



## PUBLIC COMMUNICATION AND AGEISM

### Communication Strategy of the Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in Spain

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*Public communication*  
*Ageism*  
*Age-friendly cities*  
*Older people*  
*Civic participation*  
*Municipal policies*  
*Communication strategies*

#### ABSTRACT

*This study analyses the public communication strategy of the Spanish Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, with particular attention to its role in combating ageism. Based on a descriptive and exploratory design, a content analysis was conducted of the documents available on the Age Friendly World platform and of the municipal websites of Spain's 52 provincial capitals. From this information, two synthetic indices were constructed: the degree of programme implementation (IGI-P) and the degree of development of the communication strategy (IGI-C). The results show uneven adherence to the Network and a notable lack of accessible information in many capitals, as well as limited dissemination of diagnoses, action plans and evaluations. The study concludes that public communication is not ancillary but a structural component of the programme, essential to ensuring accountability, fostering civic participation and combating institutional ageism.*

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## 1. Introduction

Demographic ageing, as a phenomenon, is one of the main structural features of contemporary societies. This reality has been analysed from interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary perspectives with the aim of designing strategies and programmes that respond to new emerging individual and collective needs (Campillo-Alhama & Ramos-Soler, 2013; HelpAge Internacional, 2021b; HelpAge *et al.*, 2023). We are therefore facing a new social and economic context in which both the lifestyles and specific needs of older citizens have been reconfigured. All of this influences and conditions the social policies aimed at older citizens by public institutions.

This circumstance has significant repercussions on municipal structures when they develop competencies, functions, and services to address the rights of this population segment (Foglia *et al.*, 2023; IMSERSO *et al.*, 2024). It is in this context of proximity that the Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, promoted by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2015), has emerged, based on raising awareness among political and administrative managers to design appropriate environments that combat ageism (WHO & PAHO, 2023). Through the platform *Age Friendly World* (2025), the WHO promotes this programme by sharing experiences and good practices in the design of urban or rural environments structured around eight management areas (WHO, 2007) and three axes (IMSERSO *et al.*, 2024), in an exercise of transfer aimed at transforming the reality of older people.

The actions developed within the framework of the Network, together with public communication strategies for their dissemination, are fundamental to building inclusive societies that combat ageism. These communication and relational processes, developed by local councils, are based on identifying older people as the true epicentre of government action. From a neo-public perspective, they call for a change in their legal position vis-à-vis local institutions and demand to be considered as citizens and not simply as subjects. Therefore, not only should they be informed of all administrative actions and initiatives that may affect them, but they should also be integrated and involved in participatory processes (Campillo-Alhama & Martínez-Sala, 2017; Ladrón de Guevara Muñoz, 2023). This means that older citizens must be listened to on relevant issues related to public management but also given the opportunity to co-design and implement public strategies in the local context.

Demographic forecasts in Spain indicate that by 2049, the population over 65 will double, representing more than 30% of the total population (some 16 million people), making us the second oldest country in the world after Japan (IMSERSO, 2011). This circumstance justifies the relevance of this study, as the involvement of local authorities in the design, development and evaluation of public policies aimed at older people is the guarantee of an inclusive and sustainable society.

This study presents descriptive and exploratory research based on the initial hypothesis that the communication strategy of most senior-friendly municipalities is deficient and requires a rethinking of objectives, formats and media (*offline and online*). To this end, an approach is made to the 52 Spanish provincial capitals with the aim of identifying, based on their membership of the Age-Friendly Cities Network, the level of implementation of the project phases and the level of maturity of their communication strategies. This analysis will allow us to ascertain whether there is a direct relationship between progress in the implementation of the programme and the strategic management of communication by local councils.

## 2. Social policies and senior citizens

The development of the first sectoral policies aimed at older people in Spain began in 1970, coinciding with the establishment of a public social services system and the approval of the National Social Security Plan for the care of the elderly. At that time, measures focused almost exclusively on geriatric and social-health care (Campillo-Alhama & Ramos-Soler, 2013). However, it was not until the early 1990s that the 1992 Gerontological Plan was articulated (IMSERSO, 2005,

2011). This plan, organised into five areas of action (pensions, health and healthcare, social services, culture and leisure, and participation), set a precedent for the design of subsequent programmes thanks to its innovative and comprehensive nature, and was the first comprehensive social policy response for senior citizens. However, its impact was very limited due to insufficient funding and difficulties arising from the process of decentralising regional powers in the area of social services (IMSERSO, 2005). Based on this proposal, the Action Plan for Older People 2003-2007 was designed, with the aim of improving the quality of life of this group by coordinating state social policy with that of the autonomous regions and local authorities (town councils, provincial councils and island councils).

Furthermore, the commemoration of the European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations (2012) was one of the most important initiatives of the European Union's framework programme between 2011 and 2014. Its objective was to guide the programmes and policies promoted by the Member States and their corresponding regional, local and social partners towards active ageing (EU Economic and Social Committee, 2023).

Within European regulations and guidelines, the Green Paper on Ageing (European Commission, 2021) stands out, adopting a view that associates age with decline, dependence and vulnerability, presenting older people as a high cost to society. This approach contrasts sharply with the contemporary focus on human rights, well-being and the ability of this group to contribute to social and economic life in a comprehensive manner. In 2023, the European Economic and Social Committee drew up an Opinion on a European Strategy for Older People, coinciding with the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union, which analyses, from a multidimensional perspective, the main challenges and opportunities posed by demographic ageing. It also highlights the importance of an effective approach by public and social actors in the design of policies aimed at older citizens. In this regard, it is essential that the European Union formulate a new strategy that guarantees the protection of the rights of older people and their involvement in the design of policies and strategies through civic participation and citizen science.

This new framework for action should be aligned with the Plan for the Decade of Healthy Ageing 2020-2030 (WHO, 2020), which is linked to the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Older people are at the heart of a global initiative that brings together the coordinated efforts of government officials, civil society, international organisations, academic institutions, the media, the private sector and the third sector, with the aim of improving the life experience of this group, their environments and the communities in which they live (Noordzij *et al.*, 2019).

The Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) project is directly linked to this WHO strategy (2020). It is consistent with the promotion of active and healthy ageing (EU Economic and Social Committee, 2023). Consequently, each country's national plans for the well-being of older citizens must be designed on the basis of specific objectives, with metric indicators (quantitative and qualitative) that assess the effectiveness of public policies, as an essential requirement for moving towards an inclusive society in which older people can live with dignity, full participation and social integration.

### **2.1. The Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in Spain**

The Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities in Spain (CAPEMAE) operates in the context of local government. By assuming responsibility for designing a comprehensive strategy for sectoral policies affecting this segment of the population, their needs, opinions and proposals are taken into account in a process of civic participation whose purpose is to analyse different areas of political and administrative management in order to promote active and sustainable ageing (Premaratna *et al.*, 2023; Zuniga *et al.*, 2023). There are currently 274 municipalities that are members of this network (IMSERSO, 2025).

**Table 1.** Municipal Adherence Index (IMA) of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Programme by Autonomous Community (Spain)

| Autonomous Community | Total No. of Municipalities | No. of Participating Municipalities | Municipal Adherence Index (IMA) (%) |
|----------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Andalusia            | 785                         | 23                                  | 2.9                                 |
| Aragon               | 731                         | 10                                  | 1.4                                 |
| Asturias             | 78                          | 26                                  | 33.3                                |
| Balearic Islands     | 67                          | 8                                   | 11.9                                |
| Canary Islands       | 88                          | 3                                   | 3.4                                 |
| Cantabria            | 102                         | 19                                  | 18.6                                |
| Castile and León     | 2,248                       | 14                                  | 0.6                                 |
| Castile-La Mancha    | 919                         | 4                                   | 0.4                                 |
| Catalonia            | 947                         | 32                                  | 3.4                                 |
| Valencian Community  | 542                         | 30                                  | 5.5                                 |
| Extremadura          | 388                         | 5                                   | 1.3                                 |
| Galicia              | 313                         | 8                                   | 2.6                                 |
| Madrid               | 179                         | 17                                  | 9.5                                 |
| Murcia               | 45                          | 4                                   | 8.9                                 |
| Navarre              | 272                         | 10                                  | 3.7                                 |
| Basque Country       | 252                         | 59                                  | 23.4                                |
| La Rioja             | 174                         | 1                                   | 0.6                                 |
| City of Ceuta        | 1                           | 1                                   | 100                                 |
| City of Melilla      | 1                           | 0                                   | 0                                   |
| <b>Total Spain</b>   | <b>8,132</b>                | <b>274</b>                          | <b>3.4</b>                          |

Source: INE (2025). Register, Number of municipalities by province, autonomous community and island. IMSERSO (2025) as of: 09/07/25. Own elaboration.

The implementation of the programme is based on The Vancouver Protocol (WHO, 2007): a methodological proposal for the preparation of diagnoses and the design of plans in the municipalities that form part of the CAPEMAE Network. During this process, the aim is not only to identify the needs and demands of older people, but also to detect the barriers and limitations that prevent their active participation as members of the community in proposing improvements (Greenfield *et al.*, 2015, 2022; Greenfield & Buffel, 2022). As shown in Table 1, the autonomous communities with the highest Municipal Adherence Index (MAI) (Campillo *et al.*, 2025b), in descending order, are: Asturias (33.3%), the Basque Country (23.4%) and Cantabria (18.6%). At the opposite end of the scale, we find Castile-León and La Rioja (with 0.6% respectively) and Castile-La Mancha (0.4%), with the lowest MAI at the regional level.

In this process, the WHO (2007) proposes a working method structured in four phases, which are specified below and are aimed at developing a five-year project based on eight key management areas:

- Phase 1. Diagnosis and design of action plans (years 1 and 2):
  - 1.1. Creation of mechanisms to achieve the participation of older people in the Network cycle through focus groups.
  - 1.2. Initial diagnosis of the friendliness and adaptation of the locality to older people. Priority is given to the use of qualitative analysis to gather comprehensive information from the group and other local actors, facilitating a deep understanding of the social dynamics and challenges faced by political and administrative leaders in municipal institutions.

1.3. Development of a three-year Action Plan for the entire city, based on the initial diagnosis and the proposals of older people.

1.4. Identification of indicators for monitoring and evaluating progress during the development and implementation of the Action Plan.

- Phase 2. Implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan (years 3 to 5):

2.1. Implementation of the Plan designed in Phase 1.

2.2. Monitoring of the established indicators.

- Phase 3. Progress assessment (end of year 5):

3.1. Presentation of the evaluation report on progress made, in accordance with the indicators defined in Phase 1, within the design and planning of the Action Plan.

3.2. Consultation with external experts: review of conclusions and progress towards improvement.

- Phase 4. Continuous improvement (end of year 5): restart of the 5-year cycle process.

In this process, the eight areas of friendliness identified in the Vancouver Protocol (WHO and PAHO, 2023) have been adopted in Spain as a basis for assessing and improving the quality of life of older people. These areas have been grouped into three main axes, which reflect a global vision of the different dimensions of the competencies, services, and functions developed in the context of proximity (IMSERSO *et al.*, 2024). This structure by areas and axes of action allows local councils to comprehensively cover the fundamental aspects that affect the lives of older people.

Firstly, we find the Physical Environment (Axis 1), which focuses on aspects of the built (and public) space that facilitate integration and barrier-free mobility for older people. This axis integrates the following areas of user-friendliness: (1) Outdoor spaces and buildings; (2) Transport; (3) Housing. The Social, Cultural and Participatory Environment (Axis 2) integrates all those social and cultural aspects related to citizen participation, social inclusion and the well-being of older people. It includes the following areas: (4) Social participation; (5) Respect and social inclusion; (6) Civic participation and employment. Finally, Social Environments and Socio-Health Determinants (Axis 3) focus on services and resources that contribute to the health, well-being and quality of life of older people, based on two areas: (7) Communication and information; (8) Community and health support services.

The municipalities affiliated with CAPEMAE have developed, based on the diagnostic phase based on civic participation processes, multiple and complex action plans to combat ageism, discrimination and age-based prejudice. The plans include the design and implementation of actions and proposals in each and every one of the eight areas established in the Vancouver Protocol. These are reinforced through public communication strategies developed through intergenerational activities, awareness-raising or social interest campaigns, improved training and sensitivity towards the group, adaptation of communication and spaces, highlighting the social contribution of older people, and promoting a more active image of old age (HelpAge Internacional, 2021a, 2021b; HelpAge *et al.*, 2023; IMSERSO *et al.*, 2024; PAHO, 2021; Zuniga *et al.*, 2023). Public communication, in the context of the Network, aims to promote a positive image of older people, as well as dignified treatment based on social justice to guarantee equal rights, opportunities and access to resources for older citizens.

### 3. Public communication as a cross-cutting area of municipal management

Building truly age-friendly cities not only involves improving the quality of life of older citizens, but also strengthening social cohesion by creating more equitable, respectful communities that are prepared for all the challenges of the social context. The design of the projects developed by the municipalities that are part of the CAPEMAE Network has a strong communicative and relational component. Therefore, information and communication management is of particular importance for municipal institutions, as the achievement of sectoral policy objectives by the government team is conveyed to citizens through various messages that are identified as public communication.

Public communication and information, as a specific area of management in the Vancouver Protocol (WHO, 2007), is based on the following specific aspects:

- a) access to content of interest through accessible channels.
- b) clarity and format of information, using inclusive, simple and adapted language.
- c) ease of carrying out administrative procedures.
- d) diversity of communication channels with older people (analogue and digital).
- e) availability of personalised care services (through “OMAMs” – Municipal Offices for the Elderly).
- f) Use of ICTs, providing digital training for older people to help bridge the digital divide.
- g) useful and relevant information on specific services and resources for older citizens.

The use of inclusive, stereotype-free language that helps to avoid terms and expressions that perpetuate images of frailty, uselessness or dependence (HelpAge *et al.*, 2023) is one of the key elements of public communication, promoting a narrative focused on the autonomy, contribution and diversity of older people.

On the other hand, the digitisation of public communication, through different media and formats, presents opportunities for older people, but also major challenges. The digital divide can lead to social isolation and economic exclusion within this group, especially if they do not have the necessary skills to access technology. For this reason, age-friendly municipalities must commit, within area 7. Communication and Information, to implement digital literacy programmes that empower older people by providing them with the necessary skills and abilities to use digital tools, communication 2.0, social networks and multimedia platforms (Criado-Grande *et al.*, 2017; Poveda-Puente *et al.*, 2024). Social media can improve transparency and participation, as it is the citizens themselves who collaborate in the process of establishing and managing the thematic agenda of the local institution. Of all these, Facebook, X (Twitter), Telegram and Instagram have been repeatedly incorporated into the communication and relationship management of the public sector and have transformed the way in which functions and competences are communicated (Campillo-Alhama & Martínez-Sala, 2017; Campillo-Alhama *et al.*, 2025). Programmes, plans, projects, services, events, initiatives and activities at the municipal level are disseminated through websites, blogs and social networks.

Within the eight key areas included in the programme of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Network in Spain, communication and information not only represents a management area with its own identity, within axis 3. Social Environments and Socio-Health Determinants (Criado-Grande *et al.*, 2017; *Age Friendly World*, 2025; Campillo *et al.*, 2025a; Campillo *et al.*, 2025b), but also has a cross-cutting nature that extends to the other areas included in axis 1 (Physical Environment) and axis 2 (Social, Cultural and Participatory Environment).

To strengthen the impact of the CAPEMAE Network, it is essential to establish much more standardised and transparent diagnostic and action protocols that promote not only the evaluation of action plans, but also an efficient communication strategy, derived from municipal strategic objectives in the different areas of management and in each of the four phases of the programme. By extension, gender perspective, unwanted loneliness and ageism as issues present in all areas (IMSERSO *et al.*, 2024; Ramos-Toro, M., 2018; Raymond *et al.*, 2023) must also be made visible through communication and public information strategies that contribute to strengthening municipal social policies.

### **3.1. Cross-cutting communication in the Vancouver Protocol for combating ageism**

Ageism is defined as discrimination and prejudice based on age, especially towards older people. It is characterised by the undervaluing of this population group due to negative stereotypes associated with old age. It has a serious impact on this group, as it creates barriers to their social participation, inclusion and access to services, limiting older people's opportunities to lead active and healthy lives (HelpAge Internacional, 2021; HelpAge Internacional *et al.*, 2023; Ramos-Soler & Campillo-Alhama, 2023; Raymond *et al.*, 2023).

Public communication strategies are crucial for the effective development of comprehensive municipal policies. These proposals go beyond mere administrative information on services and benefits aimed at this group; they transform the perception of ageing in the collective imagination, promote social inclusion and intergenerational solidarity, reduce discrimination and promote human rights, improve the psychological and physical well-being of older people, strengthen social policies in all key areas of management, and contribute to economic and social impact by empowering older citizens (PAHO, 2021).

**Table 2.** Public communication objectives by focus areas and management areas of the Vancouver Protocol

| Areas of the Vancouver Protocol<br>(Axis 1: Physical environment)   | Strategic communication objectives   |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1. Outdoor spaces and buildings:</b><br/>accessibility of parks, squares, public and residential buildings, availability of green areas, safety in public spaces and adaptation of infrastructure for people with reduced mobility.</p> | <p>1.1. Promote accessibility initiatives in buildings and public spaces.<br/>1.2. Communicate maintenance and cleaning programmes for parks, streets and squares.<br/>1.3. Raise awareness of improvements in lighting and safety in high-risk areas.<br/>1.4. Promote adapted street furniture such as inclusive benches, fountains and litter bins.<br/>1.5. Reinforce the value of accessible green spaces as places for intergenerational encounters.<br/>Combat ageist stereotypes by showing older people as active participants in participatory urban management processes.</p> |
| <p><b>2. Transport:</b><br/>Quality, accessibility and affordability of public transport, including frequency of services, adaptation of infrastructure, safety and availability of parking.</p>  | <p>2.1. Provide specific information on accessibility on buses and taxis.<br/>2.2. Disseminate simple, adapted visual information on stops, routes and signage.<br/>2.3. Promote road safety campaigns aimed at older people.<br/>2.4. Provide information on social tariffs and discounts for older people.<br/>2.5. Raise awareness of the existence of accessible night-time public transport.<br/>2.6. Include testimonials from older users that reinforce an image of independence and active mobility in this stage of life.</p>  |
| <p><b>3. Housing:</b><br/>affordable housing, assistance with home adaptations, availability of home services, physical accessibility to prevent accidents, and <i>cohousing</i> or sheltered housing alternatives.</p>                       | <p>3.1. Promote housing adaptation programmes with accessible campaigns.<br/>3.2. Communicate resources and financial assistance in a clear and understandable manner.<br/>3.3. Highlight the importance of an adapted home environment for safety.<br/>3.4. Promote residential alternatives such as sheltered housing or <i>cohousing</i>.<br/>3.5. Reinforce the right to decide where and how to live through testimonials from older people.<br/>3.6. Combat stereotypes that reduce old age to passive institutionalisation.</p>   |
| Areas of the Vancouver Protocol<br>(Axis 2: Social, Cultural and Participatory Environment)   | Strategic communication objectives   |
| <p><b>4. Social participation:</b><br/>Provision of leisure and free-time activities, accessibility to information about these activities, affordability, adaptation of facilities and promotion of volunteering and community networks.</p>  | <p>4.1. Promoting a wide range of cultural, sporting and recreational activities.<br/>4.2. Highlight old age as an active and creative stage of life through testimonials from older people to legitimise and exemplify initiatives.<br/>4.3. Combat the ageist stereotype of inactivity.</p>  |

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|---|---|
|   | <p>4.4. Combat isolation by reinforcing the positive image of active ageing.</p> <p>4.5. Highlight civic participation as key to community cohesion.</p> <p>4.6. Promote opportunities for participation in specific processes in community centres and spaces.</p> <p>4.7. Emphasise the importance of older people's participation in public consultations.</p>   |
| <p><b>5. Respect and social inclusion:</b><br/>Raise social awareness about ageing, combat stereotypes, promote intergenerational activities, improve care services and include older people.</p>                               | <p>5.1. Promote campaigns that highlight positive attitudes towards old age.</p> <p>5.2. Develop narratives that eliminate negative prejudices about old age.</p> <p>5.3. Portray old age as a stage with social value and not as a social burden.</p> <p>5.4. Show diversity in life trajectories.</p> <p>5.5. Avoid discourse that distorts the diverse reality of older citizens as a relevant community asset.</p> <p>5.6. Promote and disseminate intergenerational activities.</p> <p>5.7. Highlight intergenerational inclusion projects as good practices.</p> <p>5.8. Strengthen solidarity between generations through shared testimonies.</p> <p>5.9. Position older people as agents of inclusion and community cohesion.</p> <p>5.10. Disseminate messages of equal treatment and non-discrimination in services.</p> <p>5.11. Highlight the social, cultural and economic contribution of older people.</p> |
| <p><b>6. Civic participation and employment:</b><br/>involvement of older people in volunteering, employment, entrepreneurship and civic participation, promoting channels for participation and councils for older people.</p> | <p>6.1. Raise awareness of the existence of senior councils, forums and consultative processes.</p> <p>6.2. Promote opportunities for volunteering and intergenerational mentoring by older people.</p> <p>6.3. Reinforce the image of old age linked to leadership and civic engagement.</p> <p>6.4. Break the ageist stereotype of withdrawal from public life.</p> <p>6.5. Raise the profile of older people who participate in social, work, entrepreneurial and voluntary activities.</p> <p>6.6. Value the experience of older people as a social resource.</p> <p>6.7. Provide information on adapted employment and entrepreneurship programmes for older people.</p> <p>6.8. Raise awareness of intergenerational volunteering and mentoring as a social resource.</p> <p>6.9. Portray older people as civic leaders and agents of change.</p>   |
| <p><b>Areas of the Vancouver Protocol</b><br/>(Axis 3: Social and Socio-Health Environments)</p>  | <p><b>Strategic communication objectives</b></p>  |
| <p><b>7. Communication and information:</b><br/>accessibility to public information, ease of completing procedures, diversity of channels (oral, written, digital), adaptation of language and personalised attention.</p>      | <p>7.1. Ensure accessibility to information through various communication channels (<i>offline and online</i>).</p> <p>7.2. Implement accessible communication formats (easy reading, subtitles, audiovisual materials), adapted to older citizens.</p> <p>7.3. Design messages with inclusive language that identifies with the diverse realities of the group.</p> <p>7.4. Combat digital ageism that associates old age with technological incapacity, avoiding messages that are free of paternalism.</p> <p>7.5. Promote literacy and digital training programmes to reduce the technological divide.</p>  |

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| <p>7.6. Ensure that public information is useful, transparent and relevant to older people.</p> <p>7.7. Encourage two-way communication between the municipal institution and older people through digital platforms and social media (especially blogs, social networks and instant messaging), gathering their contributions, complaints, claims and demands.</p> <p>7.8. Position older people as citizens with full rights to information.</p> <p>7.9. Design spaces for personalised attention to older people, as well as for information and administrative procedures.</p> |  |
| <hr/>  |  |
| <p><b>8. Community and health services:</b><br/>health and social care services, home support, coordination of resources, physical and cognitive accessibility of services and promotion of autonomy.</p>  | <p>8.1. Provide clear and accessible information on the availability of health and social care services.</p> <p>8.2. Disseminate specific information on administrative procedures and formalities for dependency care and home services.</p> <p>8.3. Raise awareness of support programmes for non-professional carers, with training and allocation of resources.</p> <p>8.4. Promote preventive health campaigns, including oral health.</p> <p>8.5. Emphasise the rights of older people as active users of municipal services in a comprehensive manner.</p> <p>8.6. Strengthen the participation of older people in the evaluation of services, encouraging feedback processes to the relevant departments or councils.</p> <p>8.7. Combat ageist perceptions in the collective imagination that reduce old age to situations of illness, dependency and lack of autonomy.</p> <p>8.8. Legitimise their role as active agents in community care.</p> |

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Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

## 4. Objectives

This study takes a look at the 52 Spanish provincial capitals with the overall aim of identifying, based on their membership of the CAPEMAE Network, the level of implementation of the project phases and their communication strategies.

To this end, three specific objectives are established:

- 1) To identify, through the *Age Friendly World* (2025) platform, the degree of implementation index (IGI) of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities programme in the selected municipalities, based on its stages (diagnosis, action plan and evaluation) and cycles.
- 2) Analyse, based on the different virtual spaces of the municipalities belonging to the Age-Friendly Cities Network (own or institutional websites), recurring content, resources, media and communication formats to disseminate the progress of the stages in the programme cycles.
- 3) Establish the relationship between the “IGI” (the degree of implementation index) of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities programme (IGI-P) with older people in the 52 provincial capitals in Spain and the “IGI” of their communication and relational strategies in the fight against ageism (IGI-C).

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1. Research design

This descriptive and exploratory research uses the case study method, applied to the 52 Spanish provincial capitals. On the one hand, a *codebook* is designed to enable content analysis of the documents published on the *Age Friendly World* platform (2025), which reflect the different stages of the cycles of programmes aimed at older people by the local councils belonging to the Network. On the other hand, the content, formats and resources implemented in the public communication strategies of the municipalities represented in this intentional sample are analysed.

The methodological design allows for a systematic examination of the relationship between the level of implementation of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Programme and the

public communication strategies deployed at the local level, which justifies the relevance of the multiple case approach (Yin, 2018).

## 5.2. Sample and units of analysis

The sample is intentional and consists of the 52 provincial capitals in Spain that, as of the cut-off date (September 2025), are listed in the Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. The unit of analysis consists of:

- a) official documents published on the *Age Friendly World* platform (diagnoses, action plans and evaluations).
- b) the institutional websites of the local councils linked to the programme, understood as the main channels of digital public communication.

For analyses relating to programme implementation (cycles and phases) and communication strategy, the analytical sub-sample consists of the 35 capital municipalities that were members of the Network at the cut-off date (July–September 2025), according to the *Age Friendly World* platform. Non-member municipalities are described in demographic and ageing terms, but are not included in the cycle analyses or in the construction of “IGI-P/IGI-C”.

## 5.3. Sources and documents used

The corpus analysis includes all documents available on the *Age Friendly World* platform for the period July–September 2025, as well as specific sections of municipal websites that report on the development of the programme and its phases. This time frame was chosen in order to capture an up-to-date status of implementation and communication strategies.

## 5.4. Analysis tools and operational definitions

A *codebook* and analysis sheet were designed to examine the implementation phase of the programme (diagnosis, action plan, evaluation and continuous improvement) and the resources, formats and public communication strategies deployed on municipal websites. The variables for measuring programme implementation were taken from the documentation in *Age Friendly World*, coding the following phases by municipality and cycle: diagnosis, action plan and evaluation, as well as the date of accession. Fourteen components (variables for measuring the web communication strategy) were verified on the institutional websites: (1) project description; (2) diagnosis; (3) action plan; (4) evaluation; (5) institutional video; (6) events; (7) blog/news; (8) social networks; (9) video library/news archive; (10) complementary services; (11) training; (12) active ageing resources; (13) community resources; (14) social benefits/dependence assistance.

The IGI-P (Programme Implementation Grade Index) was constructed as an additive index normalised to [0,1] that summarises progress by cycles (1–3) and phases (diagnosis, plan, evaluation) based on the information and documentation collected on the *Age Friendly World* website. One point was assigned for each phase completed within each cycle (maximum 3 per cycle; theoretical maximum 9 in the three cycles). The raw value (0–9) was normalised to [0,1] by dividing by 9. Adherence is recorded and described, but is not scored in the IGI-P as it does not constitute a substantive phase of the cycle.

For its part, the IGI-C (Communication Strategy Implementation Index) has been constructed from the 14 components in Table 5, being an additive index normalised to [0,1] based on the institutional websites of each municipality. Each component was coded binarily (presence=1, absence=0). In cases of “no website” or “project website not found”, 0 is coded in all components and the case is marked with the label Not available-website for sensitivity analysis. The raw value (0–14) was normalised to [0,1] by dividing by 14.

### 5.5. Procedure, reliability, and analysis strategy

The methodological procedure followed several stages: (1) design of the analysis sheet based on the specialised literature on content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002; Krippendorff, 2019); (2) training of two researchers for the coding of the corpus; (3) pre-testing of the form on a subsample of documents in order to detect errors and adjust categories; and (4) systematic application of the form to the entire document corpus.

The objectivity of the content analysis was ensured through inter-coder reliability (Piñeiro-Naval, 2020). The Percentage of Observed Agreement (PAo) was calculated by applying the form to a random subsample of 25% of the documents. The agreement reached was 94%. Cohen's Kappa ( $\kappa = 0.80$ ) was also applied, correcting for the random effect of agreement (Cohen, 1960). These values exceed the threshold of 0.80 recommended in the literature (Lovejoy *et al.*, 2016), indicating a high degree of objectivity and agreement between the coders.

The coded data were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis (frequencies and percentages) in order to characterise the implementation of the programme and the communication strategies. Likewise, bivariate cross-tabulations were performed between the Programme Implementation Degree Index (IGI-P) and the Communication Strategy Implementation Degree Index (IGI-C). R was used for statistical calculations.

## 6. Results

Table 3 shows different indicators for the 52 provincial capitals. The data shown are the total number of inhabitants per municipality, the ageing index, the percentage of people over 65 years of age and whether there is a reference link as a municipality belonging to the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Network (either as a specific website or from the municipal site).

**Table 3.** Provincial capital municipalities

| Municipality          | Total inhabitants | Ageing index | Over 65 years old (%) | Website   |
|-----------------------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------------|---|
| A Coruña              | 245,468           | 202.39       | 25.40                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Albacete              | 172,722           | 108.77       | 17.38                 | <a href="https://www.albacete.es/es/node/4551">https://www.albacete.es/es/node/4551</a> |
| Alicante              | 337,304           | 130.52       | 19.64                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Almería               | 200,753           | 100.08       | 17.11                 | <a href="https://acortar.link/ZQmacR">https://acortar.link/ZQmacR</a>                   |
| Ávila                 | 57,949            | 135.55       | 21.08                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Badajoz               | 150,610           | 108.6        | 17.77                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Barcelona             | 1,636,732         | 168.09       | 21.53                 | <a href="https://bit.ly/4f0yXir">https://bit.ly/4f0yXir</a>                             |
| Bilbao                | 346,405           | 203.11       | 24.68                 | <a href="https://bit.ly/3Yq5Ldt">https://bit.ly/3Yq5Ldt</a>                             |
| Burgos                | 174,051           | 166.83       | 23.83                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Cáceres               | 95,418            | 124.66       | 18.71                 | (*project website not found)  |
| Cádiz                 | 114,244           | 209.39       | 25.07                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Castellón de la Plana | 172,589           | 126.52       | 19.42                 | <a href="https://acortar.link/XsAFN7">https://acortar.link/XsAFN7</a>                   |
| Ceuta                 | 83,386            | 61.31        | 12.50                 | <a href="https://acortar.link/oAJfOK">https://acortar.link/oAJfOK</a>                   |
| Ciudad Real           | 75,104            | 120.94       | 18.59%                | (*project website not found)  |
| Córdoba               | 322,071           | 130.94       | 19.96                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Cuenca                | 53,988            | 132.39       | 19.33                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Girona                | 101,932           | 100.05       | 16.67                 | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Granada               | 231,775           | 160.2        | 22.61                 | (*project website not found)  |
| Guadalajara           | 87,064            | 112.18       | 18.17                 | <a href="https://acortar.link/dRq2At">https://acortar.link/dRq2At</a>                   |
| Huelva                | 142,538           | 123.35       | 19.30                 | (*project website not found)  |

|                        |           |        |        |   |
|------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|---|
| Huesca                 | 53,429    | 132.42 | 21.17  | <a href="https://acortar.link/z0s882">https://acortar.link/z0s882</a>                     |
| Jaén                   | 111,932   | 126.42 | 19.11  | <a href="https://acortar.link/HbZSMK">https://acortar.link/HbZSMK</a>                     |
| Las Palmas G.C.        | 378,675   | 161.42 | 19.47  | (*project website not found)  |
| León                   | 122,051   | 230.48 | 28.08  | (*project website not found)  |
| Lleida                 | 140,080   | 115.48 | 18.58  | <a href="https://sl1nk.com/2ioDp">https://sl1nk.com/2ioDp</a>                             |
| Logroño                | 150,808   | 145.07 | 21.71% | <a href="https://acortar.link/G54vB9">https://acortar.link/G54vB9</a>                     |
| Lugo                   | 97,613    | 170.38 | 23.18  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Madrid                 | 3,305,408 | 149.86 | 20.36  | <a href="https://bit.ly/4e90ahu">https://bit.ly/4e90ahu</a>                               |
| Málaga                 | 577,405   | 119.98 | 18.56  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Melilla                | 85,491    | 48.36  | 11.17  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Murcia                 | 460,349   | 94.32  | 16.23  | <a href="https://bit.ly/3C77ahO">https://bit.ly/3C77ahO</a>                               |
| Ourense                | 104,596   | 214.31 | 26.47  | (*project website not found)  |
| Oviedo                 | 217,552   | 200.26 | 24.80  | (*project website not found)  |
| Palencia               | 77,090    | 198.22 | 25.61  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Palma                  | 419,366   | 115.04 | 16.86  | (*project website not found)  |
| Pamplona               | 203,081   | 163.01 | 22.79  | <a href="https://www.pamplona.es/temas/mayores">https://www.pamplona.es/temas/mayores</a> |
| Pontevedra             | 83,114    | 158.32 | 22.01  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Salamanca              | 143,269   | 235.03 | 28.28  | <a href="https://lc.cx/ijpC3Q">https://lc.cx/ijpC3Q</a>                                   |
| San Sebastián          | 188,102   | 198.12 | 25.07  | <a href="https://acortar.link/Yc73Rh">https://acortar.link/Yc73Rh</a>                     |
| Santa Cruz de Tenerife | 208,563   | 160.13 | 20.01  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Santander              | 172,221   | 221.43 | 26.30  | <a href="https://acortar.link/0Ae6MO">https://acortar.link/0Ae6MO</a>                     |
| Segovia                | 51,258    | 184.16 | 24.27  | <a href="https://acortar.link/mtuAIM">https://acortar.link/mtuAIM</a>                     |
| Seville                | 684,234   | 133.11 | 20.08  | (*project website not found)  |
| Soria                  | 39,695    | 140.56 | 21.49  | <a href="https://acortar.link/gbgXxl">https://acortar.link/gbgXxl</a>                     |
| Tarragona              | 135,436   | 120.01 | 19.12% | <a href="https://acortar.link/WxaWw8">https://acortar.link/WxaWw8</a>                     |
| Teruel                 | 35,994    | 128.47 | 20.18% | (*project website not found)  |
| Toledo                 | 85,449    | 108.08 | 18.05  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Valencia               | 789,744   | 157.35 | 21.55  | <a href="https://l1nq.com/b8Nqv">https://l1nq.com/b8Nqv</a>                               |
| Valladolid             | 297,775   | 219.97 | 27.39% | <a href="https://bit.ly/3YukKTI">https://bit.ly/3YukKTI</a>                               |
| Vitoria-Gasteiz        | 253,093   | 144.59 | 22.01  | <a href="https://bit.ly/3Utk7sD">https://bit.ly/3Utk7sD</a>                               |
| Zamora                 | 60,297    | 225.67 | 27.01  | (*unfriendly city)  |
| Zaragoza               | 675,301   | 150.83 | 22.03  | <a href="https://bit.ly/3C6R1cb">https://bit.ly/3C6R1cb</a>                               |

Source: INE (2025), Annual Population Census 2021-2023 (a) (b) and (c). Own elaboration (d), 2025.

From a descriptive perspective, it can be seen that of the 52 provincial capitals, 28 (54% of the total) are either not age-friendly (17) or do not have public information available on their own or municipal websites (11). This circumstance is relevant, as these municipalities are territorial administrative references, have a considerable number of inhabitants (some of them exceeding one million) and are home to most of the services that local administrations must offer to citizens in the exercise of their powers. It is particularly significant that the capitals of the province of Galicia are either not members of the Network or do not have a website with information about their membership, despite the considerable number of municipalities in the autonomous region (313) (see Table 1) and the fact that they have one of the highest ageing rates in the country.

A comprehensive analysis of the available information has been carried out, through the websites of the participating municipalities, to verify the maturity cycle of the implementation of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities programme. For the purposes of systematisation, the

year of membership and the level of development of the different stages involved in the roll-out of the programme have been recorded. The methodological procedure analyses, from the *Age Friendly World (2025)* repository, the level of development of the project in the municipalities that have signed the commitment *letter*, based on baseline assessments, *strategy and action plans*, and evaluations of the process in different cycles.

**Table 4.** Level of maturity of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities Programme in Spain

| MUNICIPALITY               | MEMBERSH<br>IP | CYCLE 1 |     |     | CYCLE 2 |     |     | CYCLE 3 |     |     |
|----------------------------|----------------|---------|-----|-----|---------|-----|-----|---------|-----|-----|
|                            |                | (1)     | (2) | (3) | (1)     | (2) | (3) | (1)     | (2) | (3) |
| A Coruña                   |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Albacete                   | 2017           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Alicante                   |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Almería                    | 2023           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Ávila                      |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Badajoz                    |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Barcelona                  | 2009           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Bilbao                     | 2011           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Burgos                     |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Cáceres                    | 2017           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Cádiz                      |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Castellón de la Plana      | 2014           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Ceuta                      | 2016           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Ciudad Real                | 2017           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Córdoba                    |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Cuenca                     |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Girona                     |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Granada                    | 2018           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Guadalajara                | 2015           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Huelva                     | 2023           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Huesca                     | 2022           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Jaén                       | 2021           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Las Palmas de Gran Canaria | 2023           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| León                       | 2016           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Lleida                     | 2016           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Logroño                    | 2021           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Lugo                       |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Madrid                     | 2014           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Málaga                     |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Melilla                    |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Murcia                     | 2018           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Ourense                    | 2013           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Oviedo                     | 2023           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Palencia                   |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Palma                      | 2014           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Pamplona                   | 2018           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Pontevedra                 |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Salamanca                  | 2016           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| San Sebastián              | 2009           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Santander                  | 2013           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Segovia                    | 2016           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Seville                    | 2018           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Soria                      | 2017           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Santa Cruz de Tenerife     |                |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |
| Tarragona                  | 2014           |         |     |     |         |     |     |         |     |     |

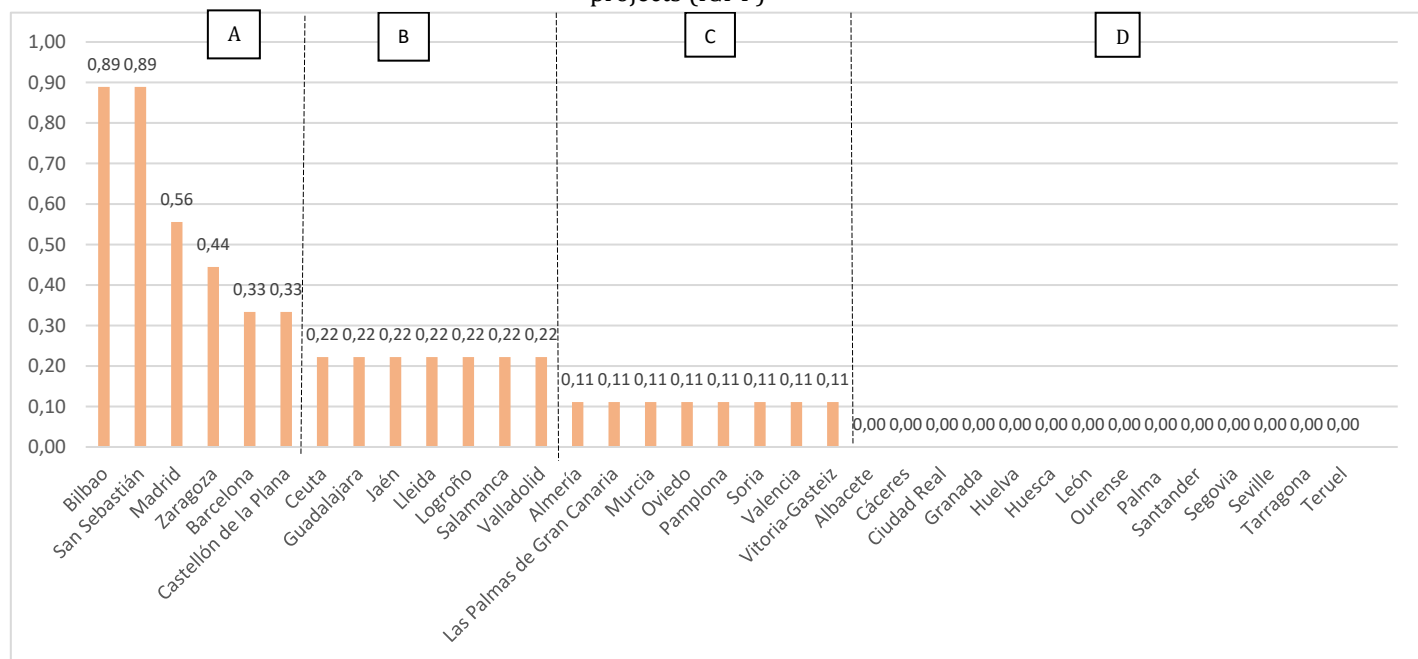
|                 |      |  |
|-----------------|------|--|
| Teruel          | 2019 |  |
| Toledo          |      |  |
| Valencia        | 2016 |  |
| Valladolid      | 2016 |  |
| Vitoria-Gasteiz | 2011 |  |
| Zamora          |      |  |
| Zaragoza        | 2011 |  |

Key: (1) Diagnosis; (2) Action plan; (3) Evaluation  
 Source: Age Friendly World (2025). Own elaboration.

The results shown in Table 4 are negative in general terms, since, of the 35 municipalities belonging to the Network, only four municipalities have progressed beyond cycle 2 of the project (Bilbao, Madrid, San Sebastián and Zaragoza), with paradoxical cases such as that of the municipality of Murcia, where an action plan has been established, in the first instance, without prior diagnosis.

Based on the data in Table 4, a synthetic index has been designed to measure the degree of maturity and implementation of the projects (IGI-P). The index has been constructed in an additive manner, with a minimum value of 0 (no plan or no development) and a maximum value of 1 (complete development of the plan in the three cycles). The results allow the different municipalities to be classified and a gradient to be established in the maturity of the implementation and development of the projects, as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Classification of municipalities according to the degree of implementation and maturity of projects (IGI-P)



(\*) Implementation degree index [0.1], 0 = no implementation, 1 = maximum implementation  
 Source: Age Friendly World (2025). Own elaboration, 2025.

Figure 1 shows four areas corresponding to different levels of implementation in the 35 provincial capitals that are age-friendly in Spain, in descending order: area (A) includes those that have developed a very significant implementation process, based on their objectives in the different management areas of the Vancouver Protocol; area (B) includes those municipalities whose implementation is relevant; area (C) includes those that have developed the network programme to a limited extent; and area (D) includes those municipalities that have not made any progress in the development of the process, based on their membership of the CAPEMAE Network.

**Table 5.** Resources and formats used in the CAPEMAE Network communication strategy

|   | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) | (5) | (6) | (7) | (8) | (9) | (10) | (11) | (12) | (13) | (14) |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|------|------|------|------|------|
| A Coruña<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Albacete<br><a href="https://www.albacete.es/es/node/4551">https://www.albacete.es/es/node/4551</a> |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Alicante<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Almería<br><a href="https://acortar.link/ZQmacR">https://acortar.link/ZQmacR</a>                    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Ávila<br>(*unfriendly city)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Badajoz<br>(*unfriendly city)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Barcelona<br><a href="https://bit.ly/4f0yXir">https://bit.ly/4f0yXir</a>                            |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Bilbao<br><a href="https://bit.ly/3Yq5Ldt">https://bit.ly/3Yq5Ldt</a>                               |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Burgos<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Cáceres<br>(*project website not found)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Cádiz<br>(*unfriendly city)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Castellón de la Plana<br><a href="https://acortar.link/XsAFN7">https://acortar.link/XsAFN7</a>      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Ceuta<br><a href="https://acortar.link/oAjfOK">https://acortar.link/oAjfOK</a>                      |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Ciudad Real<br>(*project website not found)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Córdoba<br>(*unfriendly city)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Cuenca<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Girona<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Granada<br>(*project website not found)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Guadalajara<br><a href="https://acortar.link/dRq2At">https://acortar.link/dRq2At</a>                |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Huelva<br>(*project website not found)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Huesca<br><a href="https://acortar.link/z0s882">https://acortar.link/z0s882</a>                     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Jaén<br><a href="https://acortar.link/HbZSMK">https://acortar.link/HbZSMK</a>                       |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Las Palmas G.C.<br>(*project website not found)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| León<br>(*project website not found)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Lleida<br><a href="https://sl1nk.com/2ioDp">https://sl1nk.com/2ioDp</a>                             |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Logroño<br><a href="https://acortar.link/G54vB9">https://acortar.link/G54vB9</a>                    |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Lugo<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Madrid<br><a href="https://bit.ly/4e90ahu">https://bit.ly/4e90ahu</a>                               |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Malaga<br>(*unfriendly city)  |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |
| Melilla<br>(*unfriendly city)   |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |     |      |      |      |      |      |

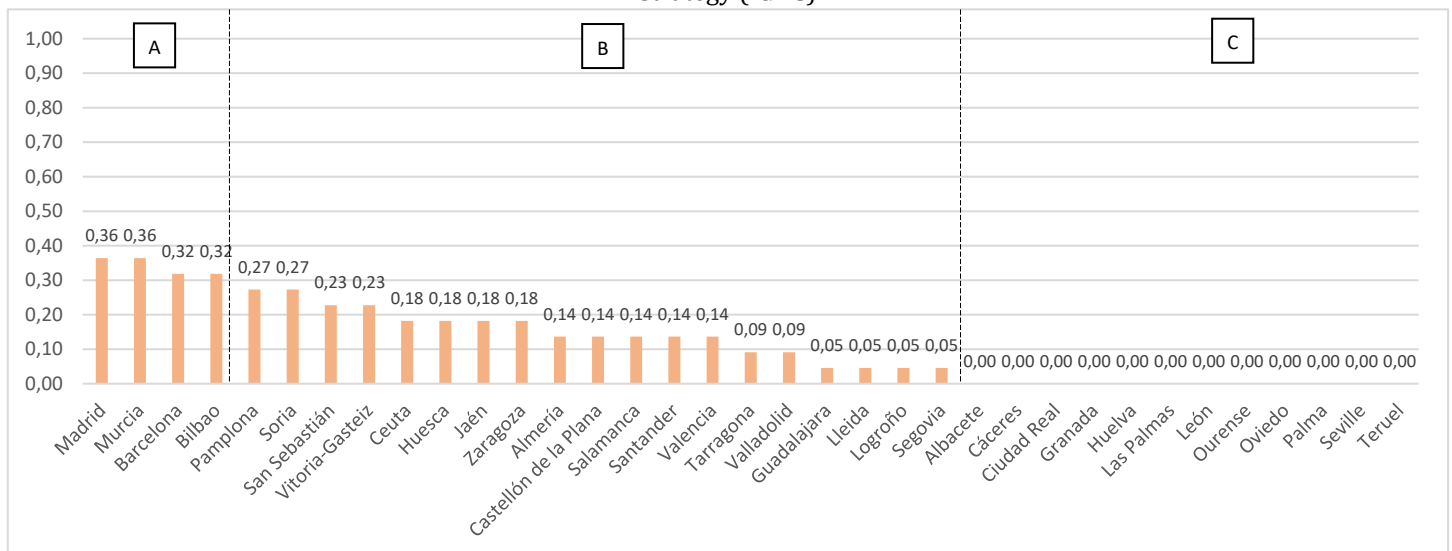


diagnoses and action plans through their own or institutional websites, but not the evaluations of their interventions in each of the eight areas of the Vancouver Protocol. On the other hand, there is also a special focus on generating content on information about complementary services, resources on active ageing, community resources or the application for social benefits and dependency assistance.

In terms of effectiveness in generating and disseminating content, the municipalities of Madrid, Murcia, Barcelona and Bilbao stand out for integrating into their respective websites not only the development of the Network programme, but also complementary information on the action plan and the use of communication resources (institutional videos, events, blog news, social networks, video library/newspaper library). Tarragona is the only municipality that uses a social network (Facebook) to disseminate various actions of the programme.

Based on the data in Table 5, a second synthetic index has been designed to measure the degree of implementation of communication strategies (IGI-C). The index has been constructed in an additive manner, with a minimum value of 0 (no communication strategy or no development) and 1 (full implementation in terms of content generation, resources, formats and complementary information). The results allow the different municipalities to be classified and the degree of maturity of municipal communication strategies to be identified, as shown in Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Classification of municipalities according to the degree of implementation of the communication strategy (IGI-C)



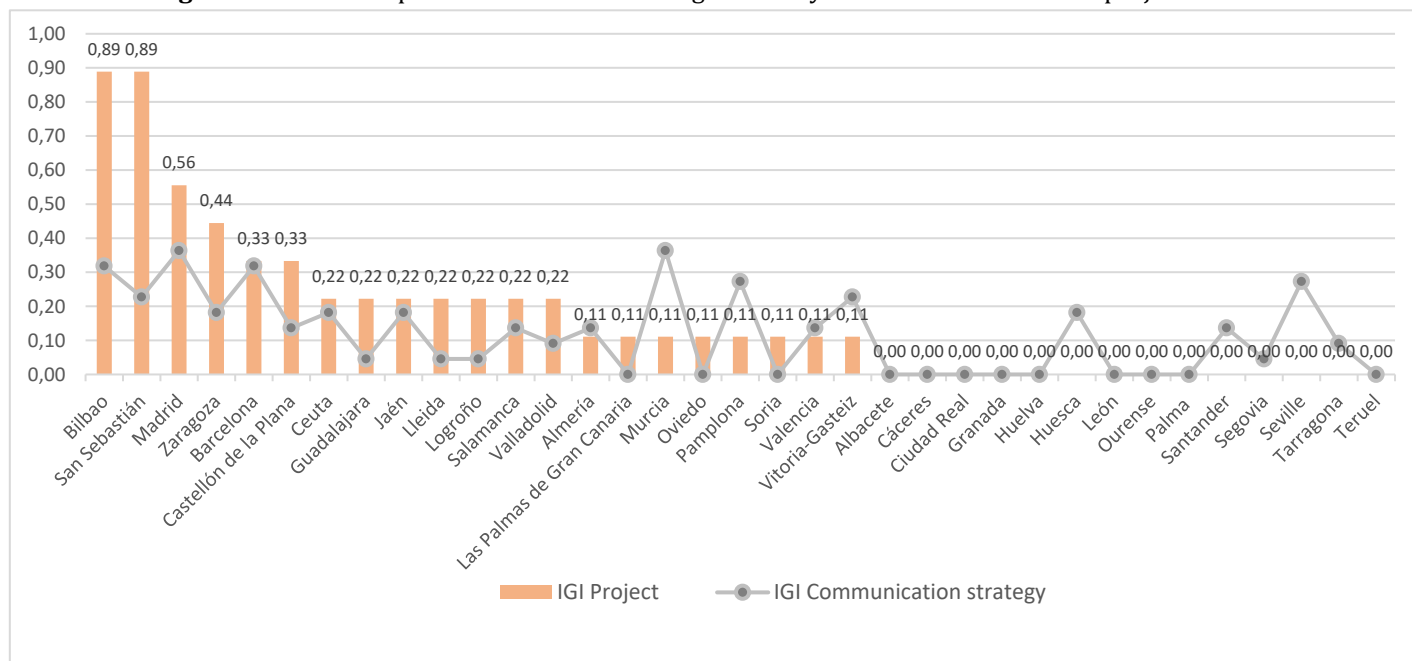
Source: Own elaboration, 2026.

Of the 24 municipalities that have their own or institutional website (representing 83% of the 35 participating municipalities), area (A) reflects those that have developed the most relevant communication strategy (11%), while area (B) reflects those that have implemented communication strategies in a more limited way (or not at all in the case of Albacete, despite having a website) (58%). Finally, area (C) shows that there are municipalities that have not implemented communication and information strategies (31%) to enable older people to access information about the project, the development of its phases or complementary information, resources and services, as they do not have their own or institutional websites.

The limited or non-existent use of digital communication formats such as blogs, video libraries, newspaper libraries or social networks, along with other information resources, demonstrates the lack of interest and attention on the part of municipalities in management area 7 of the Vancouver Protocol, which represent Communication and Information. Consequently, it is clear that the communication strategy of most age-friendly municipalities is very deficient and requires a rethinking of objectives in the generation of content, social media, formats and channels for interaction with older citizens.

The relationship between the implementation and development of programmes in the 35 municipalities belonging to the Network (out of the 52 provincial capitals) and the communication strategies established for disseminating the project description, its phases, useful and relevant information for older citizens, as well as the integration of resources and formats into the communication strategy, is reflected in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Relationship between the IGI of the Age-Friendly Cities and Communities project and the



communication strategy  
Source: Own elaboration (2025).

Most of the municipalities belonging to the CAPEMAE Network have a modest or deficient communication strategy, as the line representing the Communication Strategy IGI (IGI-C) is below the Project Development IGI (IGI-P). On the other hand, the results also show that, despite the fact that some municipalities have made little or no progress in the implementation phases of the programme (diagnosis, action plan, evaluation) and its cycles (*Age Friendly World*, 2025), they do publicise their membership of the Network to the public.

### 7. Analysis and conclusions

Previous research indicates that demographic ageing is one of the main structural challenges facing contemporary societies and that, as a result, social policies must be geared towards guaranteeing rights, participation and quality of life for older citizens. In this regard, the results show that, even in provincial capitals with high ageing rates, the implementation of age-friendly projects is weak or invisible, which creates a gap between the needs identified at the regulatory level and the effective institutional response.

The specialised literature insists that local administrations, as institutions of proximity, are key actors in articulating inclusive policies. However, the lack of comprehensive plans and, above all, systematic evaluation processes, shows that the Network runs the risk of becoming a merely declarative instrument, without the component of continuous improvement provided for in the Vancouver Protocol (WHO, 2007). This deficit contradicts the approach of citizen science and civic participation that both the WHO and the European Union have advocated over the last decade (WHO, 2020).

Empirical results show that communication strategies associated with the Network are underdeveloped. Most participating provincial capitals offer only general descriptions of the

project or information on diagnoses and plans, but rarely include evaluations or encourage two-way communication. This situation contradicts the principles of inclusion, transparency and civic participation that the literature on public communication and active ageing considers essential for combating ageism (HelpAge Internacional *et al.*, 2023; PAHO, 2021). In practice, the absence of positive narratives and interactive channels perpetuates the image of older citizens as passive recipients of services, rather than actors with agency (Campillo *et al.*, 2025a; Ramos & Campillo, 2023). The IGI-C synthetic index confirms these shortcomings, placing most municipalities at low values. From a theoretical perspective, this weakness can be interpreted as an indicator that communication has not been integrated as a strategic resource, but rather as an accessory to complement projects. This limits both institutional transparency and the possibility of strengthening social cohesion by highlighting the contribution of older people. Furthermore, the limited use of digital formats and social networks reinforces the technological divide and hinders the transition to multi-channel and accessible public communication, which the WHO (2020) and the European Strategy for Older People (EESC, 2023) consider essential for ensuring inclusion.

A joint analysis of the IGI-P and IGI-C indices reveals a structural disconnect between the implementation of projects and communication strategies. While some municipalities are making progress in developing diagnoses and plans, their communication strategies remain weak or non-existent. From a theoretical perspective, this dissonance contradicts the conception of municipal communication as a cross-cutting dimension and as a necessary condition for accountability and informed participation by older citizens. The analysis of the association between the degree of project implementation (IGI-P) and the communication strategy (IGI-C), recoded into tertiles, shows a statistically significant relationship ( $\chi^2 = 14.44$ ;  $p = 0.006$ ). The magnitude of the association, measured using Cramer's V (0.45), is moderate, suggesting that maturity in programme implementation is significantly related to the quality and scope of municipal communication strategies.

In practical terms, municipalities with high levels of programme implementation also tend to have medium to high levels of communication, while those with low implementation more frequently have poor communication strategies. This empirical evidence supports the initial research hypothesis, as public communication is not an accessory component, but a factor intrinsically linked to the effective development of the CAPEMAE Network.

The lack of alignment between implementation and communication has significant implications in terms of democratic governance. The neo-public framework states that older people should be treated as active citizens and not as mere administrators. However, the absence of clear information on the programme's progress restricts the possibilities for deliberation, citizen control and co-design of policies, placing this group in a position of dependence on the local administration. There are also cases in reverse: municipalities with little development of the programme that nevertheless widely publicise their membership of the Network. This practice can be interpreted as a form of communication that generates citizen expectations without there being any tangible progress in the methodological phases.

One possible solution is to integrate communication as part of the implementation cycle: each phase of the Vancouver Protocol should include mandatory communication milestones (participatory diagnosis, accessible plan, easy-to-read evaluation report, digital feedback). This would ensure consistency between the technical progress of the programme and the construction of an inclusive narrative that reinforces trust, participation and social recognition of older people as active agents of change.

However, there are also significant opportunities. The consolidation of CAPEMAE has made it possible to generate synergies and share good practices between municipalities. The incorporation of a gender perspective and attention to cultural diversity within the older population also represent significant steps towards more inclusive communication. The experience of Spanish municipalities shows that when older people are recognised as valid interlocutors and given a central place on the public agenda, more inclusive, cohesive and resilient communities are created. Therefore, moving towards truly age-friendly cities means transcending

welfare and committing to communication that reinforces the rights, dignity and full citizenship of older people.

The fight against ageism within the framework of the Age-Friendly Cities Network requires transformative communication that not only changes social narratives about old age but also promotes the real and effective participation of older people in public life. The eight areas of the Vancouver Protocol constitute an operational framework for articulating communication and integrating it into public policies.

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