



Social Services Europe Contribution to the Consultation on the Green Paper on Ageing

Social Services Europe(SSE) is a network of European umbrella organisations including Eurodiaconia, EPR, Caritas Europa, EASPD, Red Cross EU Office, FEANTSA and CEDAG, representing over 200,000 not-for-profit social and health care organisations, employing over 11 million people.

Our national members support many people in various stages in life, such as children, the elderly, persons with disabilities, people at risk or experiencing poverty and social exclusion, homeless people, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the European Commission consultation on ageing, fostering solidarity and responsibility between generations. We welcome the Commission's recognition of the impact of demographic change, ageing and the challenges and opportunities it offers.

We believe that access to social services is a fundamental right. Everyone should enjoy these rights, and this is supported by part 1, article 14 of the European Social Charter¹ and Article 34 point 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Ageing affects all aspects of a person's life but should not be detrimental to their social rights or the right to live in dignity. The vital factor for SSE is not only participating in the debates focused on the Green Paper on Ageing but also delivering on the White Paper on Ageing while anticipating the Commission's initiative on Long Term Care in 2022. This contribution is structured in the form of questions as outlined in the consultation, our input provides answers to questions relevant to SSE member organisations.

How can healthy and active ageing policies be promoted from an early age and throughout the life span for everyone? How can children and young people be better equipped for the prospect of a longer life expectancy? What kind of support can the EU provide to the Member States?

Ensuring older people can live in dignity must be a policy priority, which begins from early childhood and runs along adulthood, it covers the entire lifecycle of a person. Healthy and active ageing should not only be about the ability for older persons to be physically active and participate in the labour force as it is often construed but the ability of older persons to fully participate in social, economic, cultural and civic affairs, which should be mirrored in public policies. As such, policies aimed at promoting healthy and active ageing should include all groups of persons from early childhood to adulthood. Public authorities should:

- Invest in services for older people as well as foster economic growth, create jobs that ensure a good quality of life.
- Member States and the EU should give every child a good start in life through investing in early childhood education. Also, Lessons promoting the importance of keeping a healthy lifestyle should be introduced and incorporated in early childhood education curriculum.

¹ Everyone has the right to benefit from social welfare services. European Social Charter.

Access to high quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) can also effectively lead in early diagnosis in case of a disability and eventually early childhood intervention and better quality of life later on.

Moreso, people should be prepared to adapt to life accordingly, accept changes and integrate them into their lives.

- There should be adequate preparation for transition from an active work life to retirement. From this perspective, policy could focus on optimising the role of pre- and post-retirement counselling programmes in increasing interest in non-work-related activities and helping retirees to rearrange their personal goals such that they can be fulfilled in a non-work context.² Such programmes should be comprehensive in nature; they should incorporate individual participant needs and contextualized to fit cultural values.
- The European Commission should support Member States to develop lifecycle strategies (childhood, youth, adulthood and older people) in partnership with, and inclusive of, children and young people. To ensure positive impact through implementation, these strategies should support volunteerism, across the lifecycle, while strengthen awareness raising and peer learning amongst children and young people to promote healthier lifestyle choices in their schools and communities.

The EU plays a crucial role in guiding and leading the way for Member States, as they can further support Member States by identifying the issues at hand and providing them with guidance and support to further promote actions and policy frameworks that will work for all people, despite of age.

- The European Commission should intensify support to the Member States in carrying out campaigns to change public perceptions of older people that society better values their contribution to society.
- Also the EU should promote and support, investment in quality curative and preventive social and health services is crucial to enable active ageing for older people.
- Healthy ageing is strongly linked with access to healthcare and COVID-19 further revealed and exacerbated the existing gaps in the healthcare system. Many initiatives have been developed and are mentioned in this paper, such as personalised medicine, the new EU4Health programme etc. Another opportunity emerging from the social services sector is the development of services in the community, smaller-scale initiatives which will offer person-centred support. If this is mainstreamed in also the healthcare sector, it may further support healthy and active ageing of the whole population and address the healthcare needs of each individual early on, even in remote and rural areas.
- Additionally, the European Commission's report identified that almost half of older people have a disability, with a percentage of 47.8% of people in the 65+ age group– with this figure getting higher as people get into the older age groups. (EU-SILC 2018) Therefore, the support provided to persons ageing with and ageing in a disability is a crucial aspect of any work on Ageing. As such, the “disability” and “ageing” sectors need to be viewed as unseparated when designing policies and developing services. The opportunities and synergies provided by this can promote mutual learnings and cooperation with the same goal, being the vehicles for millions of people to enjoy their Social Rights, to live dignified and independent lives, and provide the necessary support to enable millions of people to participate actively in the society.

² <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/ageing-and-society/article/active-ageing-from-empty-rhetoric-to-effectivepolicy-tool/AE973B91D5F93069AA650C31D215614F>

What are the most significant obstacles to lifelong learning across the life-cycle? At what stage in life could addressing those obstacles make most difference? How should this be tackled specifically in rural and remote areas?

- Main obstacles are access to (early) childhood education, both in terms of affordability and quality, access to life-long learning in adulthood in terms of availability (online, distance to training centre, also via accessible public transport, etc.); adequacy (what kind of trainings can people follow, are they adapted to their language skills and capacities, does it increase opportunities on the labour market, also in terms of better working conditions and wages?); affordability (are the courses for free); as well as the possibility to combine learning with working and family life (when and where do the training courses take place, how long does the whole training cycle take, can single parents participate, are there childcare facilities onsite etc.). Addressing the learning challenges in childhood makes the most difference with a long-term impact.
- Fighting discrimination is crucial in this context. The best ways to prevent any type of discrimination are awareness raising and training. Policies that ensure positive visibility of old age from childhood are essential to fight prejudices and age discrimination (ageism). Subjects and / or spaces which comprehensively address concepts and social structures such as inequality, equity, good treatment, and discrimination based on age, sex, religion, etc. should be included in educational curricula. In the same sense, it would be important to promote EU recommendations to the different media so that the images and messages they use do not contribute to stereotyping, ageism, sexism, disempowerment, etc.
- On the work training and opportunities to grow on the job should be provided without extra cost on the trainee. Focus should be on the most vulnerable, those experiencing digital poverty.
 - The EU should engage in active outreach, people in most vulnerable situations should be prioritised. They should ensure the availability of internet for persons in rural and remote areas. Provide online skills, they should be empowered to participate fully in life.
 - A potential untapped source to further support access to continuous education is the [European approach to micro-credentials](#)³. Micro-credentials can open education up to more people because they are flexible, short-term, and open to all types of learners. They can be particularly helpful for people who are looking to build on their current knowledge rather than getting a full degree, people who want to bridge a gap between degrees or their initial formal education and for emerging labour market skills for people who want to upskill or reskill.
 - Availability of training, cost, training conflicting with the working schedule and staff shortages are some of the obstacles of access to continuing education. EU policy initiatives need to target these challenges and provide policy guidance to Member States. Eurofound's findings demonstrate that only 5 EU countries have mandatory Continuing professional development training in ECEC, specifying also the amount of time spent on training and another 10 refer it in regulations or make it mandatory, without although specifying the duration⁴. And the report, continues by recommending that comprehensive policy guidance regarding the content, format and length of trainings as such is essential to ensure quality and effective trainings and EU funding can have a key role in financing

³ www.ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/a-european-approach-to-micro-credentials_en

⁴ Eurofound (2020) Access to care services: Early childhood education and care, healthcare and long-term care, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available here: www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20015en.pdf

these programs. This example and data findings may be referred specifically to ECEC training but can further appeal to Continuous Professional Development trainings in different fields.

- Another important aspect is raising awareness on the need of life-long learning, targeting specifically people of older age but also focusing on educating employers on the benefits of Continuing Professional Development in their workforce. And this shall further target rural and insular areas, where the availability of information as such and accessibility to training may be limited.
- The Green Paper on Ageing also identified that 1 in 5 young people lack basic digital skills, number which certainly grows bigger as we move towards older ages. And this comes in a period in which digital technologies have entered our lives in all areas and have created opportunities and challenges that we were not able to even imagine a few years ago. Technology runs with such a fast pace forcing us to evolve with an even much faster pace. However, at the same time, the take up of technology in many areas, such as in the social services sector, in care and support settings is not the same and the challenge emerging is how we will ensure that this sector will not be left behind, together with the people which it supports. Policies and adequate funding are needed to ensure that digital infrastructure is available and that everyone is trained in a way that can allow the use of such services. The digital gap is huge and needs adequate funding and the establishment of safeguards to ensure that people with limited digital skills will not be further excluded and isolated. This is particularly the case for people of older age, persons with disabilities, and the population in general living in rural and remote areas.

What innovative policy measures to improve participation in the labour market, in particular by older workers, should be considered more closely?

The EC and Member States should promote employability of older people, and should more in general tackle unemployment and improve access to job opportunities through the EUInvest programme. Particular focus should be directed especially towards the sectors of the green economy and social enterprises, capable of producing new jobs, and by expanding lifelong learning opportunities currently offered by public administrations. The EC should also support Member States to strengthen and modernise public employment services through the continuous training of operators, the inclusion of specialised counsellors and tutors, and the implementation of targeted policies for each sector of the labour market and for different categories of workers, whether older, young, with a migrant background, with a physical challenge, etc. The Council should adopt such an approach, incorporating these points, in the functioning of public employment services.

- It is necessary to build good foundations based on relevant data in order for institutions to be able to formulate effective policy measures. The EU institutions and Member States should support sharing of experience and good practice when creating employment programmes.
- The EU should support and promote the agenda of good working conditions for older workers who want and are able to work. At the same time it is necessary to protect those persons who are no longer able to work due to their age and/or health. Policy measures should therefore respond flexibly to the individual situation of older people. Concrete measures could be considered, such as improving the skills, particularly digital skills, of older workers with specialised training courses; promoting flexible working hours and specialised part-time working for older persons, which does not disqualify them from complete social protection (part-time pension, part-time work); improving health and safety policies in the workplace,

including mental health; and promoting policies that combat anti-ageism and discrimination due to age in the workplace.

- Social economy enterprises (SEEs) and their subsector, Work Integration Social Enterprises (WISEs) play an essential role in facilitating the integration of people with a distance to the labour market. The people working in SEEs are generally people with care and support needs, such as persons with disabilities, migrants, long-term unemployed and people of old age.
- Social economy enterprises not only contribute to the employment of persons with disabilities and persons with a distance to the labour market but they are also present in underdeveloped rural areas. Thus, playing an important role *in the promotion of social cohesion and in the recovery of areas at risk of abandonment by the general population*⁵. Moreover, they support the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, such as principle 3 on equal opportunities and principle 17 on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, as in many cases they are the only existing working opportunity for persons ageing with disabilities.
- Therefore, social economy enterprises need to be recognised in law as an effective instrument for achieving social objectives and thus the employment at fair conditions of persons with care and support needs.
- Persons with disabilities remain an untapped workforce. Following the principles of Article 27 of the UN CRPD on the right of Persons with Disabilities to work and employment, and principle 17 on inclusion of Persons with Disabilities, policies need to further promote and support their equal participation in the labour market. Policies shall also support the possibility of receiving funding to cover the additional employer's expenses/costs when employing persons with care and support needs, such as persons with disabilities and older persons. Additionally, a fit-for-purpose State Aid policy at EU level is important to create a level playing field between organisations that employ persons with care and support needs and those who do not. As well as reduced taxation measures to help businesses and social enterprises to employ persons with care and support needs. The EU Member States should facilitate the financial support to social economy enterprises through a stronger use of exemptions and a better use of the de minimis rules on State Aid.
- Another potential, which shall be harnessed as an employment opportunity for older workers and further fostered by targeted actions at EU and Member State levels is the job creation in the social services sector. Social service providers are one of Europe's biggest contributors to job creation with over 100.000s of new jobs created each year⁶. This job growth is expected to continue as highlighted in the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights which estimated 8 million job openings in the next 10 years in the health and social care sectors; with the social care sector being part of the broader social services sector.
- Additionally, digital devices can support the workforce, as they can improve occupational health and safety⁷. Policy objectives shall facilitate the development and introduction of these technological advancements, to support an ageing workforce but also prevent or postpone future care needs by providing these tools to younger workers as well.

⁵ EASPD (2018) Declaration on social economy enterprises. Available here:

www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/easpd_declaration_on_sse.pdf

⁶ Eurofound (2020) Representativeness of the European social partner organisations: Local and regional government sector and social services, Sectoral social dialogue series, Dublin. Available here:

www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef20019en.pdf

⁷ <https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/EPsU-Social-Employers-Joint-Paper-Digitalisation-V5-FINAL-06.06.19-EN.pdf>

- The Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights⁸ has committed to increase the provision of formal early childhood education and care. Policy objective that will support the reconciliation of work and family life, and it will further increase the participation of informal carers, mainly women and women of older age, in the labour market. However, this shall come hand in hand with the provision of other services, such as respite care, personal assistance and formal long-term care and support services.

How can EU policies help less developed regions and rural areas to manage ageing and depopulation? How can EU territories affected by the twin depopulation and ageing challenges make better use of the silver economy?

Residents in rural areas often have limited access to various types of services (social services included), which has an impact on the quality of living. At the same time, limited access to services leads to a further migration of people from rural to urban areas. The prevention and support model for unwanted loneliness must include a diversified approach in rural and urban areas. Participation requires mobility and accessibility of vital services. This is a particular challenge in rural areas. In addition, policies that improve communication systems (road and telephone, internet ...) will facilitate the settlement in rural areas of new people and families who can develop their lives and perhaps their jobs within these communities.

Social Services Europe members support self-determined participation, create forms and spaces for exchange and encounters, enable commitment, counteract loneliness and promote the resources of older people for themselves and for society. They work at the interfaces of various fields of work, for example with volunteer centres, municipalities and church communities as well as outpatient, (partial) inpatient assistance and hospice work. They advise, support and accompany older people and caring relatives.

- EU and Member States policies should foster access to health, social and other services and support the increase of capacity and quality of outreach services in order to provide accessible full spectrum of services (services network) based on the people's needs. Providing services in rural areas could also lead to creation of new jobs in those regions.
- In terms of the social care and support sector, investments in digital technologies⁹ provide opportunities for the deployment of services in rural and insular areas, for the creation of new services and for the improvement of existing services. Additionally, they provide better linkages between the different social services and better flow of information across the care and support system, advancing the cooperation between different service providers in also different geographic locations. Thus, facilitating access to such services in rural and remote areas. At the same time, policies and adequate funding are needed to ensure that digital infrastructure is available and that everyone is trained in a way that can allow the use of such services. The digital gap is huge and needs adequate funding and the necessary actions to ensure the full participation of the sector in the digital transformation and to guarantee the quality of the services provided.
- Investing in inclusiveness, and, more broadly, in the promotion of equality would contribute to make rural regions attractive and to address the negative impact of depopulation. Social

⁸ [Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

⁹ <https://www.epsu.org/sites/default/files/article/files/EPSU-Social-Employers-Joint-Paper-Digitalisation-V5-FINAL-06.06.19-EN.pdf>

services have an important impact on the development of rural communities¹⁰ and as a job-creator they can have an even bigger impact.

- Social economy actors -both social enterprises and social services- can have a huge impact for workers and local communities. Apart from the initial social impact, the social economy creates jobs, helps disadvantaged people in the labour market and improves professional choices for carers (usually women) as well as work-life balance¹¹. This is even more important in rural areas where social services and social enterprises are often some of the biggest employers. The investment stays in the local community with approximately 80% for non-relocalisable jobs and 20% directly injected in the local community¹². Thus, policies promoting investments in small scale local social services and social enterprises can further support job creation and attract more people in small local communities, boosting the social, economic and community life in such areas¹³.
- EU funds and cohesion policy programmes can play an important role in supporting these initiatives. But access to EU funds & financial instruments needs to be facilitated, bringing simplification not only to managing authorities but especially to the final beneficiaries. The Partnership principle needs to be effectively put into practice, allowing for a true co-creation of the funding programmes which results into more effective funds addressing the particular local needs.

How could volunteering by older people and intergenerational learning be better supported, including across borders, to foster knowledge sharing and civic engagement? What role could a digital platform or other initiatives at EU level play and to whom should such initiatives be addressed? How could volunteering by young people together with and towards older people be combined into cross-generational initiatives?

The EU should continue to support civil society, local, regional and national authorities to promote recognition of the contribution of (older) volunteers to society, to awareness raising on the value of volunteering to empower people and volunteer organisations, and to creating an enabling environment for volunteering including a volunteering infrastructure. In every country a legal framework should exist that provides basic legal recognition of, and legal protection for volunteers, while avoiding to impose too much administrative burden that would hinder volunteering. Support structures should be strengthened, that offer training and accompaniment for volunteers. The quality and added value of volunteering also depend on the support that volunteers receive. Special attention should be given to volunteering initiatives that empower people experiencing poverty and social exclusion by giving them the opportunity to volunteer, as well as to initiatives that introduce new forms of volunteering and of volunteer exchanges.

- SSE members observed a gap in intergenerational dialogue and perceived risk of conflict between generations for economic resources. There is a need for increased interaction and

¹⁰ EASPD (2018) Provision of social care and support services in remote rural areas. Available here: https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/social_services_in_rural_remote_areas_-_easpd_report_march_2018.pdf

¹¹ Social Services Europe (2019) "Improving work-life balance through enabling social services: From service provision to decent policies". Available here: https://80cf426a-4e57-48e6-a333-91f4b1dbdd1a.filesusr.com/ugd/9f45fc_a06e31394eec43fa9b5b11c0fb25794e.pdf

¹² EASPD (2017) "Investing in Social Care & Support – A European imperative": Available here: socialinvestment.eu/uploads/library/report-investing-in-social-services-76-1.pdf

¹³ EASPD (2018) Provision of social care and support services in remote rural areas. Available here: https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/social_services_in_rural_remote_areas_-_easpd_report_march_2018.pdf

understanding between ages to build solidarity and maintain a willingness to contribute to financial solidarity mechanisms. Volunteering can help develop intergenerational solidarity by creating links between young, middle-aged and older generations and promoting cooperation and interchanges between them. For example an intergenerational and intercultural mentoring initiative in Belgium; [DUO for a job](https://www.duoforajob.be/en/homepage/).¹⁴

- To support the scaling up of innovative practices the European Commission should make available funding to national, regional and local CSO's to implement practices which promote intergenerational learning and volunteerism amongst older people. Moreover, as a means of structuring the volunteerism amongst older people.
- Public authorities and the EU should promote and support projects financially that facilitate exchanges between generations, such as intergenerational houses and meeting places and those that link schools with older people's homes. Innovative digital platforms that serve as *MeetUp* for the transfer of skills between generations should be funded.

Which services and enabling environment would need to be put in place or improved in order to ensure the autonomy, independence and rights of older people and enable their participation in society?

The European Commission noted in 2009, "Dependent people prefer long-term care in a residential or community setting rather than institutional care, but in many countries, institutional care still accounts for more than half of public expenditure"¹⁵ SSE echoes the call to policymakers to develop policies aimed at preserving financial autonomy as well as physical autonomy thanks to adapted housing, transport and access to services that allow older people to stay in their own homes for as long as possible.¹⁶

Enabling older people to maintain their autonomy necessitates a holistic policy approach:

- Innovative organisational approaches and technical solutions could achieve a more efficient use of resources, skills and technology, improve the health and quality of life of older people and caregivers, delay disability, slow the progression of the disease, avoid unnecessary hospitalization and institutional care and increase the sustainability of health and care systems (Social Protection Committee and the European Commission, 2014). A wider use of assistive technologies solutions to better meet the need of the elderly population. A more effective integration of health and social care and the much greater use of cost-effective, affordable technology is important, but may also require major additional training and upskilling of staff.
- Any form of device, from walking sticks to self-regulating cooking plates and voice-operated smart home options, can help people who need support. Providing people with devices can allow them to live in dignity, increasing their capacity to decide and act independently. Besides, it is a cheaper solution for public authorities than residential care, although price should not be the driving force.
- Innovative projects focused on assisting older persons should be promoted and financed. For example the Gamified e-Services for older persons carried out by Eurodiaconia member, Oulu Deaconess Institute. The project seeks to promote health and well-being among older people by engaging them in games and programs that encourage the active participation of the user and work towards improving the person's physical and mental well-being.¹⁷

¹⁴ <https://www.duoforajob.be/en/homepage/>

¹⁵ Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion(2009)

¹⁶ European Commission second European Demography Report (2008)

¹⁷ <https://www.eurodiaconia.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/ed-publication-dementia.pdf>

- Member States should fight against poverty and social exclusion in all ages; in-work poverty and gender/disability/ethnic pay gaps should be tackled, so that older people do not live in poverty.
- Member States should invest into the education and recruitment of persons providing care and services for the elderly, launch financial incentives to employ people in the field, and to improve their working conditions and remuneration.
- Technology can play an enabling role in assuring independent living,.technical designs should be devised to meet human needs of the elderly, and they should be developed with service users as an empowering tool that improves their quality of life. Policies need to guarantee that adequate funding and resources will be allocated for the development of person-centred technology¹⁸, aiming in promoting independence and quality of life of the ageing population. Person-centred technology can lead to improvements in everyday life, work, communication, mobility. It may for example, facilitate better access to services for persons with reduced mobility.
- Public authorities should provide persons in need with devices at reasonable costs or free, focusing on increasing people's capacity to live independently and to make decisions for themselves.
- The EU should develop initiatives that facilitate the accessibility and affordability of Assitive Technology (AT) solutions, in collaboration with AT developers ans support service providers.
- Research into technological solutions must incorporate service user's perspectives and privacy considerations, and research projects in this field must involve long-term care service providers.
- Also, the EU should promote the support of modernization and consolidation of quality community-based support services, including through stimulating mutual learning and exchange of good practices.
- Calls for proposals under EU research programmes relating to long-term care and ambient assisted living should ensure service providers' engagement.
- There is also a massive need for the financial sustainability of long-term care services in all member states. The EU must encourage social investment, and national governments must view spending in LTC as essential to enable all people, including older people, to live in dignity and enjoy a quality of life.
- One of the main challenges when designing services is the diversity of care and support needs of the service's beneficiaries. Many disability services have proven pioneers in overcoming this challenge by providing person-centred services, reflecting the wishes and preferences of their users. This expertise needs to be mainstreamed to support the development of services for the ageing population, ensuring access to person-centred and empowering services in line with the UN CRPD and the EPSR¹⁹.Equality before the law is a basic general principle of human rights protection and is indispensable for the exercise of other human rights, as non-enjoyment of legal capacity may interfere with the right to employment, independent living, health, etc. Having clear legal frameworks in place, promoting equal recognition before the law for all people, despite age/ disability and facilitating supported decision-making is essential. Additionally, there is a need for a change in the mindset, not only of the professionals working in the judiciary system but also of the wider society.
- Persons with care and support needs, service providers and public authorities need to work together, following a co-production approach, to ensure that any policy development will reflect the needs and wishes of the individuals.

¹⁸ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Publications/pct_report_complete_final.pdf

¹⁹ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Publications2020/report_on_ageing.pdf

How can the EU support vulnerable older persons who are not in a position to protect their own financial and personal interests, in particular in cross-border situations?

- Older persons in vulnerable situations need to be protected from housing exclusion and homelessness. There are numerous elderly people among the EU's homeless population. Preventing evictions and securing long-term affordable housing needs to be guaranteed for people in need, especially as older persons in vulnerable situations often do not have social safety net to rely on and are dependent on social support services.
- Vulnerable older persons – and many persons with disabilities - are often seen as incapable of making decisions, equal recognition before the law is essential, as well as equal access to justice. This indicates changes in the judiciary system improving the accessibility of services as such. Measures relating to universal design and accessibility, such as easy to read information and accessibility of buildings are a few examples on how to improve access to justice for vulnerable older persons.
 - Additionally, clear legal frameworks providing appropriate and effective safeguards to prevent abuse in accordance with international human rights law are essential.
 - The European Commission's initiatives on the Strategy of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities will further support Member States on Improving access to justice, legal protection, freedom and security by providing guidance to Member States on access to justice for PwD in the EU; and the collection of good practices on supported decision-making.

How can the EU support Member States' efforts to ensure more fairness in the social protection systems across generations, gender, age and income groups, ensuring that they remain fiscally sound?

Families play a crucial role in taking care of their dependent relatives. This unpaid work is work, and constitutes a win-win action for our communities. The Member states should implement the work-life balance directive in a generous way and take initiatives to enable, support, and recognise the value of family care work by allowing a number of days per year of special leave for care work in the family (for children, elderly, the ill). An adequate minimum income should be ensured during longer periods of leave for care work. The EC should monitor the transposition of the work-life balance directive and take appropriate action in case of non-compliance by Member States.

Ensuring decent income during longer periods of leave due to the need of care work will lead to reducing risk of poverty of elderly women. Women are more often involved in family and long-term care than men and this is often reason why they have lower pensions. Longer care periods are linked with low income and consequent worse position in the labour market due to a career break. Moreover, a decent income for informal carers in long-term care will increase the number of such carers and reduce institutional care costs – this will help maintain the social protection systems fiscally sound.

The situation of so- called 'live-ins' in private households of EU Member States has to be pursued. Mainly women from Eastern European Countries, often far away from their own families, take care of an elderly person and support the families taking care of a dependent relative. It is important to create a fair care mobility scheme by establishing legal employment relationships and fair working conditions in private households with a transparent labour contract, corresponding insurance protection, fair pay and regulated working hours, as well as free time.

Low wages persist in feminised labour market sectors. There is a need to encourage greater participation by men in these sectors and to promote adequate wages.

Member States shall ensure the active participation of all individuals in the society, regardless of age and provide equal opportunities to all, based on principle 3 of the EPSR and the TFEU.

Social protection systems shall ensure that social security benefits are not reduced or removed, once a person with care and support needs enters the open labour market, as this may work as a negative determinant on their decision to enter or return to the labour market.

Furthermore, once persons with a disabilities reach their 65 years of age, they are no longer considered as persons with disabilities but as older persons, thus affecting their disability rights and their access to dedicated funds or other accessibility measures. Therefore, the “disability” and “ageing” sectors need to be viewed as unseparated when designing policies and developing services.

How can the risks of poverty in old age be reduced and addressed?

- Policies targeted at empowerment and fighting discrimination from childhood through adulthood will prevent old-age poverty. To break the poverty cycle and prevent child poverty are essential. In this regard, we welcome the European Commission’s target to lift at least 5 million children out of poverty in the EU by 2030 in the recently published European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan. However, we have to aim at eradicating child poverty completely.
- Ensuring older people can live in dignity must be a policy priority. With COVID, an increasing number of older people are faced with the risk of living in poverty.
- Adopting a life-cycle approach to addressing poverty later in life and to promote and fund programmes which are targeted at increasing the education, skills and employability of vulnerable, socially disadvantaged and excluded groups to ensure they are not affected by poverty later in life. Hungarian Red Cross launched the “Itt a helyed!” (Your place is here). At this stage in life, young people who are not in education, employment or training (sometimes referred to as NEET), can benefit greatly from adapted support for the transition from education to work. The objective of the scheme is to improve their chances on the labour market by spending a gap year in a meaningful way and gaining valuable life skills.
- Pensioners must be entitled to an adequate minimum income sufficient to live in dignity.
- Public authorities should invest in quality curative and preventive social and health services, which are essential to enable active ageing for older people, particularly those with care needs. Public authorities must think long-term, making suitable their commitments to invest more in preventive care. Similarly, attention should be paid to quality and affordable housing solutions, coupled with other support services
- Public authorities should adopt quick labour market integration policies for third-country migrants who face a higher risk of old-age poverty. They should be allowed to work in good quality jobs. To achieve this, both anti-discriminatory and active outreach measures must be taken to ensure that migrants and people with migrant backgrounds can access good quality jobs.
- There is need for positive actions to tackle discrimination against Roma and ensure their full participation in the labour market as well as opportunities for growth in the workplace.
- Giving care must not lead to old-age poverty. Informal unpaid carers, mostly women, reduce their paid working hours and some times give up their careers to care for children and relatives, which implies they forego income and part of their future pension to take up care

responsibilities. Therefore, to avoid old-age poverty of women, they should be given wage replacement during the period taken off work, similar to child benefits. Again, we reiterate the crucial role of minimum income in tackling old-age poverty. Also, member states should consider adopting social protection schemes for informal carers.

- Pension system should guarantee an income that enables decent living conditions. The pension system should include a mechanism so that pensions increase adequately with regard to inflation and other economic factors.
- Policies should be adopted to encourage older persons' employment by reducing their social security contributions for each more senior worker.
- Public authorities should create avenues for earnings in old age; volunteering should have financial compensation.

How can we ensure adequate pensions for those (mainly women) who spend large periods of their working life in unremunerated work (often care provision)?

- Each Member State relies on informal caregivers to a different extent and yet, in all countries, this category plays a great deal in assisting those in need of LTC. Smaller families, migration processes of the young generations, more gender-balance in the labour market and other factors may disrupt those LTC systems heavily relying on informal caregivers or lead to other problems such as the use of undeclared immigrant carers (European Commission, 2013).

In contexts where long-term support provision relies on informal caregivers, informal carers might not be able to fully met the needs of elderly people with disabilities as per the concrete needs these users may have.

- The importance of recognising care work as essential and the time spent on family care work should be considered as eligible for the calculation of pension rights.
- Informal care provision should be remunerated and compensated as women who are not part of the formal labour market due to taking care of a relative are performing a service to society can miss out on social security and pension. Adequate schemes supporting care and ensuring a pension contribution should be developed and implemented as part of a work life balance. (EPR)

How can the EU support Member States' efforts to reconcile adequate and affordable healthcare and long-term care coverage with fiscal and financial sustainability?

- Access to social support is very often essential to enable people to enjoy their human rights and to participate actively in society. It is therefore the legal and political responsibility of public authorities to organise the social welfare system in a way which enables access to such social support. This includes measures required to be able to have sufficient public expenditure to cover such investments and be financially sustainable; including through improved use of fair taxation mechanisms. The European Union therefore also has a role to play to ensure public authorities have sufficiently resources budgets to ensure people can enjoy their basic human rights, including through access to social support. Past EU policies – including the austerity measures – have not managed to adequate reconcile financial sustainability and healthcare and long-term care covering given the underfunding of such services across the European Union and the chronic structural issues experienced by the sectors involved (staff shortages, waiting lists, outdated services, etc). This systemic issue was only re-enforced further by the COVID-19 pandemic. Future EU policies should do more to ensure that sufficient resources are available to be dedicated to these two sectors. At the

same time, expenditure to such services can also be improved; for instance, by better prioritizing the development of community-based services in order to improve the effectiveness of the social and health interventions, often pre-emptively.

- Older people represent the majority of recipients of LTC (Social Protection Committee and the European Commission, 2014), which is a real challenge if we consider the demographic situation in Europe. This is connected to increased dependency due to the prevalence of frailty, multi-morbidity and physical or intellectual disabilities as people age (European Commission, 2015).
- Long-term care services should be characterised by three mutually agreed and interconnected objectives: access to services should be affordable for all citizens and not related to the income or wealth situation; services should be of comprehensive high quality and person-centered; and LTC services should be sustainable in the long term.
- The financial sustainability of LTC services is the most pressing challenge. Public expenditure on health care and long-term care together accounted for 8.7% of GDP and about 15% of total government expenditure in the EU in 2015. Member States are capable of responding to the growing demand of these services but there is a lack of political will and often the sector is not sufficiently resourced. As a result LTC accessibility has developed into a form of “restricted universalism”, whereby services are now largely targeted towards those with the highest levels of caring needs, limited by financial constraints, longer waiting times and budget ceilings, and with a greater reliance on informal care.
- An additional important element in the reform of long term care and support policies is to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of its funding; both the rates (how much) and the model (how to). User-centred funding models, such as personal budgets, have the potential to support the population ageing in and with a disability to choose the services they need, and they also have an impact in the quality of service provision. Public procurement has too often been misused in the field of long-term care and there exists little to no promising practices in this field; except in cases where markets may be reserved for not-for-profit organizations on the basis of partnerships²⁰.
- The EU must invest in LTC services: The European authorities must encourage and support social investment and governments must view expenditure in LTC as an essential investment to ensure all people, including older people, can live in dignity and enjoy quality of life. LTC is a right, as mentioned on principle 18 of the EPSR and everyone shall have the right to affordable LTC services, in particular home and community-based care. Austerity measures, over the last decades, have disproportionately affected the funding of social care and support services, whereas the demand of such services is growing much faster than before. The EU needs to ensure that additional funding is transitioned towards Member States to respond to the increasing needs of the ageing society.
- LTC services present clear opportunities for investment that would help provide quality, affordable and accessible care while also creating jobs to meet the increased need:
 - Staff shortages and high turn-over in the social services sector are related to the poor working conditions many of the staff face. Unsocial hours, predominantly part time or shift work characterise the sector and service providers face competition for contracts which make it challenging to pay decent wages. Additionally, the majority of social workers are women. In order to improve the working conditions of the staff, maintain a steady work force- which benefits the users who create bonds with staff members- and

²⁰ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/bucharest_2019_conference_report_2.pdf

recruit new staff in order to meet the higher demands of services, we need adequate investment.

- Additionally, it is crucial that public authorities contract quality services in public procurement procedures ensuring that tendering processes do not lead to the choice of provider based only or mainly on the cost of the services.
- Integrated, person-centered services: It is important to address needs others than bio-medical; what is right for the individual in terms of upkeep or health, such as leisure and social activities. Equally, people who have multiple care needs usually receive health and social care services from different providers and in different care settings. This often happens without appropriate co-ordination or a holistic approach, leading to various issues for the service user, the (in)formal carer and the family such as gaps in service provision or inadequate support, limited access and information, as well as *increased costs to care systems* in the form of unnecessary hospital admissions or aggravated health problems (Action Paper, 2016). LTC services should promote integrated responses to meet the needs of older people with disabilities.
- Deinstitutionalisation: Deinstitutionalisation in long-term care promotes the well-being of those in need of care and support and may present *lower expenditure for healthcare systems* (Ilinca, Leichsenring, Rodrigues, 2015). In addition, older people tend to prefer to receiving LTC services in their own homes. The prevalence of depressive disorders for older adults living in the community (2-3%) is lower compared to the ones in LTC facilities (about 10%) (World Health Organisation, 2015). The WHO suggests viewing institutions as a “last resort” only when family or home-based options are not available (2002). Using an older-person-centred approach, people aged 65+ should be considered individuals with a great deal of experience, with their own needs and also preferences (World Health Organisation, 2015) who should be able to choose residential or home care. Coproduction as a model should be pursued and promoted, ensuring service users, as experts of their own experience, can co-create services and policy.
- The increase in LTC demand could also be mitigated by technological developments: innovative organisational approaches and technical solutions could achieve a more efficient use of resources, skills and technology, improve the health and quality of life of older people and caregivers, delay disability, slow the progression of the disease, avoid unnecessary hospitalization and institutional care and increase the sustainability of health and care systems (Social Protection Committee and the European Commission, 2014). This may also require major additional training and upskilling of staff.
- A crucial issue in these times concerns the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector. Older persons and persons ageing with a disability have being hit hard by the pandemic and it revealed that existing services are unable to address their care and support needs. Moreover, the pandemic revealed the serious challenges that social services, especially in LTC faced, such as increased expenditures in parallel with unstable or decreased funding, and staff shortages, which put at risk the continuity and sustainability of support. The EU’s funding and recovery instruments, specifically the Recovery and Resilience Facility, need to respond to these challenges; guarantee the development of community-based services; ensure access to person-centred and empowering services in the community in line with the principles of the EPSR; and invest in building up a skilled social care workforce.
- Moreover, the impact from the climate change and the actions foreseen by the EU Green Deal, will be a pivotal moment for the care and support services. Climate change affects the lives of all of us but not in the same manner or at the same time. Persons with care

and support needs, especially those living in areas of high risk, where access to essential services is limited, will be impacted the most and consequently, the lives of the staff supporting them. There is an urgent need to support the care and support sector to transition to greener solutions and this shall come hand in hand with the training and preparation of the social care and support staff.

How could the EU support Member States in addressing common long-term care challenges? What objectives and measures should be pursued through an EU policy framework addressing challenges such as accessibility, quality, affordability or working conditions? What are the considerations to be made for areas with low population density?

- There is a need to support the development and capacity building of outreach health and social services and to promote informal care by providing adequate income for carers, respite services and other forms of professional support.
- Transforming residential services to community and family-type services should be supported. Outreach services and family-type services will both ensure better living conditions for elderly people, strengthen regional accessibility of services even in areas with low population density (more services with lower capacity in more places) and reduce epidemiological risks.
- It is necessary to provide stable funding and support quality of services and reduce the feminisation of the care sector.
- To increase the efficiency and quality of healthcare and long-term care, the functional interconnection and cooperation of the health and social care system (and other fields) needs to be strengthened. It is necessary to build good foundations based on relevant data in order for institutions to be able to formulate effective policy measures. The EU and member states should support sharing of experience and good practice when creating social policy programmes.
- It is important that public authorities contract quality services in public procurement procedures; ensuring that tendering processes do not lead to the choice of provider based only or mainly on the cost of the services .
- There is a clear need of a different landscape of services, services which will meet not only the needs of each person, but also their wishes and preferences. To achieve that we need to change not only the way we develop services but also the way we fund services and the way we recruit and train the staff working in such services. This subsequently leads in the delivery of a service that is responsive to the user's needs and preferences. We shall clearly focus on the persons themselves, the individuals with care and support needs. Involving the users of services, through co-production, in the design, development and delivery of the services allowing them to be in control of their lives, take ownership and express choice.
- Working Conditions:
 - The balance of power has shifted from the service to the person with care and support needs. Services shall be person-centred, shall meet the needs of each individual, they shall follow their wishes and preferences and support them in making their own decisions, thus having control over their own lives. The shift to a model of care and support as such requires more staff and most importantly well-trained staff. Care workers shall be viewed as enablers of change²¹ and in order to achieve that the EU needs to support Member States, to:
 - offer decent wages, ameliorate the working conditions, and increase the attractiveness of the sector by providing career advancement opportunities within

²¹ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/easpd_helsinki_conference_report_2019_0.pdf

the care sector, by recruiting a more pluralistic workforce, in terms of background, skills, qualifications and gender, and by offering digital devices to improve the occupational health and safety of workers;

- ensure that care workers can provide flexible support, relieved from compliance and administrative protocols, to meet the needs, wishes and preferences of each individual;
 - increase the Social Dialogue by actively involving in the decision-making processes the employer's organisations and the worker's representatives.
- One of the key actions planned through the Action Plan on the EPSR is an initiative on Long-term Care in 2022, that will set a framework for policy reforms to guide the development of sustainable long-term care that ensures better access to quality services for those in need.
 - Additionally, the European Parliament report on the employment and social policies of the euro area 2020²² will further promote the development of an EU framework for services²³ to set minimum standards and quality guidelines, which would facilitate independent living and women's participation in the labour market by providing accessible and affordable quality childcare and early education services, as well as short- and long-term care and social services, including for the elderly and people with disabilities. The Framework should also cover the following elements: • set an overarching definition of services; • define how future services should be provided; • improve the recognition of the sector; • provide an overview of funding models; • address workforce development matters, including training, recruitment and retention; • foster innovation to create resilience in the social sector; • set guidelines on quality of services and minimum standards; • link social services to all EU policies and the EU budget.
 - Given that social care services affect so many different aspects of the lives of people, as well as both the European economy and its welfare system, it is important to set-up a cross-Directorate General working group to bring together and gather the expertise of all relevant DGs, involving also major European representatives of the social care sector and beneficiaries. Moreover, it is equally important to gear broader EU policies towards achieving an EU wide framework, such as the European semester, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the upcoming Social Economy Action Plan, and EU funds.
 - The Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030 has set out clear objectives to further support towards these directions: Building a European Framework for Social Services of Excellence for persons with disabilities, to improve service delivery and enhance the attractiveness of jobs in this area by 2024; And issuing Guidance recommending to Member States improvements on independent living and inclusion in the community by 2023. Any initiative on Long-Term Care must be build in the same spirit as the Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2012-2030.

How can older people reap the benefits of the digitalisation of mobility and health services? How can the accessibility, availability, affordability and safety of public transport options for older persons, notably in rural and remote areas, be improved?

- The gap between the increasing need to maintain digital sovereignty in everyday life in old age and to have the necessary digital skills for a self-determined life, and the large number of people over 60 who are offline, illustrates the need to create customised support services in dealing with digital media. Those who do not use digital media run the risk of being "left

²² https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2020-0183_EN.html

²³ https://www.easped.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/epsr_action_plan_-_easped_position_2020.pdf

behind". It is about supporting older people and taking away their fear of "technology" if they are unsure about using digital media. They should become curious about the diverse possibilities of digitalisation. Their fears, e.g. "that they will get into situations in the digital world that they are not up to, or that they will even become victims of scammers", must also be taken seriously and ways of dealing with them must be shown. The digitisation of services has complicated access for a large group of older people. It is important that all digitised services maintain specific physical windows allowing easy access and supporting the elderly in their use.

- Regarding public transport, especially in remote areas, buses "on demand" and / or local taxis work well in public-private collaboration. A bus "on demand" has an established route, with stops in all villages and with clear schedules. However, it only makes its route and / or for a previous telephone call to "demand the service". In this way, resources are rationalised, making them accessible to the elderly in the most remote areas. In the same way, establishing public-private collaborations with people living in the area who can become "taxi drivers" for the elderly, would not only improve their access to centralised services in the cities but would also create jobs in remote rural areas.
- The eHealth Action Plan 2012-2020 (2012) is a roadmap to support Member States in using technology to better meet the needs of the patients, support health care workers and modernise healthcare systems through research and innovation. Specifically, research on the long-term care should focus on innovative solutions to improve disease management, prediction, prevention diagnosis and treatment. It presents and consolidates actions to deliver the opportunities that eHealth can offer, describes the EU's role and encourages Member States and stakeholders to work together and eliminate barriers for fully mature eHealth system in Europe (EPR).

Are we sufficiently aware of the causes of and impacts of loneliness in our policy making? Which steps could be taken to help prevent loneliness and social isolation among older people? Which support can the EU give?

- Many people with disabilities grow older earlier than other people due to conditions such as acquired brain injury and dementia. Additionally, the type of disability and severity can change over time. It is important to address needs others than bio-medical; what is right for the individual in terms of upkeep or health. EPR members stressed the importance of focusing on the quality of life of users and the importance of leisure and social activities.
- EPR member, the Don Carlo Gnocchi Foundation, stresses the importance of promoting independent living and alternatives in order to avoid or to delay older people to move into assisted-living facilities (nursing homes). The foundation offers a variety of services and facilities, including a Geriatric Assessment Unit (UVG), which aims to address each older person's challenges in order to maintain physical, mental and social individual aspects. The Day time centre (CDI) is a support service to the family that has as its main objective the maintenance of the older people in their own home for as long as possible, providing a range of services and social-day-care interventions and the mini apartments that are designed for the elderly, singles or couples, who are still autonomous but need a controlled and protected environment. Support should be ensured for both informal and formal care, and mixed and flexible services.
- Older people with disabilities can be exposed to greater social exclusion. Physical problems can lead to social exclusion and isolation. Losing the social network has a negative impact for the well-being of old people with disabilities. In many cases, older persons limit their physical activity due to fear of injuries and experience an increase of their medicines intake. When

people grow older, they also lose substantial parts of their social networks due to death of friends and relatives and own impaired functioning. This network has in most cases been giving support to the individual in various ways.

- Deinstitutionalisation in long-term care promotes the well-being of those in need of care and may present lower expenditure for healthcare systems (Ilinca, Leichsenring, Rodrigues, 2015). In addition, older people tend to prefer to receiving LTC services in their own homes and this choice seems related to four factors (SWG, 2013):
 - Sharing household
 - Age-friendly houses
 - Assistive aids and ICTs
 - Home-care support
- The prevalence of depressive disorders for older adults living in the community (2-3%) is lower compared to the ones in LTC facilities (about 10%) (World Health Organisation, 2015). The WHO suggests viewing institutions as a “last resort” only when family or home-based options are not available (2002).
- The use of digital tools offers opportunities for people experiencing loneliness, social isolation and social exclusion. At present, digitalisation in society allows us to stay in touch with friends and family while being far away from each other. Supporting the use and creation of digital tools dedicated to assist and meet the needs of older people as part of the implementation of chapter III (Social protection and inclusion) of the European Pillar of Social Rights.
- In this regard, the French Red Cross, during the Covid-19 Pandemic, accelerated the digital transformation of their services to address the social isolation of older people which was exacerbated by the pandemic. The use of tablet computers, virtual reality and music therapy tools have strengthened older people’s link with the outside world. However, French Red Cross have identified two existing challenges 1) to ensure the sustainability of these solutions if they are not funded by public authorities or private companies; and 2) to implement digital solutions in induction training for professionals working with older people if they have not proper IT skills, so the programme is successful.

Which role can multigenerational living and housing play in urban and rural planning in addressing the challenges of an ageing population? How could it be better harnessed?

- The personal perception of being able to carry out daily activities and living independently plays a crucial role in whether the person needs help (SWG, 2013). Using an older-person-centred approach, people aged 65+ should be considered individuals with a great deal of experience, with their own needs and also preferences (World Health Organisation, 2015) who should be able to choose residential or home care. Older people with disabilities can present complex needs and therefore there must be training of staff providing long-term care to be able to support different disabilities, particularly intellectual disabilities and people with co-morbidity. (EPR)
- EASPD commissioned a study on Service Provision for Persons with Disabilities who are ageing²⁴. This study examined practical examples of community-based services, as well the extent to which examples enable the older persons with disabilities to be at the heart of any decisions on their care – a person-centered approach. Additionally, case studies of community-based services are provided in order to show the state of play of these services, along with the barriers that people with disabilities that are ageing are experiencing with regards to service provision and the quality of life.

²⁴ https://www.easpd.eu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/Publications2020/report_on_ageing.pdf

- Also, Promoting active participation is crucial in this context. Elderly people should be involved in the design of policies that affect them. Dialogues and exchanges could be fostered toward this aim.

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