

The report ‘The digital era? Also my era!’ From a source of information to a policy tool

A reflection by the author An Hermans on the Committee of Ministers meeting



On 28 June 2022, the presentation of the Report ‘The digital Era? Also my era! Media and Information Literacy: a key to ensure seniors’ rights to participate in the digital era.’ (Council of Europe, Information Society Department, DGI, 2020, 03) was on the agenda of the the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers’ Thematic Coordinators on Information Policy (TC-INF). On this occasion I felt honoured to meet **Mrs Marija Pejčinović**

Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. The presentation of the report and the exchange of views took place under the presidency of **Ambassador Rasmus Lumi, Thematic Coordinator of Information Policy (TC-INF).**

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28/06/2022: Committee of Ministers (TC-INF): some reflections

At the Committee of Ministers (TC-INF), I presented the new publication "Media and information literacy: a key to ensure older persons' rights to participate in the digital era" and participated in an exchange of views with delegations.

In a brief introduction, I addressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for the increase in online communication and the need for media and information literacy (MIL); the potential of digital literacy, inspiring practices across Europe and the global fight against ageism; finally, I made some connections between the topics of the report and the broader political context, especially what I consider to be a unique role for the Council of Europe in this regard. See: The Committee of Ministers discusses digital literacy for seniors - News (coe.int)

The report: 'The digital Era? Also my era!'

In the report I explored:

- Different levels and sectors of decision making related to ageing, seniors and MIL;
- The interpretations of policy makers, senior organisations, academics, stakeholders (media, ISPs, etc.) on seniors and digitisation;
- 'Good practices' in different fields (from education to seniors' associations to initiatives by telecom institutions).

I have formulated some conclusions and considerations:

- Looking at two megatrends of today's society (digitisation and ageing), questions arise about how to connect these megatrends to achieve a win-win result in both areas?
- How can ageing societies "benefit" from digitisation; how can digitisation strengthen ageing societies?
- What does it mean for people? What does 'people-centric' digitisation mean?

Some conclusions:

- Both academic, political, and social surveys and statements show:
 - Comprehensive research is lacking;
 - Great diversity among the target group of older people;
 - Few initiatives;

- MIL is primarily linked to formal education;
- Need for non-formal initiatives and initiatives that consider the capabilities, life story, needs of senior citizens;
- However, there are "pioneers" (both in research and in practice).
- How can we understand and interpret this development from a human rights-based approach?
 - Protecting human rights offline and online;
 - Access to internet is not enough, also understanding, using, creating is part of MIL;
 - Digital democracy;
 - What about misinformation?

Linking the findings of the report to the broader policy framework on ageing and to the unique role of the Council of Europe in this area

As the continent's leading intergovernmental human rights organisation, the Council of Europe has a unique position; a unique role to play:

- In promoting a human rights approach in ageing policies;
- In ensuring a high degree of unity in the application and promotion of common standards, developed within normative frameworks of international conventions;
- In ensuring the protection and participation of older people in order to live a fulfilling life throughout their lives;
- In enhancing opportunities for digital inclusion MIL and digital inclusion as building blocks of freedom of expression, democracy and active citizenship;
- By calling on Member States, stakeholders, media, and civil society to assume their responsibilities in ensuring digital inclusion that also ensures social inclusion and leaves no one behind.

The Council of Europe has a long tradition of standing up for the human rights of older people. This report can be an incentive to take up the proposals of the recommendation CM/Rec (2014)2 and the evaluation (2019):

- Regularly update the exchange of good practice;
- Mainstreaming the issue of older people into all areas of the Council of Europe's work, by continuing to play its role in protecting the human rights of older people,

in line with the principles set out in previous documents, but also by recognising some new trends, such as digitalisation, as well as the capacities of older people and their willingness to participate in policies and decisions that affect them;

- Following up on international discussions (global campaign against ageing, mainstreaming ageing...) and pending issues (a UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons as a "legally binding instrument to 'implement' the human rights of older people).

The report and the exchanges of views in different locations can be used as a "campaign of awareness" with journalists, Internet service providers, private companies, policy makers, academia, and civil society.

Some points for further research, policy initiatives and innovative actions

With a view to the near future, some initiatives are planned where the report 'The digital era? Also my era!' will be presented and discussed:

- **14/09/2022:** Prague (Prague city hall) at the occasion of the CR-presidency of the EU-Council (printed translated copies; keynote speaker An Hermans);
- **23-25/09/2022:** University Krakow, conference with Polish seniors' associations (ao universities third age) and delegations from neighborhood countries (ao Ukraine, Belarus); keynote speaker: An Hermans;
- **30/09/2022:** International panel on the occasion of the 01/10/2022 UN International Day on Older Persons (UNIDOP) organized (Zoom conference, member of the panel: An Hermans) *Seniors 55+ eServices Guide Prototypes in Central Europe* and Slovenj Gradec, Slovenia;
- **08/12/2022:** Madrid: International conference AFAMMER (printed translated copies; keynote speaker An Hermans);

The "good practices" in the report have been selected as a "variety" of initiatives, always including the "voice of the seniors" and/or options. More and different - surveys could be introduced.

Based on several good practices, thematic conferences could be organised to deepen some research and empowerment dimensions.

Some points already highlighted in the conclusions of the report:

- MIL should be seen from the **perspective of human rights**. In the digital age, media literacy is a prerequisite for personal development, autonomy, participation in society. Therefore, in accordance with Recommendation CM/Rec (2022)4 on promoting a favorable environment for quality journalism in the digital age, MIL initiatives for all age groups - not only children and youth –are taken into account.

- Policies on ageing, including digital learning and media and information literacy, need to be **mainstreamed and involve all parts of society**. As MIL initiatives, which focus on the use of skills and competences can be seen as a complex lifelong learning process, it is necessary to respectfully consider the older learner and his/her life history. Everyone involved in MIL with older learners is called to explore new tools and methods, both in the digital and in the "real life" social field. While international organizations provide the general framework, national, regional, and local governments, civil society, non-formal education, and multi-generational social units of families and neighborhoods can play an important role in responding to the needs and expectations of seniors and ... providing a variety of joyful mutual learning situations, not only in the digital field but also in the "real" warm social field.

- Senior citizens are an integrated part of the population of a society. Also, men and women **over 75 years old. We understand the society of 'longevity' and the increasing life expectancy as a positive result of medical science and a growing healthier lifestyle...** However, where are men and women aged over 75 in population surveys and in Eurostat statistics? The exclusion of older people (+75) in surveys must be understood as discrimination, as an act of ageism. The 'invisibility' of older people in static population surveys is a painful fact due to the limitation of 74 years in the exclusion criteria of most surveys. As a result, seniors over 75 are excluded from surveys about digital transformation of societies, digital human capital, etc.