

FERPA Activity Report 2023-2025

From the FERPA Congress in Vienna in 2023 to the present, the concluding document of the Congress and our Manifesto have continued to be an important reference point for us, outlining our claim strategy with regard to the protection of the rights of millions of older people, retired and former workers.

In the particular European context, briefly described yesterday, and after the last elections for the European Parliament - with more than a quarter of MEPs belonging to the extreme right and a European Commission that, for the first time in many years, does not have a specific Commissioner for Labour and Social Affairs - it seems increasingly difficult to build a fairer and more equitable economy, one that is able to provide answers to the problems of working women and men, pensioners and young people.

The ETUC has very carefully analysed this worsening of the European political situation, which may jeopardise social protection, social dialogue and the very role of trade unions, and has promoted targeted initiatives and mobilisations to address this difficult scenario.

FERPA shared this choice and actively participated in all ETUC events, meetings and demonstrations. At the same time, we also resolutely supported our demands, so that they became, for the ETUC and all affiliated trade union organisations, common demands to be supported on an equal footing.

It is an action that we have carried out not only with conviction, but even with insistence, to make the entire ETUC and the entire European trade union more attentive to the needs and proposals of trade unionism and the associationism of pensioners and the elderly.

We are convinced that we are right in this action of ours. Not only to defend our dignity and that of the entire European elderly population, but also because building a fairer, more democratic Europe, which truly protects and promotes labour and civil and social rights, means building a Europe for all ages, which strengthens the bonds between generations and does not leave behind the elderly and retired population.

This conviction of being right was reinforced by the meetings we had on our FERPA Manifesto in the past legislature with the cabinets of the President of the European Council and the President of the European Parliament. We found good agreement on its contents. The meetings, however, ended with an invitation to FERPA to transfer our demands to the confederal level, as the European institutions consider that it should be mainly the ETUC to support our Manifesto, also through tripartite meetings. According to them, in fact, our demands mainly concern matters that are the responsibility of individual states, and considerable economic resources would be needed to accommodate them.

Given the end result of these meetings, therefore, over the past two years we have been working to ensure that our demands were taken on board by the ETUC and its member trade union confederations.

To try to achieve this goal, our activity has been constant.

Starting with the ETUC Congress in Berlin in May 2023. At that Congress we intervened several times, stating and demonstrating that every topic or resolution addressed in fact also involved pensioners and pensioners and that, therefore, references to our demands could not be missing. In the end we got a lot of listening, but little content, few concrete results. Only small steps.

But we did not give up.

Subsequently, we spoke at the ETUC Executive in Madrid in September 2023, which had on its agenda the ETUC Resolution and Manifesto on the European Parliament elections. Elections, which, as already mentioned, all trade union organisations considered very important, both because of the forecast of a strong shift to the right and because of the prospect of a reduction in the role of the social partners and social dialogue.

Within the framework of the ETUC Action Plan, as you may recall, FERPA participated with its banner in the big demonstrations in 2023 in Paris, Brussels and in the European Parliament, where we were also invited to speak. These were important demonstrations, against the reinstatement of the Stability Pact and austerity policies, against cuts in public spending, social protection and pension systems.

We attended and contributed to all other meetings of the ETUC Steering Committees and Executives. Some of these meetings were also attended by the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen; the President of the European Council, Antonio Costa; the Vice-President of the European Commission, Teresa Ribera. Participations aimed at

strengthening the key role of social dialogue. In addition, the leaders of the major political parties were also present before the European elections.

Particularly significant were the appearances of Enrico Letta, who illustrated his Report on the future of the European single market, drawn up on a mandate from the European Council, and Mario Draghi, who illustrated his Report on the future of European competitiveness. I would like to recall that FERPA intervened on these two Reports, reiterating that strengthening the single market and achieving a more competitive and competitive Europe cannot entail reducing public spending, and in particular public health, to the detriment of the health of the most fragile segments of the population. Instead, effective and adequate social protection systems must be guaranteed for people of all ages and the European Pillar of Social Rights must be fully implemented.

We are convinced that the profound demographic changes taking place, the lengthening of the average lifespan and the ageing of the population must be addressed with new policies and a new approach. We are convinced that we do not need further welfare cuts, but a change of perspective and investment. We are convinced that longer life expectancy cannot be considered just a cost, a problem. Older people are already a fundamental resource for society today and even more so in the future if appropriate policies are put in place.

Over the past two years, we have had a positive collaboration with the ETUC's Confederal Secretary, Giulio Romani, who is in charge of social

protection and pensions, also participating in the various meetings of the relevant committee.

Over the past two years, we have had several meetings with the ETUC General Secretary, Esther Lynch, on the role of FERPA; on our demands, in particular the demand for a minimum guarantee pension in Europe; on FERPA's voting rights in the ETUC Executive Committee and Management Committee.

With Esther also, last year, in 2024, on the occasion of the International Day of Older Persons on 1^o October, we drew up a joint ETUC-FERPA declaration - which you all received - in which we jointly denounced the fact that older people and pensioners in Europe are excluded from decision-making processes affecting their living conditions and rights.

With Esther we had also agreed on a joint ETUC-FERPA petition in defence of welfare systems and against the increase of the retirement age. However, the ETUC presidency decided to postpone it, on what I consider an unconvincing grounds, namely that it had not been submitted to the ETUC Social Protection Committee beforehand. We shall now see what happens.

This intense relationship between the FERPA Secretariat and the ETUC Secretariat has brought concrete results. In fact, as FERPA we have contributed to the formulation of important resolutions directly affecting pensioners, resolutions which were then approved by the ETUC Executive.

I want to recall them briefly:

- The resolution for a fair and inclusive pension policy in the European Union clearly states that the purchasing power of pensioners must be

protected and that pensions must be indexed to inflation and cost-of-living increases; that the amount of pensions must be related to income; that a minimum pension above the poverty line must be provided.

- The resolution for a reform of economic governance, which does not force member states to cut their pension and healthcare systems.
- The resolution for a strong public welfare and greater social protection.
- The resolution for the right to adequate housing for all generations.

These issues are also reflected in the ESC Activity Report that will be presented at the ESC Mid-Term Conference in Belgrade next week.

Last month, we were also invited by the ETUC to participate in the trade union delegation for the definition of procedures to strengthen social dialogue. A positive signal, which is in line with the joint ETUC-FERPA declaration of 1^o October 2024, which I mentioned earlier.

Finally, we tabled amendments to the draft declaration to be presented at the ETUC mid-term conference, because, once again, there were no references to the conditions of older and retired people. Some were accepted and included in the draft.

The continuous proactive and lobbying work of the FERPA Secretariat vis-à-vis the ETUC enabled us to achieve these results, which we must consider as positive steps towards the goal of giving FERPA and its demands more strength and visibility.

We tried to be protagonists. FERPA's activity within the ETUC and among its affiliates was not only to make our demands become shared. It has also had the objective of trying to convince ETUC and European trade unions to eliminate this 'discriminatory allergy' that so many have towards FERPA and to make them realise the reality. The reality is that in Europe, as I said earlier, older people now make up about a fifth of the population and that a significant proportion of the members of ETUC trade union organisations in the various countries are pensioners and retired people. Older people and pensioners must therefore be given proper consideration by those who represent them also at confederal level. Appropriate attention and responses must be given, as is the case for female and male members, so that they can feel an integral part of the ETUC.

We obtained ETUC resolutions supporting our Manifesto: a step forward, but still not enough.

A strong commitment is therefore needed from all of us to urge the trade union confederations, both at European level and in the individual countries, to work together to follow up and make concrete the resolutions adopted by the ETUC. We must all feel involved in this commitment.

FERPA's voting rights in the bodies of the ETUC are missing. The Statutory Changes Committee of the ETUC has approved and agreed on a proposal that we welcome as another step towards eliminating this ugly discrimination and giving the future General Secretary, or future Secretary General, of FERPA, after the next ETUC Congress, the opportunity to have

the dignity to vote like everyone else. We hope that this proposal will be approved next week in Belgrade.

On 30 April, we sent a note asking all of you to urge or persuade your confederations to vote in favour, because I am very concerned that the 'discriminating allergy' I mentioned earlier towards FERPA and the elderly and pensioner population may prevail again when it comes to the vote.

On the occasion of the 2024 European Parliament elections, we convened an extraordinary meeting, by video, of our Executive Committee and prepared a document with our demands, which we as the FERPA Secretariat sent to the candidate leaders and which you sent to the candidates in your countries.

We also recorded a video, to be circulated on social media, with our interview-invitation to support candidates sensitive to our issues and curb the advance of an authoritarian and xenophobic far-right.

After the elections, we sent our best wishes for good work to the new Presidents of the Commission and Parliament and took the opportunity to postpone the FERPA Manifesto.

In these two years, we also participated in the Congresses of many FERPA member organisations: the CFGT Pensioners' Congress in Valence; the CGT Congress in Saint Malo; the UGT Congress in Benidorm; the OOSS Congress in La Lastrilla.

We also spoke at the ETUC Project on Discrimination in Amsterdam and at two Spi-CGIL conferences, the first in Rome on *Women, Health and Ageing*, the second in Belgrade on *Appeal of Balkan Pensioners' Unions for*

Social Rights and EU Enlargement. We re-proposed this appeal at a meeting of the ETUC Executive, and at the ETUC Executive meeting on 15 February a resolution was passed on it.

We also spoke at the Madrid Conference on the present and future of European policy for older people, organised by the European Economic and Social Committee, with the support of the Spanish Presidency of the European Council. We took part, in Brussels, in a meeting of the OSE, the European Social Observatory, on how to ensure the continuity of social Europe. We continue to participate in the work of the Civil Society Liaison Group, a body of the European Economic and Social Committee, of which FERPA has been a member since 2021.

As FERPA we are following the European parliamentary course on driving licences, with particular attention to age-related limits, and on this our Executive approved an agenda that we sent to the then President of the European Parliament in the last legislature. Now everything is referred back to the new Parliament.

As FERPA, we had 5 Executive Committee meetings (3 in presence and 2 in video) and 10 Steering Committees (6 in presence and 4 in video). The video meetings were necessary due to the reduction of funds by the European Commission and FERPA's lack of adequate financial resources.

The ESC finally has a permanent location, but it does not have a meeting room with sufficient space to hold our Executive Committee meetings, for which we have to search outside for a suitable and available facility each

time. Instead, we have been able to hold our Executive Committee meetings in a room inside the ESC.

It was important that we were able to keep FERPA's headquarters inside the new ETUC building and obtain an office in a central, highly visible and functional location for the Secretariat's work, a location that was also very useful for consistently carrying out the lobbying work, which I illustrated earlier, towards the ETUC Secretariat.

It is also good to have succeeded in accrediting FERPA in the European Parliament as an interest group, and to have received the entry passes for the Parliament as a secretariat.

With regard to the goal of increasing the number of FERPA members, we approved the request to become a full member of the KSS pensioners of the Republic of North Macedonia. We also recently received a request from the San Marino pensioners' KSS, which we will examine. These requests are positive, because they broaden our representation and show a growing interest in our Federation.

FERPA has a good website, thanks to Uilp-UIL and Maria Sole, who follows it in a timely manner and who is also doing the photo shoot for us these days. I would also like to thank the Uilp-UIL for having in recent days restored our website, which had been completely destroyed by a hacker attack, and for recovering its contents.

I will not dwell on the Women's Committee, as the President spoke about it in depth this morning in the interesting round table discussion and I thank

her for the great organisational effort; I also thank the Spi-CGIL for bearing some of the costs of participation.

As far as FERPA's economic aspects are concerned, the 2024 budget, as you know, closed in the red, and the 2025 budget is also expected to close in the red. These negative accounts are the result of FERPA's lack of adequate economic resources, mainly due to the membership fee, which is stuck at 2011.

This lack of resources may jeopardise the very functionality of FERPA. For this reason, we have debated the issue at length in the bodies, we have set up a Commission coordinated by Dick de Graaf, our Treasurer, but, so far, we have not arrived at any definitive proposal.

For this year we have adopted a provisional solution, which does not solve the problem. We must therefore commit ourselves to finding a definitive solution at our next Executive Committee meetings, so that we can continue to have a functional FERPA that can also celebrate the next 30 years.

Finally, we have prepared a good draft, very rich in content, of the concluding document of this conference of ours, a draft already approved at our Executive meeting last February. Silvana will present it tomorrow.

All this work was possible thanks to the good collegial work of the members of the Steering Committee and thanks to the constant and daily commitment of the Secretariat, which proved to be very active and functional. And, above all, thanks to all of you, who have been excellent protagonists of FERPA's action and of our journey together.

Thank you for what you have done, what you do and what you will do for FERPA.