

Comments and recommendations to the UNECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing 2022

*An Hermans attending the UNECE Conference as ‘Council of Europe expert for
Media and Information Literacy and Seniors’*

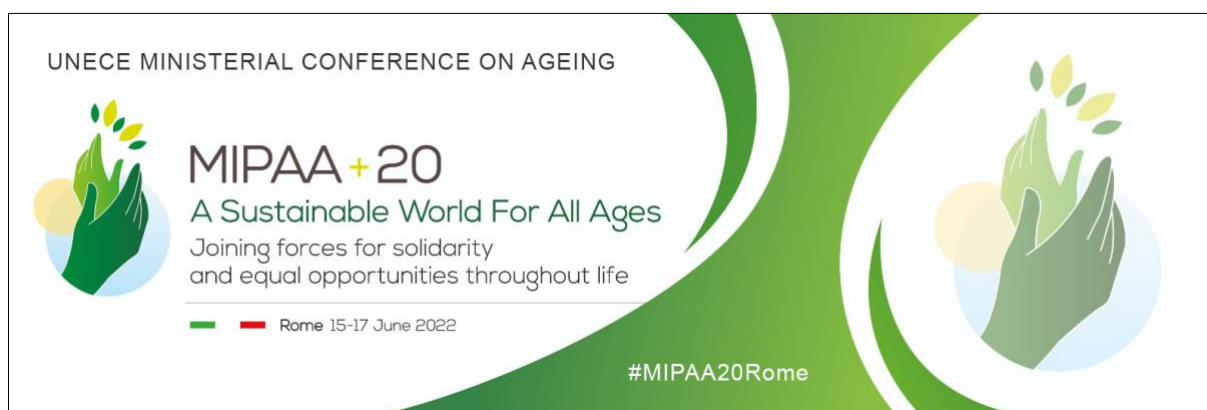


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1. General Information about the Conference and the Joint Forum

The UNECE Ministerial Conference on ageing (MIPAA+20) took place in Rome from 16 to 17 June 2022, providing and evaluating the implementation in Member States of the comprehensive policy framework on ageing. A UNECE joint Forum of Civil Society and Scientific Research on 15 June 2022, preceded the Ministerial Conference.

Commissioned by the Information Society Department, I have been attending the UNECE Conference as ‘Council of Europe expert for Media and Information Literacy and Seniors’. This report is based on this participation.

The Conference was prepared by the UNECE [Standing Working Group on Ageing](#) (SWGA), founded in 2008. It supports the realization of the policy principles set out in the 2002 [Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing](#) (MIPAA) and its [Regional Implementation Strategy](#) (RIS), together with the subsequent [Ministerial Declarations on Ageing](#) among the UNECE member States. It strives for synergies between the activities linked to the implementation of the MIPAA/RIS and those addressed by the follow-up on the implementation of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) and other international frameworks such as the [ICPD Programme of Action](#) and its follow-up beyond 2014, together with the [WHO Global Strategy on Ageing and Health](#) and the [United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing \(2021-2030\)](#).

For more information about the MIPAA+20 Ministerial Conference, see: <https://mipaa20rome.it> .

1.1 MIPAA/RIS, 20th anniversary

The 2022 MIPAA+20 Conference completed the fourth review and appraisal cycle (2018-2022) and marked the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing and its Regional Implementation Strategy (MIPAA/RIS). In 2017, a UNECE conference was held in Lisbon: [Ministerial Conference on Ageing: A Sustainable Society for All Ages: Realizing the potential of living longer](#).

1.2 A sustainable world for all ages.

The theme of the 2022 Conference in Rome was “Joining forces for solidarity and equal opportunities throughout life”. Conference panels addressed this theme through the lens of:

- Promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life
- Ensuring access to long-term care and support for carers and families
- Mainstreaming ageing to advance a society for all ages

For more information about this event, please visit: <https://mipaa20rome.it>, in particular the Ministerial declaration: [Rome Ministerial Declaration.pdf \(unece.org\)](#) and the “Declaration of the Joint Forum of Civil Society and Scientific Research”: [2022 Joint declaration of civil society and scientific research.pdf \(unece.org\)](#).

1.3 Rome MIPAA+20 Declarations

In the final declaration, Ministers of UNECE member States express their aspirations to realize a sustainable world for all ages, and pledge to work towards achieving its three main policy goals for the next cycle (2022-2026) of the MIPAA.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on older persons, and the challenges and opportunities highlighted by the pandemic, receive special attention in the Rome Declaration. Ministers acknowledge the disproportional negative effects of the pandemic on older persons' health, social connectedness, access to services, and human rights, including their right to dignity, freedom of movement and social participation. They recognize that the pandemic highlighted the importance of solid and inclusive welfare and health systems; the crucial role of civil society, volunteers, and family support networks; and the pivotal nature of multilateral cooperation during global crises.

In the Joint Declaration of civil society and scientific research, support was given to the goals and accents highlighted in the ministerial declaration. The Forum highlighted the urgency "... to create without delay an international, legally binding instrument to substantiate the policy efforts made by member States on the promotion and protection of older persons' rights. Therefore, we call on governments to support the drafting of a UN Convention for the rights of older persons to guarantee the equal application of universal human rights in older age at national and global levels".

1.4 Participants

- 43 delegations from UNECE member States
- 1 delegation from observer countries: the Holy See
- International organisations: WHO, UNFPA, Council of Europe, European Commission, OECD, UN
- Representatives of civil society and scientific research

2. Some observations and comments

As I participated in the UNECE MIPAA+20 Conference in Rome (15-17) as the Council of Europe Expert on Media and Information Literacy and Seniors, it is from this point of view that the following comments and recommendations are written.

2.1 Inclusion of seniors in the digital transformation of our societies: a 'future topic'

Neither the program, nor the keynote speeches, the interventions, or the debates, nor the final declarations highlighted the inclusion of seniors in the digital transformation of our society as a priority topic. However, the need to optimize and integrate the opportunities of digitalization into ageing policies for the benefit of all was often mentioned by speakers and panellists. The problem of digitalization 'echoed' regularly in interventions and in country reports. In the report of the host country Italy, for example, the results of national and regional action plans to improve the use of the internet, digital literacy and the inclusion of seniors in the digital transformation of Italy is extensively analysed and presented as a necessity ([Microsoft Word - Italy_Report_MIPAA_2021_EN.docx \(unece.org\)](#)).

In the Ministerial Declaration ([Rome Ministerial Declaration.pdf \(unece.org\)](#)) and in the Declaration of the Joint Forum of Civil Society and Scientific Research ([2022 Joint declaration of civil society and scientific research.pdf \(unece.org\)](#)), the subject of the inclusion of seniors in the digital era appears as 'a future topic'. The editors of the declarations seem aware of the problem; however, it is given a place in the perspective of future developments. In the light of the UNECE publications in 2021, this 'low profile' of seniors and digitalization is rather surprising. See: [UNECE Policy Brief on Ageing No. 26 on Ageing in the Digital Era](#) and the UN International Day of Older Persons, celebrated on 1 October 2021, that focused on the theme "Digital Equity for All Ages": [2021 UNIDOP: "Digital Equity for All Ages" | United Nations For Ageing](#).

In line with the Policy brief No 26 'Ageing in the digital Era, we hope for a well-founded analysis in the coming years!

Some citations from the Ministerial Declaration (2022) and the Joint Declaration (2022) referring to digitalisation as 'new challenges' and 'future topics':

In the ([Rome Ministerial Declaration.pdf \(unece.org\)](#)) we read:

Art 7: 'As we recommit ourselves to RIS/MIPAA, which has for the last 20 years provided a framework for addressing the cross-sectoral and multidimensional issues of ageing, we stress the need to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights by older persons. (...) **We see those new challenges such as the ongoing digital transformation and climate change are rapidly transforming our societies.** Informed by the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and achievements so far, we consider discussing adjustments to the international framework for ageing-related policies to address such challenges. '

Additionally, in a long list of commitments to promoting active and healthy ageing throughout life (Art. 25) 'the need for user-friendly digitalization, enhancing digital skills and literacy to enable older persons to participate in an increasingly digital world, while also ensuring the right to access to information, participation, and services through access to digital devices and the Internet, and to suitable offline or other secure alternatives in user-friendly and accessible

format' and (Art. 26) 'supporting innovation for the silver economy and valuing the continued production and purchasing capacity of older persons and their contribution to social and economic activities by encouraging designers, businesses, and public enterprises to provide smarter digital, financial, and other services (...)' are mentioned.

In the Declaration of the Joint Forum of Civil Society and Scientific Research ([2022 Joint declaration of civil society and scientific research.pdf \(unece.org\)](#)), we read under '**future topics**':

(Art. 27): 'The increasing prevalence of emerging technologies (like for instance those based on artificial intelligence) and the impact of digitalisation on individuals and societies need to be carefully analysed and underpinned by strategies that promote equity and minimize bias by increasing access and avoiding social exclusion and digital divides. This means upscaling efforts to provide digital skills, connectivity, and accessible and affordable technologies and tools to older persons. At the same time, users must be protected from intrusion, scams, fraud, and other violations of their rights when using digital devices and applications'.

In the years to come, this topic of digital transformation of our societies will certainly become a mainstream topic in ageing policies and all policies related to demographic change. Digitalization is a challenge for governments to cope with in their ageing policies as well as for the providers of digital tools in several social, economic and health sectors and for civil society. The inclusion of older persons in the digital transformation is first a matter of protecting and ensuring the human rights of older persons and enabling them to participate fully in society.

2.2 The same goals, different roadmaps: the need for coordination between international organizations

We recognize, and it was highlighted by several keynote speakers, that population ageing as a global trend needs to be addressed in international frameworks. The implementation of common goals and plans, however, needs to be realized by national and local governments and in the nearest living environments and with the participation of older persons themselves. This complex panorama of initiatives from different institutions with different competences is often confusing for governments, civil servants, and civil society associations. Currently, they are expected to participate in the RIS/MIPAA, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and global and regional initiatives, the United Nations Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030), the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, the Decade of Demographic Resilience (2022-2031), etc.

More coordination and clear agreements between organizations would probably have a positive result on policies that can be and must be implemented locally.

2.3 A role for the Council of Europe.

2.3.1 The continent's leading human rights organization

The Council of Europe can play a crucial role in promoting the human rights of older persons and harmonizing the implementation of internationally agreed standards.

Both 2022 Declarations spell out UNECE member States' ambition to update the Regional Implementation Strategy of MIPAA, and possibly MIPAA itself. The discussions during the MIPAA+20

have shown that 20 years after Madrid and Berlin, the time is ripe for an update reflecting changed realities, emerging challenges, and new priorities.

In fulfilling its role as the leading human rights organization, the Council of Europe continues its traditional role of advocating for the rights of older persons, promoting common standards and guaranteeing greater unity among members states. It would be a follow up of the evaluation organized in 2018 of the **Recommendation CM/Rec (2014)2, of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the promotion of human rights of older persons (19 February 2014)**.¹ The Recommendation covered a wide range of rights and areas of action related to normative frameworks and called for the dissemination of more information and the exchange of good practices. In the evaluation report (2019), the Steering Committee of Human Rights (CDDH) mentioned, among other things, that a further follow-up would be desirable and that it would be useful to regularly update the exchange of good practices.

In the framework of the Global Campaign to Combat Ageism, the Council of Europe's publication **'Against Ageism and Towards Active Social Citizenship for Older Persons: The Current Use and Future Potential of the European Social Charter' (2021)**² is very timely. Although the focus is on the evaluation and future of the European Social Charter (adopted in 1961 and revised in 1996) for the ensuring of the human rights of older persons, the publication is an inspiration to optimize the Social Charter to provide dynamic responses to changing demographic realities.

2.3.2 The Council of Europe and the UNECE Standing Working Group on Ageing (SWGA)

Membership of the UNECE-SWGA would facilitate the role of the Council of Europe:

- As a competent discussion partner in matters on human rights and new interpretations of ageing policies (mainstreaming ageing, combatting ageism, ageing throughout the life course, digital transformation of our societies) and highlight the active and dynamic role of older persons in society;
- As a leading human rights organization with direct relations to member States, guaranteeing unity and cooperation between member States.

Currently, the membership of SWGA consists of national focal points on ageing representing the member States of the ECE region. National focal points are expected to be appointed for a longer period, if possible, and be able to inform all related ministries and agencies about SWGA initiatives and activities.

¹ Council of Europe (2014), *Human rights of older persons*, Recommendation CM/Rec(2014)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member states (containing also: the CDDH follow-up report, the compilation of replies received from governments as well as information on a Workshop organised on 21 June 2018 under the auspices of the Croatian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers), available at: <https://rm.coe.int/promotion-of-human-rights-of-older-persons/16809fb9bf>.

² Gerard Quinn & Israel (Issi) Doron (2021), *Against Ageism and Towards Active Social Citizenship for Older Persons The Current Use and Future Potential of the European Social Charter*. [1680a3f5da \(coe.int\)](https://rm.coe.int/1680a3f5da). (Department of the European Social Charter Directorate General Human Rights and Rule of Law Council of Europe – Strasbourg).

Representatives of relevant international organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the private sector and academia can also be invited as observers, in compliance with the rules and practices of the United Nations in this respect.

An illustration:

The fourteenth meeting of the SWGA (Geneva, 22 and 23 November 2021) was attended by:

- Representatives of the following 39 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE): Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United States of America and Uzbekistan. The Holy See attended as an observer State.
- Representatives of the European Union (EU) and the European Commission (EC), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Health Organization (WHO) participated.
- The academic and research community was represented by European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research (Vienna, Austria); Jagiellonian University (Cracow, Poland)/ EuroAgeism; INRCA - Centre for Social and Economic Research on Ageing (Italy); and University of International Business, Kazakhstan.
- The following non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the meeting: AGE Platform Europe, Ardager, Atdal 40+, Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND), Gray Panthers, German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations (BAGSO), HelpAge International, International Federation of Associations of the Elderly (FIAPA), International Federation on Ageing (IFA), International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse (INPEA), NGO Committee on Ageing in Geneva, Red Cross of Serbia, Turbota pro Litnih v Ukraini (Age Concern Ukraine), and Turkey Retired Persons Organization

2.4 Looking ahead and responding to 'future priorities'

The Council of Europe can explore how to promote a human rights approach to ensure the protection and participation of older persons, and what needs to be done to improve the opportunities for digital inclusion, so that no one is left behind.

As digital transformation and the digital inclusion of older persons is acknowledged in the recent UNECE MIPAA+20 Ministerial Conference as a 'future priority', the Council of Europe can base itself on the new publication "The digital Era? Also my era! [Media and information literacy: a key to ensure older persons' rights to participate in the digital era](#)" and perhaps play a leading role in tackling this 'future' problem.