



Adding Life to Years - Building Intergenerational Solidarity Across the Lifecourse for Sustainable Societies

**IASW World Social Work Day
Webinar 2025**

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Dr Catherine Elliott O'Dare, TCD.*

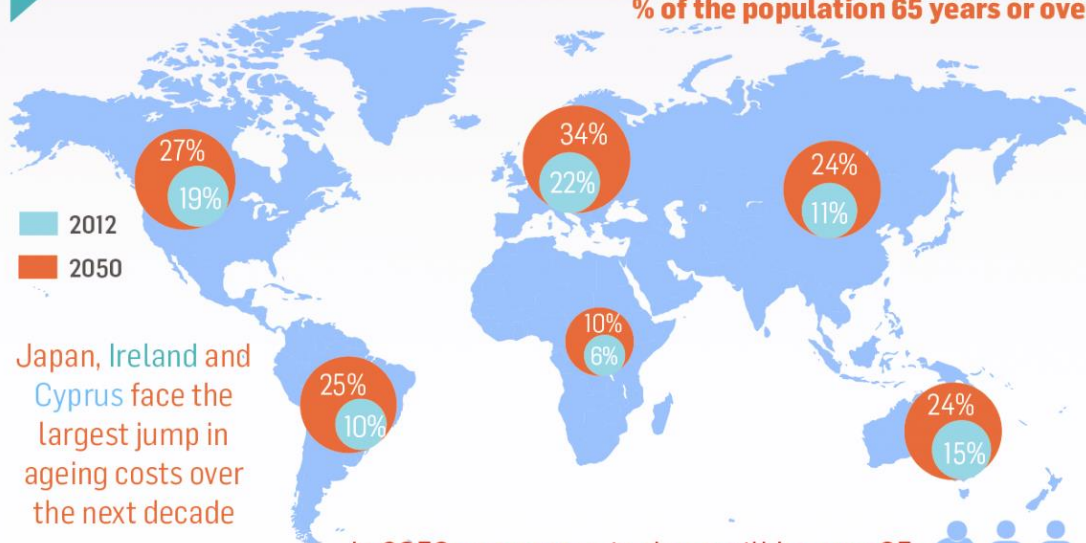


Are you looking forward to getting older and old age?

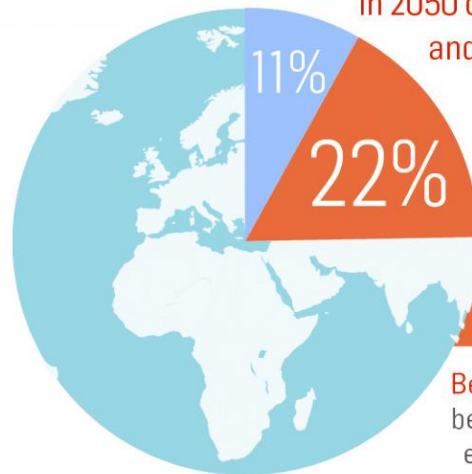
What does 'Growing Old with Dignity' look like for you?

THE WORLD'S AGEING POPULATION

% of the population 65 years or over



Japan, Ireland and Cyprus face the largest jump in ageing costs over the next decade



In 2050 one person in three will be over 65 and one person in ten will be over 80



2012 - 11% of the world's 6.9bn people are over 60

2050 - 22% of the world's 9bn people will be over 60

Between now and 2050 the fiscal burden of the crisis will be 10% of the ageing-related costs. The other 90% will be extra spending on pensions, health and long-term care

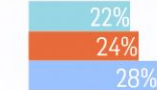
% of over 50's in overall population

2006 2011 2016

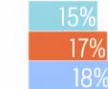
Brazil



China



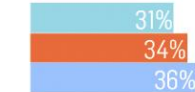
India



Japan



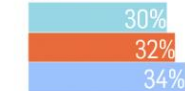
Russia



UK

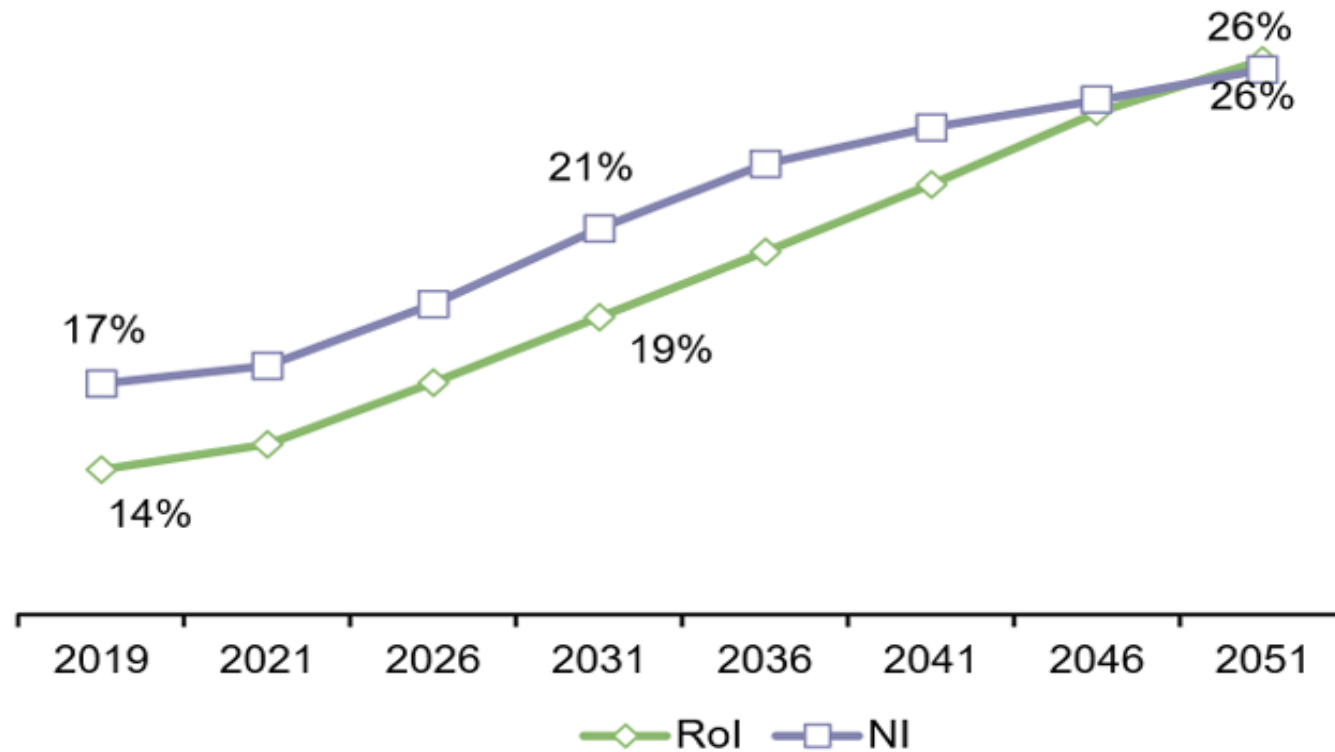


US



People aged 65+ as a percentage of total population in Ireland (2019-2051)

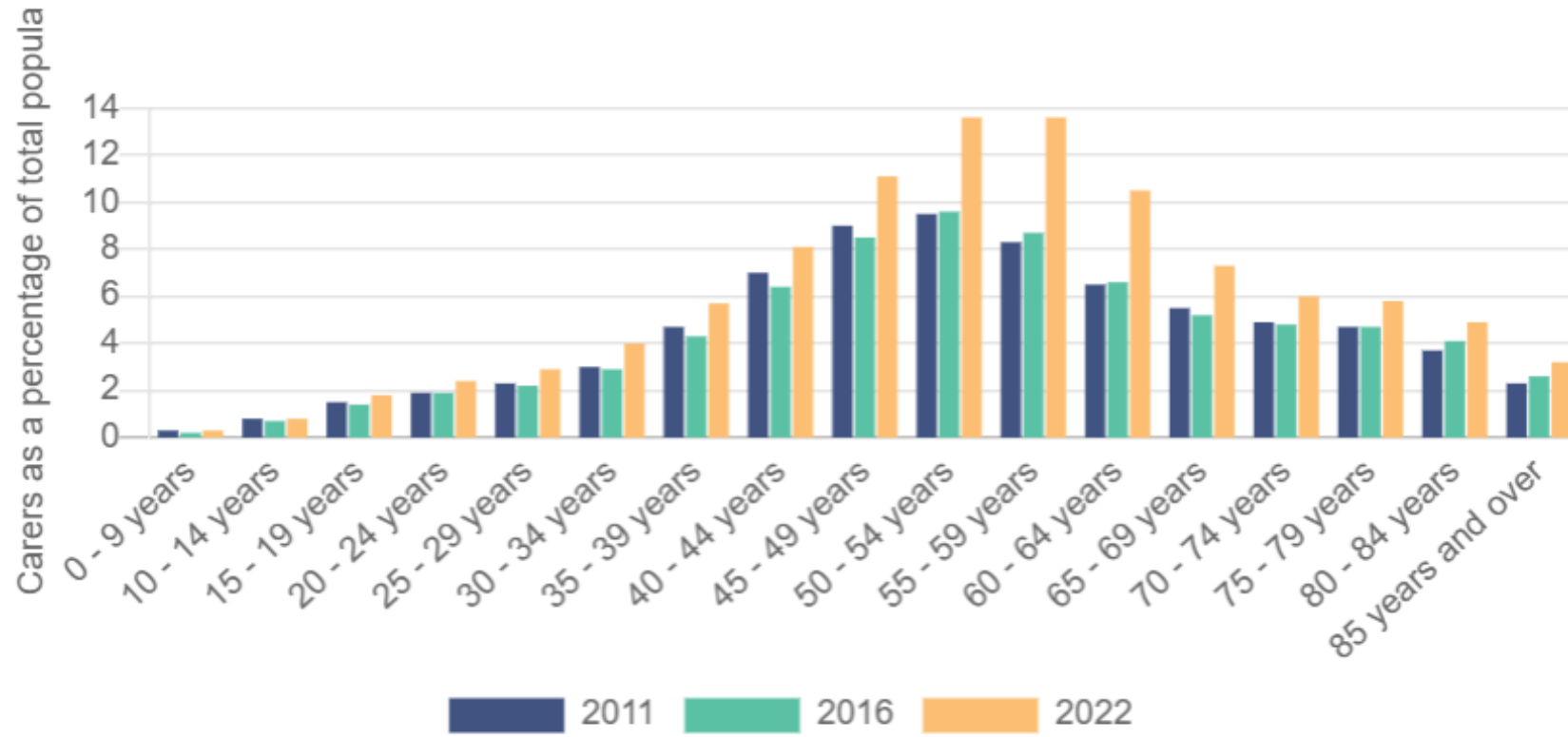
(Institute of Public Health, 2020)



Source: CSO 2018; NISRA, 2019

Carers as a percentage of total population by age group, 2011 to 2022

(Census, 2022)



Ageism

AGEISM
IS EVERYWHERE

1 IN 2 PEOPLE
WORLDWIDE ARE
AGEIST AGAINST
OLDER PEOPLE
and, in Europe, there is
more ageism against
younger than older
people

Ageism affects us
THROUGHOUT LIFE
and exists in our
institutions, our
relationships
and ourselves

Ageism
**EXACERBATES
OTHER
DISADVANTAGE**

#AWorld4AllAges

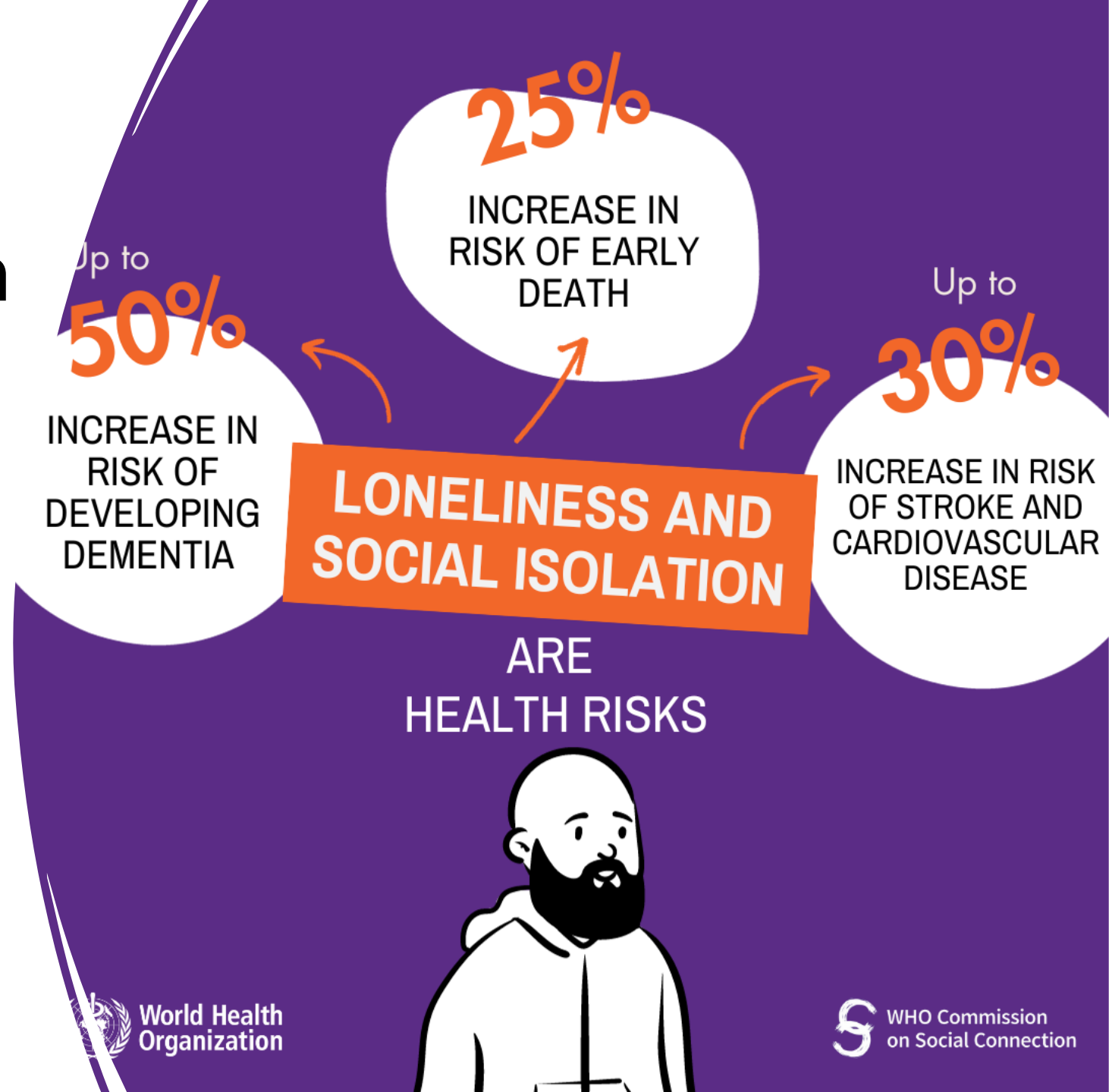
GLOBAL
CAMPAIGN
TO COMBAT
AGEISM



Social Isolation, Loneliness and Impacts on Health

(WHO,2024)

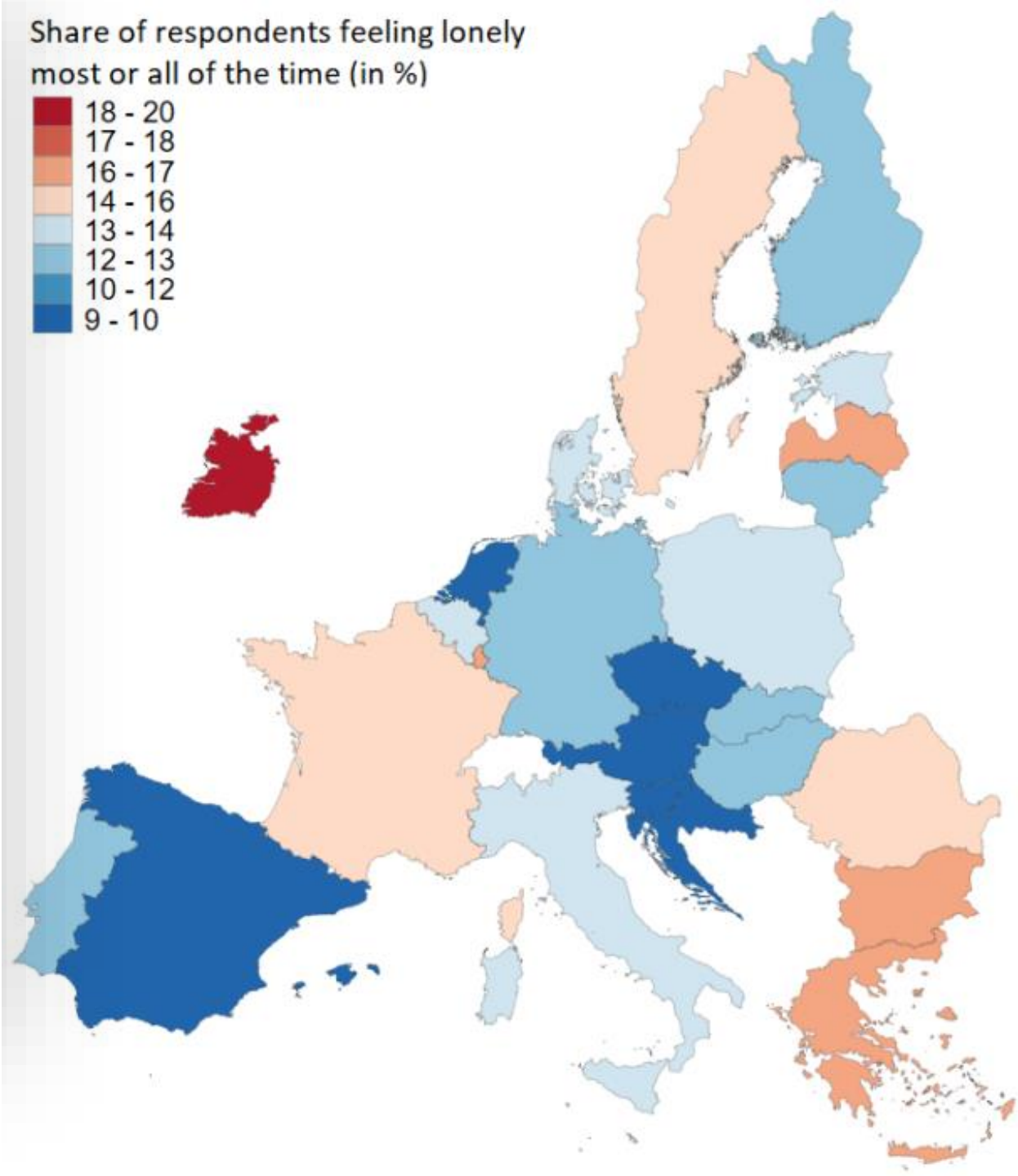
- 1 in 4 older people experience social isolation.
- Serious impact on physical and mental health, quality of life, and longevity.
- Impact on mortality is comparable to that of other well-established risk factors such as smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity.

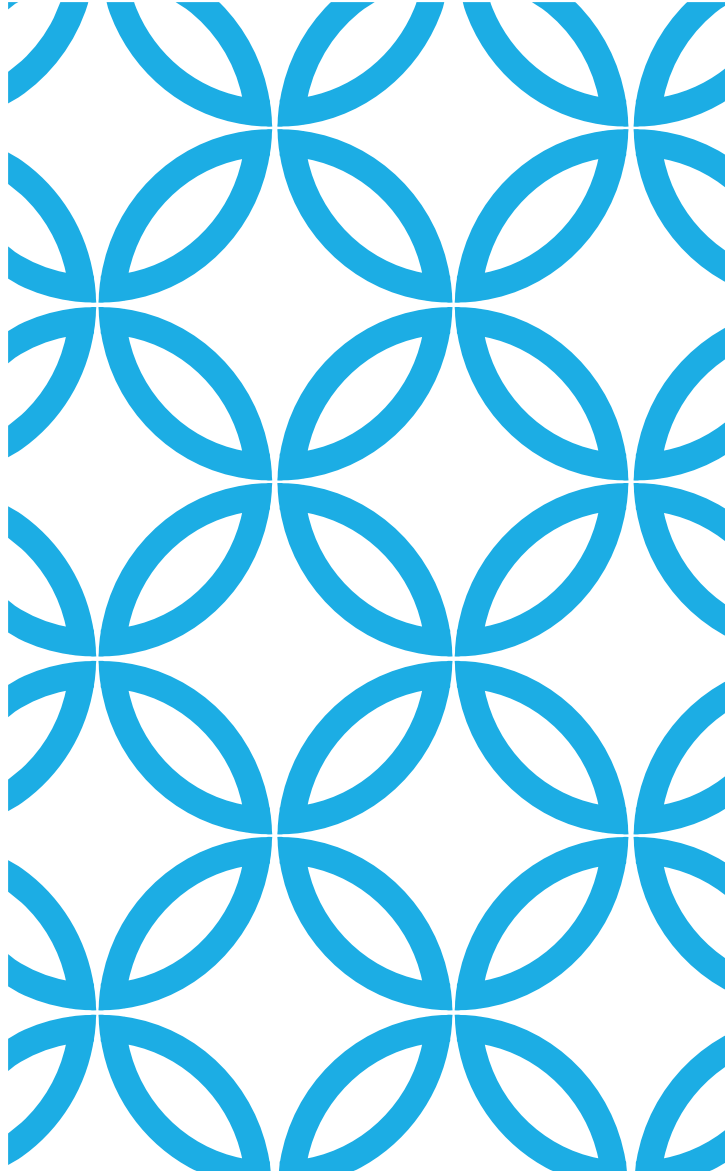


Ireland- '*The loneliest Country in Europe*'

(European Union, 2022)

- 20% of people in Ireland feel lonely most or all of the time; 13% across EU
- People who feel lonely: 6 times more likely to experience mental health issues
- Raises mortality risk by 26%, social isolation by 29% and living alone by 32%
- Poor self-rated health, functional limitations and chronic conditions = higher levels of loneliness





INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY — EVIDENCE OF PREVALENCE

Dr Catherine Elliott O'Dare —Trinity College Dublin

Unifying Generations —European study

Intergenerational Friendship — Irish research

Why study IS? Equality and wellbeing: ageism, loneliness,
segregation/integration, participation...

Unifying Generations Report

12,850 citizens across 6 European countries (France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and the UK).

12,850 respondents were surveyed aged 18-40 and 65+, equally weighted by age and gender. 6,425 people surveyed were between the ages of 18 and 40, with a further 6,425 People over the age of 65.

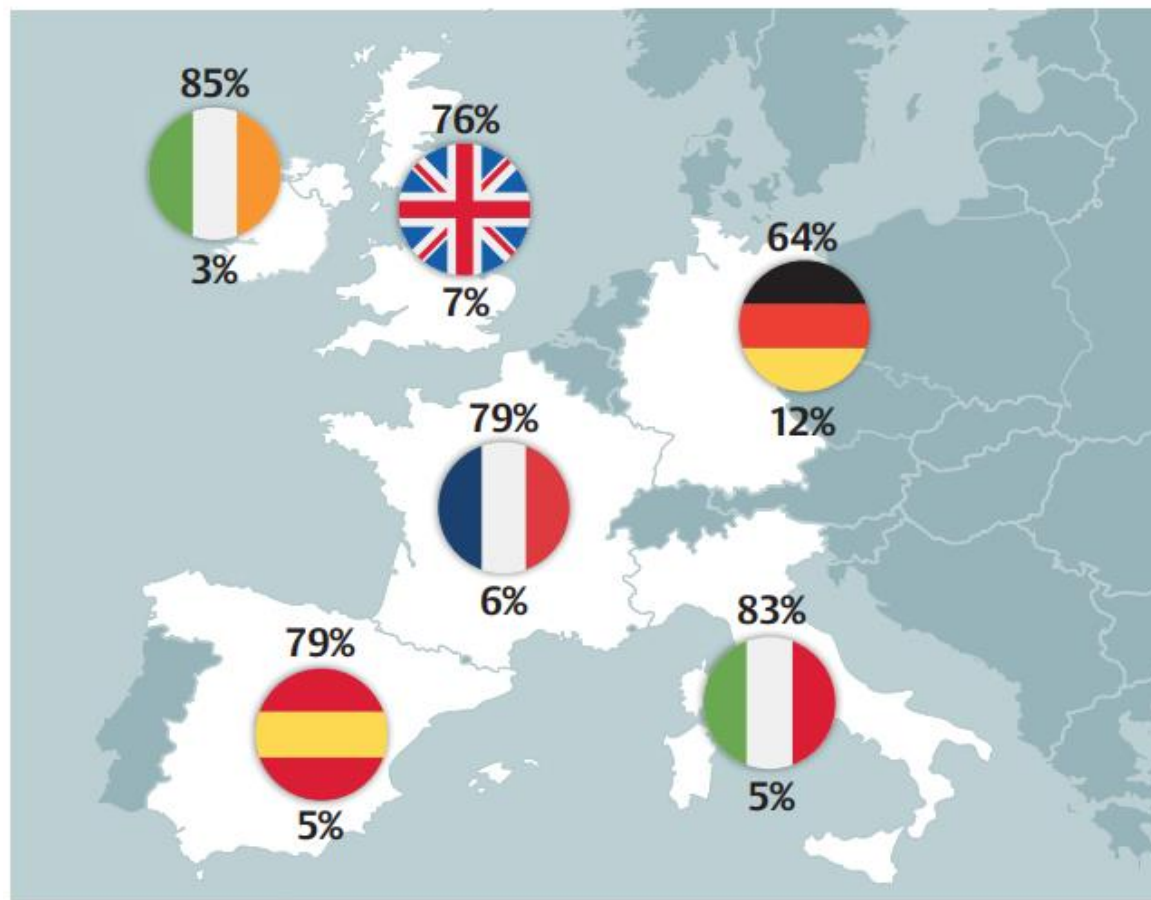
An online questionnaire which was comprised of 20 questions, including 14 questions with open ended response options.

Begin to add to the knowledge base on intergenerational solidarity

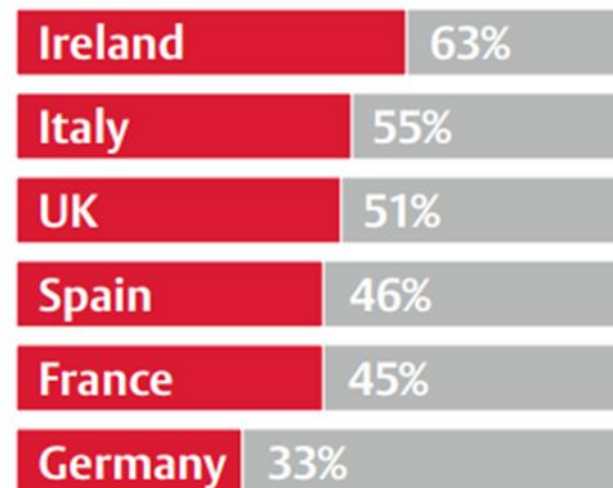


Closer relations between generations good/bad thing?

Country breakdown (Good / Bad)



Companionship/friendship is the most valuable/important thing younger people could offer an older person:



A desire for more intergenerational interactions-Ireland

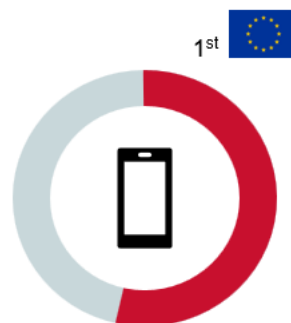
Older people's skills highly valued



29% of younger people say that mentoring/educational schemes provided by government would help them to do more with older people



54% of older people say that they would like to learn more from the younger generations in terms of new technology and digital skills



85% think that closer interactions between generations are a good thing



Most important benefits of intergenerational interactions:

- Companionship/friendship
- Learning
- Mental wellbeing



60% have a friend that is a different generation to them



35% are open to being friends with people of a different generation

Recommendations to enable intergenerational relations



1

Change perceptions about senior people and their interactions with younger people

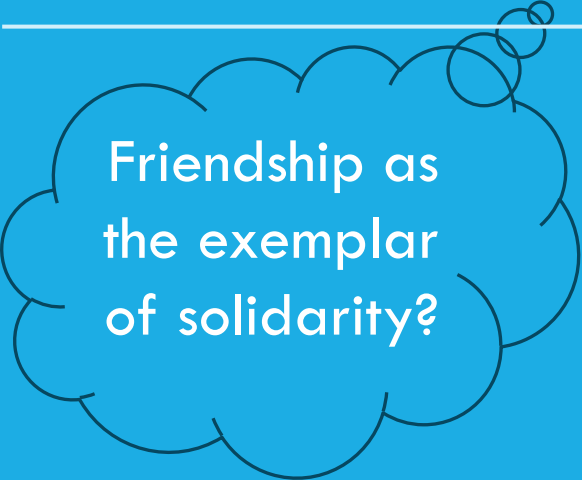
2

Greater opportunities for **mentoring and knowledge sharing** between older and younger people

3

Improve **digital skills** of senior people to overcome isolation

CONSIDERING: INTERGENERATIONAL FRIENDSHIPS



Friendship as
the exemplar
of solidarity?

Friendship characteristics: chosen, mutual, reciprocal, enjoyable and equal personal relationship. (Spencer and Pahl, 2006, Adams, 1989 etc.). With norms of respect, loyalty, support, commitment and trust (Felmlee and Muraco, 2009).

Intergenerational friendship is a friendship which occurs between differing generations of older and younger adults.

Participants in this study aged 65 or over who have, or have had in the past, a friend(s): 15 years or more their junior, not related to them, friends for more than three years.

What meaning and significance does intergenerational friendship have for the older friend: what role does it play in the older friend's life?

Intangible commonalities

‘I don’t really feel any older than her. We have a great bit of a laugh, you know. Chatting and laughing, telling jokes...I could say anything to her’. (Valerie)

‘We have a very good friendship, in their company there isn’t any great age difference, not in your heart’(May)

‘They (peer friends) weren’t all dead, but they weren’t out !’ (Tommy)



‘...IT WAS OBVIOUS WE WERE FRIENDS, BECAUSE WE WERE FRIENDS IN ACTION’. JANIS



A word cloud featuring various activities and interests in different colors and sizes. The words are arranged in a roughly triangular shape, pointing downwards. The colors include red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and purple. The words are: TRAVEL, GOLF, FINANCE, HISTORY, WORK, BRIDGE, FOOTBALL, WALKING, SCULPTING, RUGBY, MAKING-SLOE-GIN, PEER-FRIENDS, AMATEUR-DRAMATICS, PHOTOGRAPHY, MUSIC, TECHNOLOGY-USE, PROFESSIONAL-INTERESTS, HAVING-A-DAY-OUT, POLITICS, WAYS-OF-THINKING, PROPERTY-VIEWING, SHARING-A-LAUGH, PUB, ART, SEA-SWIMMING, WAYS-OF-BEING, PAINTING, EDUCATION, SHOPPING, FASHION, FAMILY, and CRAFT.

‘We were all involved with music, which is ageless’. Simon

TO CONCLUDE

Promoting and supporting intergenerational solidarity through intergenerational interaction/contact is an important policy approach, benefiting older and younger people and society as a whole.

Intergenerational relations/friendship promotes continued belonging and connectedness, supports social inclusion, tackles loneliness, promotes age equality.

AGEISM CAN BE COMBATTED



POLICY AND LAW
can protect human rights and address age discrimination and inequality



EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES
can transmit knowledge and skills and enhance empathy



INTERGENERATIONAL INTERVENTIONS
can connect people of different generations

#AWorld4AllAges



GLOBAL
CAMPAIGN
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AGEISM

Interdependency and Ethics of Care

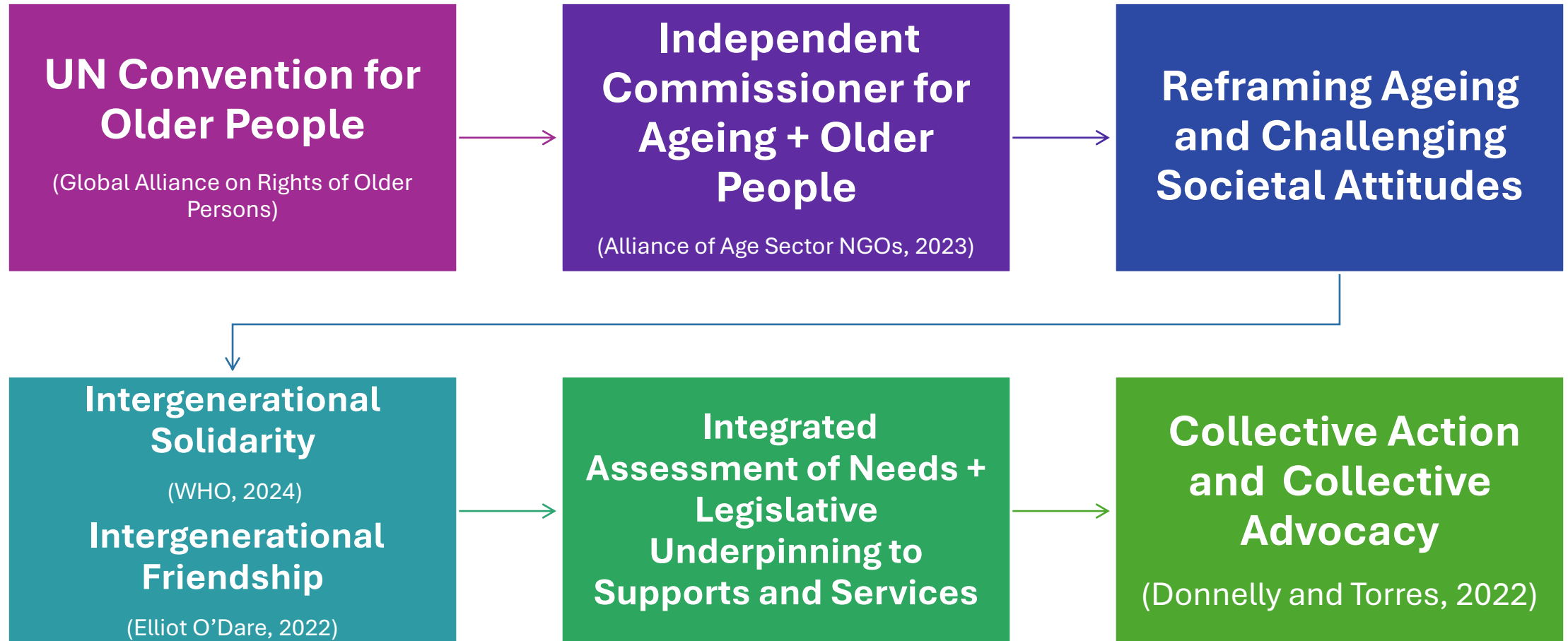
(Barnes, 2012; Tronto, 2009)

*‘From the perspective of the ethic of care, **the discourse of burdensomeness is a way of marginalising older people and also disassociating the young, fit and able-bodied from their own vulnerability and their future old age.***

(Lloyd, 2012 p.135)



What could help?



**Reframing care and support of older people as a collective responsibility and a public good can help put in place the policies and resources that we need not only for our current generation of older people, but also for our future older selves.
(Donnelly and Torres, 2022)**

Concluding Thought