



**ALL TOGETHER FOR SOLIDARITY, FOR A SOCIETY THAT CARES FOR EVERYONE**

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More than one year after its outbreak, COVID-19 is still spreading across Europe and worldwide. One thing is certain, our healthcare systems are under a lot of stress.

**Nevertheless, the pandemic has highlighted the importance of a proper care and healthcare system based on solidarity.** As COVID-19 is indiscriminately wreaking havoc amongst the population, governments have been taking diverse approaches and measures to slow down the spread of the virus. At the same time, they must ease the pressure on the most affected sectors in society.

**This crisis must be addressed with measures based on solidarity and mutual support. This is a prerequisite to ensure that the health, psychological, economic and societal impacts of the pandemic will be effectively tackled leaving no one behind.** Indeed, COVID-19 affects everyone indiscriminately. Yet, we're not equally affected. Elderly, people in poverty, or people without a solid social network are worst off in this pandemic.

The elderly have been particularly hit hard by this crisis. **Especially, residents of rest and care centres were particularly more vulnerable to the virus than others. However, due to high media attention, society mistakenly forgot that older people still living at home were evenly vulnerable.** The loss of social contacts, and cancellation of all social and cultural activities took a heavy toll on their physical and mental well-being.

Unfortunately, the pandemic also confronted us with increased discriminating voices regarding age. **However, just as young people, elderly have a right to live in good health.**

Now, what can we learn from this pandemic?

Investing in small-scale living communities for residential rest, care centres and caring neighbourhoods is necessary, in order to tackle solitude and loneliness more swiftly amongst elderly and people. For the elderly living in poverty, it is also crucial to have adapted housing conditions for older people connected with a solid network of accessible services.

In our opinion, **age-friendly communities can be a concept that maps the way forward.** The European Union (EU) can recur to this concept as a guiding thread when preparing or implementing new policies, investments and actions: an age-friendly community gives room to a more secure and cohesive environment for all ages.

**For this concept of age-friendly communities to become a reality, re-valuing and properly acknowledging the profession of healthcare workers is essential.** Unfortunately, care and health professions in Europe are still precarious and not perceived attractively by many. This in turn has led European countries to being confronted by an immense brain drain, where national labour markets are forced to attract human capital from neighbouring countries. For example, Romania depends on Russian and Ukrainian health care professionals, while Romanian professionals work in Brussels or Paris. Investing in a more balanced European labour market may prevent scarcity in means and human capital.

**Active ageing is a life course approach which begins at an early age, so should investing in prevention regarding care and (mental) healthcare.** Fortunately, a number of Ageing Prevention Agreements at European and national level already exist, that involving a wide range of authorities and stakeholders, sports federations, educational institutions, social organisations, health institutions, researchers and academics. **Nevertheless, we still deem important, to uphold the importance of non-discrimination and rights for elderly in a common European framework, and in this light, a European programme against ageism would be an important and bold step to ensure and guarantee the human rights and dignity of older people.** Europe's member states and regions could implement for instance independent and accessible contact-points or agencies (senior citizens' rights commissioner, for example) where senior citizens or their organisations could notify breaches of elderly rights and which can also uphold and survey the application of fundamental rights of the elderly.

**Older people must be able to participate fully in society, and this also means in politics.** Our demand - just like young people – is for a guaranteed presence in all kinds of management and political bodies and also that our organisations are consulted and involved in the preparation and implementation of policies that will impact us directly.

**Clearly, there is a lot to be done, but to end on a positive note: “old is not out” and on the occasion of the day of solidarity between generations we invite young people to join us in creating a partnership that battles the social and economic challenges of today, together, in solidarity.**