



Federal Ministry for  
Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,  
Women and Youth



Documentation of the Online Conference

# Strengthening Older People's Rights in Times of Digitalisation

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Lessons learned from Covid-19  
28–29 September 2020

#AgeingEU2020



Konferenz zur Stärkung der Rechte  
älterer Menschen | Conference on  
strengthening older people's rights

# Documentation

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## Introduction

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), the Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations (BAGSO e. V.), and AGE Platform Europe (AGE) have joined forces and, instead of holding two physical meetings on location, set up a joint online conference that was attended by more than 1,500 people from

over 60 countries. Input came from experts and representatives of the EU member states as well as European institutions. This documentation recaps the most important ideas and suggestions from the Conference. To watch the entire Conference, go to [YouTube](#).

For **2** days  
opportunities and  
risks of digitalisation  
for older persons  
were discussed.

There was input from

**21**  
national and  
international experts.

**13**  
experts' presentations  
were part of the  
programme.

More than **1.500**  
persons from over 60 countries  
participated.

**4** rounds of  
Q and A offered  
opportunities for  
exchanging views.

The participants  
submitted  
**266**  
questions.

# Lectures

## Moritz Ader...

...detailed OECD insights on digitalisation in the context of COVID-19. The pandemic had revealed existing divides. To close them, it is vital to overcome socio-economic differences. The motto here is life-long learning.

## Robin Allen...

...emphasised the importance of the principle of autonomy and demanded that AI be designed in a human-centric manner. To illustrate this point, he referenced the report for Equinet that deals with the impact of artificial intelligence on the work of these bodies and reveals the risks to equality.

## Andraž Banfi...

...presented the work of a project for comprehensive support to companies for active ageing of employees. It was essential to put the principle of life-long learning and continuing education into practice to prolong working life and enable people to participate in progress.

## Milan Brglez...

...presented the EP Interest Group on Solidarity between Generations and, echoing the Commission proposal, called for an increase in funding for digital transformation. He also demanded that more ESF funds be mobilised to build digital literacy and that populations beyond the retirement age be included as well.

## Anna Chabiera...

...asked... "Are the human rights of older persons implemented in practice?" The right to education is not a social right, but a human right at any age. Age stereotypes have to be countered with an internationally binding instrument.

## John Patrick Clarke...

...recalled the UN CRPD, specifically Articles 3, 5, 9 and 19. The digital transformation involved both benefits and disadvantages for older persons with disabilities. Technology must be designed in such a way as to promote the participation of persons with disabilities.

## Helena Dalli...

...said: "Europe is finding itself in the midst of three transitions, the digital transition, the recovery from COVID-19 and the transition to a true union of equality." She announced that the ageing mainstreaming principle would be pursued across all policy areas.

## Franziska Giffey...

...emphasised that human rights have no expiry date. She also stressed that, for the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth, cooperation with civil society was essential. The pandemic crisis could only be resolved through European cooperation. COVID-19 had amplified the importance of digital communication for universal participation.

## Ebbe Johansen...

...illustrated the currentness of the Conference topic by citing the accelerated digital transformation of all areas of life. Policy makers have a responsibility develop a digital environment that is user-friendly and safe for all to engage in and to guarantee, at the same time, participation by means of analogous alternatives.

## Claudia Mahler...

...referred to her report to the UN on the impact of COVID-19 on older persons. She called for a treaty on the rights of older persons that would include access to a complaint system. She commended the rights-based approach of the Council conclusions.

### Elizabeth Mestheneos...

...addressed the challenges that the use of digital devices poses for older persons. The access to the digital world was a human right that must not depend on socio-economic status. She called for data that also include the very old age.

### Heidrun Mollenkopf...

...demanded that older people must have the right to access digital information, services and social networks. New legal frameworks on the national and global level were necessary to ensure the equal application of human rights to all older men and women.

### Claudia Müller...

...discussed findings from the Federal Government's 8th National Report on the Elderly. This Report looked into how digitalisation may contribute to maintaining and improving the quality of life of older people. Here, attention had to be awarded to the great diversity of older persons and to ensuring participatory technology design.

### Franz Müntefering...

...stressed that digitalisation was clearly an advance and that this advance must serve the people and not the other way around. It was important for a functioning democracy that digitalisation be used in a way that benefits the people.

### Michael O'Flaherty...

...referred to the briefs on COVID-19 that the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights had already published this year and the results of the background paper prepared for the Conference. It became evident that frequency of digital media use decreases with age and was also correlated to the level of education. [PDF](#)

### Guiseppe Palmisano...

...introduced into the Council of Europe's framework on the Human Rights of Older Persons in times of digitalisation. Most prominent of those was the Revised European Social Charter (1996), particularly Article 23 that lays down the right to participation. He hoped that the upcoming German Chairmanship in the Council of Europe from 15 November 2020 would take up this subject.

### Birgitta Sacrédeus...

...stressed the importance of building broad-band in all regions. As examples of the benefits, she cited the access to libraries and the use of telemedicine. It had to be noted that, thanks to the high level of digitalisation in Sweden, elderly persons as well were confident users of digital tools.

### Juliane Seifert...

...stressed: "We must shape the digital transformation to everyone's benefit, no-one must be left behind. National and European policies for older persons go hand in hand, therefore so, too, do the Council conclusions. The closing of potential protection gaps must also be discussed on the United Nations level."

### Dubravka Šuica...

...underscored that COVID-19 was a wake-up call for the importance of human rights at any age. The upcoming Green Paper on Ageing was going to address this, as was the Long-term vision for rural areas.

### Matthias von Schwanenflügel...

...presented the contents of the Council conclusions adopted on 9 October 2020. They contain a set of measures addressed to the EU Member States, the EU Commission and other EU institutions that are to be implemented in the coming years. [Press release](#)



## Key findings

Human rights have no expiry date and are not tied to a person's age. This is why both exit strategies from the pandemic and the digitalisation strategies of the EU and its member states must ensure that all people can participate and no group is advantaged or disadvantaged. Enshrined in the UN Sustainable Development Strategy, the principle to "leave no one behind" is particularly pertinent for digitalisation that, in 2020 more than ever, has become a guarantor of full participation in cultural, economic and social life. Technology must benefit the people and be designed to be usable and safe – also accommodating limitations. However, technology can never

replace face-to-face human contact, only support it. To ensure digital participation, therefore, efforts must be made towards translating the right to lifelong learning into practice and towards securing people the continued development of their abilities even in their post-employment phase. Focussing on the rights of older persons for the first time since 2010, the Council conclusion adopted on 9 October 2020 were welcomed as an agenda for the coming years, tied to the expectation that the following EU Presidencies of the Council of the European Union will continue to pursue this topic.





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