



AGE Platform Europe

168 avenue de Tervueren, box 2, B-1150 Brussels

Tel: +32 2 280 14 70

www.age-platform.eu



Dubravka Šuica, Vice-President for Democracy and Demography
Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights
Stella Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety
European Commission
1049 Brussels

Brussels, 10 June 2020

Re: Call for further EU action in the field of long-term care for older persons in the COVID-19 crisis and beyond

Dear Vice-President Šuica and Commissioners Schmit and Kyriakides,

On behalf of the members of AGE Platform Europe, the largest European network of organisations of and for older persons, I would like to thank you for the initiatives you have taken to protect persons in the most vulnerable situations as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, among whom older persons. While we welcome the guidelines recently produced by the ECDC to ensure surveillance and reporting of COVID-19 cases in long-term care (LTC) facilities, we are calling on you today to pursue and strengthen your efforts to support member states in reforming their long term care systems. The challenges faced by older people in need of care took a dramatic dimension during the COVID-19 pandemic and revealed deeply rooted structural problems which require urgent and long-term coordinated EU and national action.

AGE and our members have been fighting for years to ensure that member states and the EU live up to LTC as a right, as it has been enshrined in principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights. With the forecasted doubling of persons aged 80 and over, citizens of all ages expect measures to be implemented to ensure access to quality long-term care and support for older persons with care needs. In a rapidly ageing Europe, this should be one the key policy priorities, given the direct impact this demographic trend has and will have on the lives of millions of older persons in need of care as well on those who provide care for them: professional and informal carers, the vast majority of whom are women.

The COVID-19 pandemic is showing more clearly than ever the enduring failures of the LTC sector in Europe, as [recently denounced](#) by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. Lack of access, insufficient staffing levels, systematic overlooking of older persons' preferences and wishes or isolation, among many others, have always been pervasive realities in LTC care. Therefore, it is not surprising that older people in institutional care account for half of all COVID-19-related deaths in Europe, according to the World Health Organization, with actual figures likely to be even more tragic.

The guidance recently published by the ECDC on surveillance of COVID-19 at long-term care facilities is an encouragement not only to ensure safety and proper management of COVID-19 cases in LTC, but also to make those measures compatible with the wellbeing of older persons. Care is not only about keeping users safe; it is also about fostering their social inclusion, wellbeing and dignity.

This crisis has been a turning point for our long-term care systems. Returning to business as usual is not an option anymore. The EU has its role to play in supporting member states in their action to address the many pitfalls of their LTC systems. Given the health prevention and safety aspects, as well as the cross-border aspects of LTC provision with providers, carers and users' cross-border mobility, we need the Commission, and in particular the services under your respective leaderships,



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to support member states' reforms to ensure that sustainable, adequate, accessible and person-centred long-term care services will be achieved across the EU. In particular, we would like you to:

- Ensure that long-term care is included within the key priorities in the implementation of the immediate and longer-term financing instruments proposed by the Commission, including the future European Social Fund+ and the new ambitious EU4Health Programme. These instruments should include support for professional long-term care services and informal carers alike. They should also seek to develop and improve the coordination and integration of health and social care services at national level, the lack of which has been one of the major obstacles in properly managing the current crisis.
- Develop, with no delay, a plan for the implementation of principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on the right to long-term care, including community-based services, learning from the lessons of the COVID-19 crisis. This should encompass improved access to quality services – including palliative care –, recognition of care work and improved working conditions in services as well as support for informal carers, including clear protocols and training on how to deal with a pandemic.
- Enable the implementation of principle 18 at the national level by ensuring that the European Semester builds on the Pillar and is strongly linked with the resources available in the proposed Recovery and Resilience Facility. These investments are critical to better protect the rights and dignity of older persons in need of care, as all EU member states and the EU itself committed to in [a joint letter](#) supporting United Nations Secretary General's recent statement on COVID-19 and older persons.
- Deliver on EU-wide quality and access indicators and targets for long-term care, building on existing reporting systems and avoiding additional administrative burden, to allow for benchmarking. The [European Quality Framework for the wellbeing and dignity of older persons in need of LTC](#), which AGE developed with partners from 12 EU member states, could be used as a tool to develop quality indicators and also for a potential European quality framework to be endorsed by the Council, as it was recently the case for childcare.
- Work with member states to enforce as soon as possible surveillance systems as recommended by the ECDC.
- Address the common challenges faced both by older persons in long-term care and their carers in the upcoming EU Green Paper on Ageing, based on Commission's inter-sectorial work and recommendations from older people's organisations and stakeholders, linking with the implementation of principle 18.

We would very much appreciate if we could have a virtual talk with you and your teams on how to further shape EU initiatives on long-term care while building on the views and lived experiences of our members.

We remain at your disposal and look forward to pursuing our cooperation with your respective services.

Yours sincerely,



Anne-Sophie Parent
Secretary-General of AGE Platform Europe

