

Letter of ESU President An Hermans on the United Nations International Day of Older Persons

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On the 1 October 2022 we celebrate worldwide the United Nations International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP). This year the overall theme is “Resilience of Older Persons in a Changing World.” As every year, we as the European Seniors’ Union (ESU) take part in this annual celebration and this year highlighting especially “The Resilience and Contributions of Older Women”.

As an older generation we know and experience it: older persons are a heterogenous group. Every person’s life course, their living environment, their education, their personal health... and so many other characteristics influence the way we age, certainly also gender. In our ageing world, where men and women often experience many of the same fundamental effects of ageing, they also experience many considerable differences. The past three years have brought profound upheaval in the world’s health, socio-economic and environmental sectors, with pandemic and climate- related impacts experienced globally. These effects continue to be deeply significant. Recognition of the vital contributions of older persons, and those of older women and the inclusion of their voices, perspectives and needs, is critical to creating policies responsive to local, national, and global challenges.

Some months ago, on 14th June, the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, the Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons, Claudia Mahler, issued the following statement: *“Around the world, thousands of older women continue to be silenced by the persistence of discriminatory societal attitudes and a lack of attention to abuse and violence. In 2020, around one in six people aged 60 and above experienced some form of abuse in community settings. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the rates of violence against older persons, including older women, and cases of domestic violence increased considerably. In this recent context, there is a critical need to acknowledge and document the extent to which violence against older women is widespread within our ageing societies.*

Violence against older women remains an unspoken issue in many societies and a taboo grounded in deep-rooted sexist and ageist prejudices and stereotypes and discriminatory cultural and social norms. Power dynamics and inequalities leading to emotional, financial, material, physical and sexual violence are likely to exacerbate with older age.”¹

Let us shed light on the intersection between age and gender that compounds and affects the risk factors of ageing and ageing societies. Inequalities tend to exacerbate in older age because

¹ United Nations website: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/06/un-experts-urge-states-address-violence-abuse-and-neglect-older-women>

of disadvantages and discrimination accumulated throughout the life cycle. Older women who have experienced the combined effect of ageism and sexism are suffering from manifold inequalities, e.g., access to employment, adequate pensions, healthcare, etc.

Celebrating the 2022 UNIDOP this year

- Let us acknowledge the specific contributions and challenges of older women, who often dedicated a huge part of their lives to their families, communities and to wider society;
- Let us highlight the resilience of older women in the face of environmental, social, economic and lifelong inequalities;
- Let us call on member states, political parties, and civil society to include older women in the centre of all policies, ensuring gender equality and equity for all.

I would like to invite you and your organisation to join us in highlighting this day and giving it the necessary attention.

An Hermans
ESU-President

The UNIDOP from 1990:

On 14 December 1990, the United Nations General Assembly (by resolution 45/106) designated 1 October the International Day of Older Persons.

This was preceded by initiatives such as the Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing – which was adopted by the 1982 World Assembly on Ageing – and endorsed later that year by the UN General Assembly.

In 1991, the General Assembly (by resolution 46/91) adopted the United Nations Principles for Older Persons.

In 2002, the Second World Assembly on Ageing adopted the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, to respond to the opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the 21st century and to promote the development of a society for all ages.