

ENGS and the EU GREEN PAPER ON AGEING:

How can the EU promote more responsibility and solidarity between generations?



Based on the findings of the report on the impact of demographic change published by the European Commission in June 2020, the Commission elaborated a Green Paper on Ageing. The Commission opened a consultation period to gather viewpoints to help prepare possible policy responses.

GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE COMMISSION'S TEXT

We as ENGS – European Network of Green Seniors – consulted with our groups in different countries on the questions posed by the European Commission and on its document. Hereby you find some highlights from our answers to the Commission.

You can find the total list of our answers on our home page

www.greenseniors.eu.

Here, we have written a more readable text, following the order of the questions of the Commission, but using the questions as subtitles for our position.

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES ARE CHANGING IN THE EU COUNTRIES (GREEN PAPER)

In the last five decades, life expectancy has increased by about 10 years for both men and women. The demographic profiles of EU regions vary widely, notably between urban and rural areas, with some regions ageing significantly and other regions expanding their working-age population. This trend has a significant impact on people's everyday lives and on our societies in the EU.

It has implications also for economic growth, fiscal sustainability, health and long-term care, wellbeing, and social cohesion.

In addition, the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on older people – in terms of hospitalizations and deaths – has highlighted some of the challenges an ageing population poses on health and social care.

However, ageing also provides new opportunities for creating new jobs, fostering social fairness, and boosting prosperity, for instance in the 'silver' and care economies.



By 2070, **30 %** of the population is projected to be aged **65 years or older** (compared to 20.3 % in 2019) and **13 %** is projected to be aged **80 years or older** (compared to 5.8 % in 2019)

We notice the **lack of a consistent human rights-based approach** across the green paper. Although it is mentioned, the **superficial coverage of discrimination** – even in the employment field despite the existence of an EU Directive – is also reflected by several blind spots in the document. We must comprehend the wide societal implications of ageing demographics and a new generational mix to address ageism. Older persons should be involved in all decisionmaking processes affecting their lives.

When it comes to **long-term care**, particularly visible and debated since the pandemic outbreak, we would like to better understand how the outcomes of the consultation related to the Green Paper will be articulated with the forthcoming Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights. With the latter, we hope to see concrete proposals for change in the sector.

THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HUMAN HEALTH FOR A LIFETIME ARE FORMED EARLY.

Children who grew up in a safe environment and enjoyed a healthy diet have the prognosis of longevity. Good education and a healthy lifestyle increase life expectancy. Investing in the health and well-being of children and young people must be seen as an investment in the future.

All Member States should provide early childhood education, starting with compulsory education for children from preschool age, and free education for everyone up to the age of 18.

The EU could support Member States by sharing good practices with other Member States as there are:

- Retired teachers or grandparents could one day a week help with doing homework and accompanying classes in various activities.
- Children and youngsters could meet the elderly in nursing homes and act as volunteers.
- Retired professionals in athletics, dance culture, outdoor activities, or hiking, can be engaged to share experiences with young people. Elderly people can connect young people with nature, biodiversity, and climate issues.

LIFELONG LEARNING IS NECESSARY.

After compulsory education, young people must have the opportunity to attend university or vocational training. Member States should provide study grants and student loans for living, as well as for free education.

Lifelong learning must be implemented in all Member States. Governments must ensure that everyone can start a new training or study at any time.

With virtual education more people and in particular people in remote areas can get new opportunities for lifelong learning.

There should not be any age limit for starting adult studies.

Obstacles could be cultural and based on language deficiencies. Both should be addressed as soon as identified.

MORE INNOVATIVE POLICY MEASURES ARE NEEDED TO IMPROVE PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET BY OLDER WORKERS.

Discriminating the elderly in the labour market must be combated.

Discrimination may be due to employers' fear of having to pay the costs of an employee's possible incapacity for work. Legislation should protect older workers in the event of dismissal.



A second career could be useful for many, who do not want to quit immediately when they get their pension. Hiring a senior is an idea that exists in some countries and is being put into practice in real companies, with a proper salary. The idea is that you decide for yourself on working hours and on what kind of work you can or want to do. Consent-based participation in learning programs is also needed.

POLICIES AND ACTION ARE NECESSARY TO SUPPORT SENIOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL INNOVATION BETWEEN YOUNG AND OLDER ENTREPRENEURS.

Intergenerational cooperation will be further promoted. Promoting senior entrepreneurship is an important opportunity to give a boost to green and sustainable economic activities. This could also support the social security contributions and might be an opportunity to make the bill more bearable for the younger generation in post corona times.

The expertise of seniors could also be used in international cooperation and in helping underprivileged young people learn new trades and business attitudes. Cross-border mentor programs between generations could be offered.

Promoting the Silver Economy is an opportunity for economic recovery after the corona crisis. What it needs is that labor law provisions are relaxed in a respectful way and tax regulations are adjusted in all Member States.



SILVER ECONOMY CAN BE BETTER USED IN EU TERRITORIES AFFECTED BY THE CHALLENGES OF DEPOPULATION AND AGEING.

The European Commission affirms that “the potential of less developed regions, including rural regions, can be further explored for example to use opportunities emerging in the silver economy” and adds that “Cohesion policy plays a significant role in supporting their development.”

It is important that the EU gathers information on good practices and shares this information between countries. In Member States with low birth rates and low immigration, demographics are declining. It is then important that well-off and healthy older people can continue their working career, either by working longer

before retirement or by starting a second career after retirement. The way he or she continues his or her career affects social security contributions and benefits.

It is most crucial to ensure that all elderly can manage to live on their pension. The pension systems are quite different in different countries. The EU can improve the situation by setting a minimum living standard. We insist again on a minimum pension in all Member States. Other important requirements are housing availability and real inclusion of immigrant families.

To improve living conditions in remote areas there must be functioning computer and telecommunications connections, functioning health care systems, public or on call transport, and home delivery of food and other goods!

VOLUNTEERING BY OLDER PEOPLE AND INTERGENERATIONAL LEARNING HAS TO BE BETTER SUPPORTED.

The EU has to support intergenerational volunteering by developing learning services and networking opportunities for digital platforms. Partners could initially be universities in different countries and later also other institutions.

It is a reality; in many Member States, society functions thanks to the efforts of many older volunteers (in sport, education, care, culture...). It is urgent that there is a minimum of protection for them. There is an urgent need for family



carers to be recognized and protected as well. Thanks to their work, the government is saving millions of Euros. Thanks to them, many generations of young people can devote themselves to their sport, education, cultural activity, and civil education.

EU MUST ENSURE THE AUTONOMY, INDEPENDENCE AND RIGHTS OF OLDER PEOPLE AND ENABLE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN SOCIETY, IN ALL EU COUNTRIES.

Most of the elderly can take care of their own affairs. Governments should not be intimidated by the costs of ageing. This also applies to the media. Intergenerationality must be a constant state of being.

In this computerized era the elderly must get help to learn how to use the modern communication tools. Today, during the pandemic, it has been evident that elderly learn quickly how to use a portable phone, a tablet, or a computer, and they can thereby get a richer life. However, many of the elderly cannot

afford to buy a computer and to pay for the communication costs. Therefore, elderly should be able to borrow computers and get subsidies for the communication costs.

Public transport well-adjusted to elderly is also particularly important to stay independent. It is equally important to get opportunities for gym sessions and walks. Age-friendly Cities is an UN initiative, which should be supported by the EU.

Finally, councils for seniors must be able to help guide the management of Residential Care Centers for the elderly.

THE EU MUST SUPPORT VULNERABLE OLDER PERSONS, WHO ARE NOT IN A POSITION TO PROTECT THEIR OWN FINANCIAL AND PERSONAL INTERESTS.

Governments should commit themselves to respecting both the European Convention on Human Rights and the revised European Social Charter, as well as the human and fundamental rights of older people. An enforcement mechanism should be included too. Respect for human rights is particularly important for elderly people who have disabilities and/or are in institutional care. Why should not every Member State be obliged to appoint a Commissioner for the Elderly, to ensure the human rights of elderly people?



In some Member States a person who is unable to take care of his or her own affairs gets a commissioned reliable person to help him or her with economic matters and dealing with authorities. The municipal social authorities appoint these persons, who get training and are supervised by these same local authorities. There is also a yearly municipal report on their work. We ask that such a system should be implemented in all EU countries.

THE RISKS OF POVERTY IN OLD AGE SHOULD BE REDUCED AND ADDRESSED.

The risks of poverty in old age are reduced through educating people in childhood and adolescence. In particular, the risk of poverty for women is reduced by taking care of women's employment opportunities, and by sharing of family and childcare responsibilities between women and men. One of the examples can be what the Volvo-association has decided: half a year on parental leave, also for men.

Poverty can also be reduced by a good social security system with a guarantee for a minimum pension for all.

ADEQUATE PENSIONS NEEDED FOR (MAINLY) WOMEN WHO SPEND LARGE PERIODS OF THEIR WORKING LIFE IN UNREMUNERATED WORK.

Women should receive a pension for family leave.

All Member States should re-evaluate the status quo of their pension schemes and benefits. Actions recommended:

- Raise pensions or benefit schemes for seniors currently having to live below poverty level, with difficult access to health care to meet needs.
- All active caregivers should be given compensation to achieve decent pension levels at the end of their working life.
- Private insurance schemes should not receive government subsidies.

In addition, Member States should work for better conditions for care and childcare, to avoid women falling into the gender trap. Girls and young women must be taught that they are not carers by nature. All individuals have the right to form their own life. Women's organisations all over the world are working for this.

IT IS NECESSARY TO PROVIDE A MINIMUM BASIC PENSION FOR EVERYONE.

In many Member States it is possible to take or receive a supplementary pension for a fee. However, the importance of supplementary pensions is not significant. It is therefore necessary to provide a minimum basic pension for everyone from the age of 65, regardless of employment history. A supplement, based on work or social security contributions, must continue to exist.



RECONCILE ADEQUATE AND AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE AND LONGTERM CARE COVERAGE WITH FISCAL AND FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY.

Health care systems are financed and organized differently in the Member States. Some countries rely on insurance systems, others on state funding by general taxes, and some states have a system of regional management and right to impose taxes.

On the other hand, we are convinced that health care systems should be financed by the state. In cases where it is possible to collect municipal taxes, the municipalities can finance the system. There must be far heavier taxes than today if we should be able to keep up quality and progress. Health service systems should not look upon people differently.

The regional responsibility has led to division and quality differences. Splitting the management has also led to significant difficulties to cooperate. This has

been more than evident during the Corona pandemic when each region decides for themselves. In such a case, there are also too many politicians who interfere in detail and constantly try new models of management that hinder the professionals to do their best. We are in favor of a more unambiguous policy, applicable in all Member States.

There is already a medical authority and an authority for infection prevention in the EU. Maybe more awareness on EU level and an authority for quality in health and health care could raise quality aspects.

Member States can only reconcile fiscal and financial sustainability by setting the highest standards in labour laws and social inclusion of all. Bonus malus systems in public-private schemes are highly susceptible to fraud and are discriminatory towards a large proportion of the population.

SUPPORT MEMBER STATES IN ADDRESSING COMMON LONG-TERM CARE CHALLENGES.

Many elderlies live in their own homes until their last day. Therefore, adequate homecare and home health care systems must be provided. There must be quality standards (such as accessibility, quality, affordability or working conditions) and proper evaluation systems. The EU can help by providing international statistics.

The EU Procurement Directive must be adapted to allow small businesses to compete in the care market for the elderly. The elderly should not be forced to move from the original nursing home because of the municipality or state having tendered for the service between certain numbers of years.

The Directive should consider circumstances in remote areas and allow for national implementation according to the needs of the country.

The quality of care, be it in a nursing home or the home of the aged person, is not always good. Many workers of homecare or nursing homes have hardly any or extremely poor education. Many of them cannot speak the native language. This situation should be improved. Employees are not well paid, not well trained, and not properly supervised. Moreover, there are few rules that companies offering the service must adhere to. Making a profit seems often to be more important for the companies than providing a good service.

Long-term, flexible, “tailor-made” care, based on needs, should be provided.

Within each country’s social and cultural set-up or framework, a high standard of care and compensation for caregivers should be reached, irrespective of urban or rural areas, even remote areas. 24-hour care working migration to their workplace of care needs drastically improved working conditions, compensation and accrued social benefits, for health and pension.



THE BENEFITS OF THE DIGITALIZATION OF MOBILITY AND HEALTH SERVICES MUST BE GUARANTEED.

A rupture with older communication systems should be avoided when new systems are installed.

Some older people need help in using digitalization. Digitalization serves the elderly as well young people, but the elderly might need more training for it. Therefore, it is necessary to keep older communication tools in activity, as there are: information on paper, bank services managed by people, telephone possibilities, integrated personal helpdesks in websites and service platforms.

Special attention must be paid to the accessibility of mobility now that climate impact and limitations must be assessed in the context of all transport arrangements. Public transport on demand can be helpful in remote areas. Shared taxis systems make the use of taxis cheaper. Municipalities should offer the elderly and other groups in need, taxi services with high reliability at a low price. Many of the elderly, also in remote areas, need to use taxi services when going to doctors, shopping, meeting friends etc.

PROGRAMS TO PREVENT LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION HAVE TO BE BUILT UP.

The roots of loneliness are in childhood and in young age. But even then, people must not be left alone. Here is the job for the third sector and all age groups. Multigenerationality would be important in this area as well.

It is important that municipalities provide for social events and social meeting places for the elderly. That can be done by offering walking tours, gym sessions, cultural events, providing meeting points, opportunities to eat together, etc.

The best way to prevent social isolation is to bring non-professional activities (shopping, gym, social activities) between elderly people, young people and people working together. Cities must become “Age-friendly” cities.

Policies that displace families, particularly poor ones with inadequate work opportunities near their residences, must be revised, and this should be applied in all EU countries. Financial aid that allows intergenerational living, should be provided, within families and other social structures.

IN URBAN AND RURAL PLANNING MULTIGENERATIONAL LIVING AND HOUSING POSE CHALLENGES FOR AN AGEING POPULATION.

The multi-diverse society is a fact in Europe. Cooperation among all citizens is a must.

Living together in a mutigenerational context is the best way to include elderly people, but the living units must be adopted, and services provided.

There are big differences between Member States on the concept of family. In some Member States, the importance of family has been gradually declining. In those countries, this may be a reason for loneliness and the inability to get along with people of different ages and different origins.

In other countries there is a multi-diverse view about how elderly people can live in a family. Cooperation and sociality between members of the same community are learned as early as childhood.

Based on several experiences, it seems that, when elderly people cannot stay at home anymore, they have a better life in smaller entities, in ordinary houses and in collective houses, integrated in the local community. That is a solution for getting both privacy and more togetherness.

Big senior care centers create more loneliness and anonymity. They are not the future for elderly people of the next generations, who are more conscious of their rights.
