

Digital inclusion to participate fully in society: more urgent than ever

ESU Resolution on Media and Information Literacy (ESU Congress, Madrid 2021)

The European Seniors' Union (ESU), a European umbrella organization founded in 1995 as a member association of the European People's Party (EPP), is gathering in Madrid (23-25 September) to celebrate a quarter of a century of active European citizenship, to promote and to voice the aspirations of seniors for inclusive, people-centred societies where no one is left behind.

Future global and European challenges will be highlighted in speeches, round tables and debates. **'We need a strong Europe, playing a leading role in today's geopolitical relations, ensuring its citizens of all generations and regions a fair and safe future, built on the foundations and values that senior generations fought for: freedom, peace, democracy, well-being... The ESU is standing up for these values and is hopeful to build a better tomorrow together with all generations.'** Emerita Prof. An Hermans, President of the ESU.

One of the central subjects, recently highlighted and discussed in several online ESU meetings, concerns the digital transformation of our societies. During the recent COVID-19 pandemic, more than ever before, the increased use of digital technology has shown the opportunities offered by digitalization in several sectors. Frequent use of the internet was needed not only in a professional context. 'All and everyone' were supposed to use the internet. It highlighted that everyone, and in particular older persons, are not in a position to enjoy the advantages and opportunities of digitalization. This is an urgent problem, because in the digital era we live in, access to and the use of digital communication are vital aspects of private and public life. In this changing environment, the ESU wants to defend the rights of senior citizens online and offline, preserving their possibilities to communicate, to express themselves freely and to offer them all the opportunities needed to understand and participate fully in the digital era.

The ESU welcomes recent policy plans from governments at several levels, public and private stakeholders and civil society, responding to the need for strategic and operational actions to build inclusive digital societies. Almost always the principle of 'digital inclusion for all' and the need for digital literacy are highlighted but goals, roadmaps and action plans are mostly linked only to formal education, schooling, and professional employability. Older persons, neither targeted nor reached by most initiatives, are at risk of digital isolation and this is intrinsically intertwined with social isolation.

'The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital age gap, since in the EU we observe that only one in five people over 65 uses the internet compared to 98% of people aged 16 to 29 years old. Not being included in the era of digitization is equivalent to being illiterate, as were those people who could not read or write in previous centuries. It hinders their participation and inclusion in social, cultural and economic life, causes them legal insecurity, isolates them and prevents them from taking part in making decisions.' ESU Vice-President Carmen Quintanilla

Defending the rights of everyone to live and to grow old in dignity and to participate in all areas of society, the ESU calls for the preservation of these rights in an online as well as in an offline environment. Therefore, the ESU calls for universal access to the internet for everyone and for appropriate digital learning facilities for all, to communicate and to use information and media content wisely, to know one's rights online, to understand how to combat online hate speech and misinformation...

Media and Information Literacy are the first steps to participate in digital societies and are the building blocks to active digital citizenship. The ESU is urging governments, all stakeholders and civil society itself, to create a diversity of initiatives, to be developed not only for seniors, but together with seniors, for all generations. Together we are responding to the challenges and opportunities of longevity in an ever-changing digital era. Together we are building a better tomorrow.

Madrid, Extraordinary ESU Congress, 23-25 September: 'Building the future together'.

More information: on our [ESU website](#) & [social media](#)

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