

“Fulfilling the Promises of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for Older Persons: Across Generations”



International Day of Older Persons 2023

Dear Colleagues and Dear Friends,

On the 1st of October this year, we come together to commemorate the 33rd International Day of Older Persons (UNIDOP). This day holds significance as we strive to:

- Raise awareness about the opportunities and challenges brought about by demographic shifts;
- Spotlight the valuable roles older persons play in our society;
- Extend an invitation to all to embrace and prepare for a society characterized by longevity.

Over the past few decades, life expectancy has increased across all European Member States, with demographic change becoming an integral facet of policy. We have every reason to celebrate longevity, but it is equally imperative that we support older persons through a human rights-based approach to ageing policies.

In my capacity as President of the European Seniors' Union (ESU), I am pleased to express our dedication and vision for a human rights-centered approach to shaping all European policies related to demographic changes. During the recent EU government period, the EU Commission made a pivotal decision to incorporate a new vision, particularly emphasizing the integration of ageing throughout the life course. We call upon the preservation of fundamental European values such as human dignity, democracy, and solidarity to ensure well-being for all generations, leaving no one behind.

Let us embrace our role as active citizens within civil society, regardless of our place of residence, be it within a community or a care facility. Our duty is to protect our vulnerable fellow citizens, empower family members, friends, and community members, ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to age in dignity – both now and in the future. Let us take action today to empower future generations and secure a brighter tomorrow for all.

Dear Friends,

In 2023, as we mark the 75th anniversary of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)*, the international community calls for our attention to the theme:

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75 years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the [Universal Declaration on Human Rights](#)¹, a monumental document in the history of human rights. It stands as the first document to articulate the fundamental human rights meant to be universally safeguarded. Recent years have revealed that older persons face unique challenges in various situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, extreme weather events caused by climate change, and the impacts of digitalization on societal structures. They often encounter age-based discrimination in institutions, attitudes, and practices. Recent research by the [European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights \(FRA\)](#) has underscored the gaps in implementing international and national legal frameworks for older persons.² Systemic and structural barriers persist in areas like employment, standards of living, educational opportunities, and access to services and resources, all due to ageist attitudes, discriminatory laws, and policies.

In response, older persons and their associations are taking proactive steps to prevent and reduce these threats. Speaking on behalf of older persons, we declare, [“The digital era? Also my era!”](#)³ The Senior generation is ready and willing to participate in policy making that affects them, a fundamental prerequisite for devising effective solutions to the challenges and opportunities they face.

Dear colleagues,

We advocate for the empowerment of seniors, underscoring the significance of their active involvement in decisions that directly affect their lives. An age-friendly society encourages senior citizens to stay engaged and participate actively, even in the face of unexpected crises. We stand united for Europe and its core values of human dignity, peace, democracy, and solidarity, defending these values as essential principles for people around the world.

Let us joyously celebrate the UNIDOP. Let us appreciate the additional years of life that now grace the lives of so many. Together, let us build bridges of solidarity that span across borders and generations, ensuring that all persons can age with dignity, and no one is left behind.

With warm regards,

An Hermans

European Seniors’ Union President

¹ <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>

² <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2023/older-people-digital-rights>

³ <https://rm.coe.int/digital-literacy-for-seniors-print/1680a6ce9e>