards older people
Focus on input, not outcome	Focus on process and outcome
Targeted policies meet needs of vulnerable people/ groups	Age-proofing universal policies to ensure full and equal enjoyment of all human rights



AGE work is co-funded by the **Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme** of the European Union. The contents of this document are the sole responsibility of AGE Platform Europe and cannot be taken to reflect the views of the European Commission.