



**Liat Ayalon, Ph.D.**  
**Professor, Louis and Gabi Weisfeld School of Social Work**  
**Bar Ilan University, Israel**

**[Liatayalon.com](http://Liatayalon.com)**

I was trained as a clinical psychologist, but did my internship in a psychiatric hospital and my post-doc in a geriatric department. I am currently in the school of social work and coordinate an international, multi-disciplinary, inter-sectorial Ph.D. program. As a result of these diverse exposures, my perspective has shifted from the micro-level, focused on the individual and his or her psychopathology to the meso- and macro-levels as they relate to normative processes in the lives of older adults.

A major interest of mine for the past decade has been the topic of ageism, defined by the World Health Organization as the stereotyping, discrimination and prejudice of people because of their age. Ageism can be both positive and negative and can be directed towards

people of any age. My focus, thus far, has been on the negative aspects of ageism and their impact on older adults. Because ageism is not a purely theoretical concept, but has real life implications, I have been striving to use research to support policies and legislations of relevance to older adults.

Specifically, for the past four years, I have served as the chair of a COST Action on Ageism (COST IS1402; [notoageism.com](http://notoageism.com)). COST stands for Cooperation in Science and Technology. It is the oldest funding mechanism in Europe which aims to connect researchers around a specific topic in order to enhance the field. Our COST Action encompassed over 200 researchers from 35 countries. We met regularly in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of what ageism is and what we should do to reduce it. We also collaborated with several policy stakeholders in order to ensure that our research informs policy and legislations.

As part of the COST Action, we collaborated with the World Health Organization (WHO) global campaign to combat ageism in order to ensure that we all live in a world for all ages (<https://www.who.int/ageing/ageism/en/>). To do so, we have gathered the evidence necessary to carry out a global campaign. For instance, a group of researchers involved in the COST Action has systematically evaluated existing scales to assess ageism. This information is urgently needed as in the absence of a reliable and valid tool to assess ageism it is impossible to accurately evaluate the results of the campaign. Our group has also produced an edited book on ageism from a multi-disciplinary, international perspective (*Contemporary Perspectives on Ageism*, 2018, Springer) as well as multiple scientific articles, a special issue and policy reports. We also have contributed to the Ageing-Equal campaign organized by Age-Platform Europe to ensure that the rights of older adults are not diminished with age (<https://ageing-equal.org/>).

In collaboration with researchers and policy stakeholders, we developed an international Ph.D. program, funded under H2020, under the Marie Curie Scheme (Euroageism.eu). This program aims to train 15 early stage researchers to bridge the gap between science and policy. It is expected that by the end of the program, students will be able to pursue a career along the science-policy continuum. After enrolling in the program, students must live in a country they have not lived in before and are expected to work in both science and policy institutes in different countries over their three-year fellowship. They also are exposed to different disciplines, as their mentors come from very diverse fields, such as clinical pharmacology, psychology, economy, sociology, policy or nursing. The program follows the European philosophy which fosters mobility across cultures, countries, disciplines and sectors.

I see these various projects as well as the global campaign to combat ageism as opportunities not only to improve the lives of older adults in society, but also to potentially impact my own life and the lives of my children. I realize it takes time and effort to modify current societal discourse and thinking. Yet, I am optimistic that we are heading in the right direction, towards a world for all ages, in which age is no longer a barrier, which prevents us from fulfilling our full potential. I believe that social processes that are starting now are likely to have an effect in decades to come. It is a great privilege to be active in shaping my own future.