

**40 years of Afammer**  
**Madrid, 14 December 2022.**

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

First and foremost I would like to congratulate Afammer and all of you for the role you have played already over so many years in creating opportunities for a dignified, happier, joyful fulfilment of capacities for women and families around you, both in your regional living environment and worldwide. Throughout this engagement, and the engagement in your association, you are developing your personal talents and...I am sure, it makes you happier. Congratulations.

We have the honour of being part of this celebration, representing the European Seniors' Union (ESU). As president, I have accepted this invitation as a request to bring the perspective of 'ageing societies' and people living longer, as an asset and a challenge, into your dynamic association and your activities.

I highlight 7 aspects:

1. Ageing, demographic change is a megatrend of our 21<sup>st</sup> century society. Affecting our personal life and our societies, both our governments and our societies need to respond to it, at least as well as we do towards other megatrends like digitalisation or climate change.
2. Ageing is a dimension of the life course. We age during our whole lifetime. The way we grow old is dependent on our personal capacity, gender, lifestyle, living environment... These aspects must be taken into account during the whole life course, from childhood and early education onwards..... (see: European Care Strategy<sup>1</sup>, launched on 7 September 2022)
3. Recently, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many problems about the way our societies care about older persons were revealed. Older persons suffered more than other age groups, not only from the infection, but also from the accompanying measures (lockdowns, isolation etc.). There were lessons to be learned: we all have to fight against ageism and loneliness; to create social contacts; to be aware that digital communication is not an alternative available to everyone. The basic principle is: to ensure the full enjoyment of human rights throughout life.
4. What about women? What about older women? I hope you know that the United Nations International Day for Older Persons (UNIDOP) on 1 October 2022 has highlighted "The Resilience and Contributions of Older Persons<sup>2</sup>" globally, and in particular the role of older women in navigating today's myriad of worldwide challenges. It is a global sign of the recognition of the vital contributions of older women to the development of our societies. The inclusion of their voices, perspectives and needs is critical to creating policies responsive to local, national and global challenges. They are often pillars in local societies. This recognition is crucial and must be reinforced. Age and gender are important categories to differentiate the way we look and understand people we live and work with.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_22\\_5168](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_22_5168)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/ageing/international-day-of-older-persons-homepage/2022-2.html>

5. The living situation of older persons, and of older women in particular, is often overlooked in studies, statistics and policy impact assessments. Worldwide, their quality of life is profoundly affected by the high gender pension gap, leading to an increased risk of old age poverty. Violence against women is another issue, in which the situation of older women is invisible, hidden in the categories of “domestic violence” and “elder abuse”. However, older women are less likely to report violence due to confusion, frailty, pressure from the family or because of limited access to external support.
6. Do we want to make sure that older women are not forgotten? Do we want to ensure the enjoyment of their human rights?  
Yes, let’s make it happen. But don’t start at the age of 80, or 60 or 40... Let’s begin with young girls, convince their families and governments to ensure that they can attend school, that they have a healthy life, playing and learning instead of suffering from poverty, armed conflicts and all kinds of discrimination. Only then they can develop their talents, get a good job, and eventually enjoy a dignified life in their old age. It is crucial that gender equality remains a long-term objective within a life course perspective to ensure that older women’s rights are secured to enable them to live and enjoy a quality life as they age.
7. Let’s shed light on the intersection between age and gender throughout life. Civil society can play a powerful role in tapping the capacities of men and women, promoting a caring inclusive society, creating and co-creating innovative initiatives to support people to be part of changing digital societies, making choices in housing and healthy living. And most important: let’s stand together with men and women of all generations. Let’s praise and thank older men and women in our communities and look ahead, together, sharing the responsibilities and burdens.

An Hermans

ESU president.