

Comments to report on the Multi-Stakeholder Meeting on the Human Rights of Older Persons
29-30 August 2022

An issue much commented on, is how the media generally present older people through the language and images they use, in a way that is highly stereotyped, reductive, and overall negative. The media picture older persons as frail, passive recipients and vulnerable with negative consequences for older people's self-perception. For example, in Greece despite regular health tests for the renewal of driving licences, older people were portrayed as worse drivers because they had more accidents – in fact they were more likely to get run over. A Government prejudiced measure to insist on a driving test for those over 80, was stopped when they realised that ageist attitudes and reading data improperly has led to a faulty and discriminating law proposal.

In other instances, older persons are simply omitted or not mentioned, contributing to invisibility in how their human rights were being violated.

Increasingly protests from individuals and organizations in Europe, indicate that European citizens want to tackle the stigma that older persons face, but a lack of interest or knowledge about older people in all their varieties, makes attitudes difficult to shift. Governments need to ensure that not only their policies are not ageist in concept and execution, but also in the language used in documents.

The invisibility and omission of older persons as active citizens as well as the lack of any recognition of ageism and age discrimination in a legally binding instrument, impedes the implementation of concrete national actions to advance their human rights. In comparison with the rights of persons with disabilities, where a UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities exists, the rights of older persons continue to be denied.

A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons would encourage governments to implement concrete actions, including using a human rights-based language in policies, that does not reproduce and reinforce stigma against older persons. This would also create positive narratives around ageing, something crucial when current narratives are negative and stigmatising. Older persons are active citizens whose contribution to the society is huge; they are not passive welfare recipients.

A UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons would make sure that non-stigmatising and agreed language and terminology is used amongst policymakers and the media at international, regional, national, and local levels.