



PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 29 September 2016

UN International Day of Older Persons, 1st October: Take a Stand Against Ageism!

New UN convention needed to adequately protect older persons' human rights and combat ageism in Europe

The 2016 UN International Day of Older Persons 'takes a stand against ageism' and calls on everyone to rethink our views and attitudes towards the older generation. To mark that day, a [joint event](#) at the European Parliament highlighted the pervasiveness of ageism and opened the dialogue for an international convention on the rights of older persons at EU level.

'I don't want special protection, but I do want the same protection from the law as anyone else.'

This quote from the [Declaration of Rights of Older People in Wales](#) is largely shared by older people's organisations across Europe. They do not claim special treatment, new or more rights than others, but want to **make sure that their inherent rights do no diminish or become of less importance with age.**

Yet, older people encounter particular challenges in the realisation of their inalienable human rights, as the [recent UN Independent Expert's findings](#) confirmed. Ms. Kornfeld-Matte further called on Member States to consider the elaboration of a new UN convention for this group.

'Elder-burden' is an expression that frequently comes up in the media and older workers are often perceived as lacking digital skills and flexibility, as e.g. a recent survey by the Belgian center for equal opportunities [UNIA recently revealed](#) for Belgium. These are just some examples of the flourishing stereotypes linked to old age in many areas of life. According to the findings of the European Social Survey ¹ageism is the most frequently experienced form of discrimination.

'Ageism is an erosion of human rights', highlighted Anne-Sophie Parent, Secretary-General of AGE Platform Europe, at a joint event organised by AGE, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions (ENNHRI) and the EPP group of the European Parliament on 28 September. Building on the *'assumption that older people's lives are less worthy and that old age means decline and uselessness'*, ageism leads to degrading treatment of older people and limits older persons' potential, impacts their health and well-being and hinders their contributions to social, economic, cultural and political life, as Ms Parent explained.

[Structural ageism](#) is largely tolerated by our societies; those same societies which in parallel acknowledge the necessity of increasing older people's social and economic participation in order to address the rapid ageing of the European population. Isn't this schizophrenic?

¹ Ageism in Europe – Findings from the European Social Survey: http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true

The [United Nations](#) and the [World Health Organisation](#) are leading worldwide campaigns against ageism. However, as AGE Secretary-General noted, despite an increasing number of resolutions of the European Parliament recognizing the particular human rights challenges faced by the older population, the **European Union to date has not paid any particular attention to ageism** and older people's rights are not adequately addressed in its work programme.

'Making the fight against ageism a policy priority would definitively bring more coherence and efficiency to EU policies addressing demographic change', added Anne-Sophie Parent.

Although a number of binding international and regional human rights conventions protect the human rights of all individuals, those treaties do not specifically address age discrimination or protect older persons' rights systematically or comprehensively. ENNHRI, the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions, is conducting an EU-funded project, which includes NHRIs' monitoring of the [human rights situation of older people in long-term care](#) across several European countries.

'We have identified some practices which could lead to breaches of human rights, for example the freedom of movement, right to privacy and to autonomy, as well as the right to the highest attainable standard of health. I am confident all the stakeholders will respond to our recommendations in their pursuit to improve the human rights situation of older persons in long term care', said Lora Vidović, Croatian Ombudswoman and ENNHRI chair.

'Even though human rights apply to all, the fact that older persons are not explicitly referred to in the treaties might represent a challenge to their protection, which could be strengthened with a Convention on the Human Rights of Older Persons', concluded Vidović.

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Useful links

- UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing: <http://social.un.org/ageing-working-group/>
- UN Independent Expert on the Enjoyment of All Human Rights by Older Persons: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/OlderPersons/IE/Pages/IEOlderPersons.aspx>
- UN international day of older persons: <http://www.un.org/en/events/olderpersonsday/>
- AGE work on human rights of older persons: <http://www.age-platform.eu/age-news-human-rights-and-non-discrimination>
- Human Rights of Older Persons in Long-Term Care, an ENNHRI project: www.ennhri.org/rights4elders
- WHO campaign to combat ageism: <http://www.who.int/ageing/events/international-day-older-persons/en/>

Note to the editor

About AGE Platform Europe:



AGE is a European network of organisations of and for people aged 50+ aiming to voice and promote the interests of the 190 million citizens aged 50+ in the European Union and to raise awareness of the issues that concern them most. www.age-platform.eu

About ENNHRI:



ENNHRI (European Network of National Human Rights Institutions) brings together 40 NHRIs across wider Europe. ENNHRI's goal is to enhance the promotion and protection of human rights across the European region. <http://ennhri.org/>

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