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# *A letter from AGE Secretary General Autumn 2020*

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Dear Readers,

The coming autumn will certainly be as unusual as this year's spring and summer. With the pandemic still present in our daily lives, the focus remains on protecting ourselves and our loved ones. At the same time, how can we strike the right balance between individual freedom and the collective responsibility to protect the lives of those who are in danger? How can we fight against the virus while maintaining much-needed social interaction, or stimulating the economy to recovery from the crisis? These unprecedented times call for unprecedented initiatives and responses. No one has the right answer, but together, individually and collectively, between older people and young people, between families, communities, societies and countries, we need to stay united, think and act together.



Although older persons are at higher risk of serious complications from COVID-19, many have demonstrated resilience and, while ensuring their safety, they have been actively participating in collective efforts to combat the pandemic. Retired doctors and nurses have made themselves available to reduce the shortage of medical staff in hospitals, grandparents have offered online respite to their daughters and sons exhausted from childcare, older volunteers have cared for frail old friends and neighbours... It was impressive to see how many older people were engaged in work, in teaching and learning, in family life, in caring for others. Older persons should feel proud for their contributions in these harsh times.

In the coming months, AGE and our members will continue to urge the EU and national policy makers to propose a comprehensive and coordinated response to the social and economic realities that older people face during the pandemic and beyond. The forthcoming EU Green Paper on Ageing or the plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, to name but a few, offer policy makers a unique opportunity for action to prevent the tragedies that affected so many older people and their families last spring.

As the outside world is changing, autumn is the best time to reflect and lay the foundations for our future well-being. Looking inwards, towards peace and quiet, I invite you to make a (re)discovery of the fascinating lecture on old age and education proposed at the AGE 2014 General Assembly by Tadeusz Sławek, Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Silesia (Katowice, Poland). In ['An essay a young man could never write'](#), inspired by philosophy, literature and science, Prof. Sławek speaks about old age *"as an attitude and a chain of unceasing efforts to make our lives meaningful"*, a permanent research for humanity. *"The old age is not an obstacle but just the opposite – a helpful factor"* he continues, while insisting that getting older helps to get perspective and, as such, it is rebellious and transgressive. The same applies to the work of AGE and of our members when we speak out against stereotypes about ageing, when we cross the boundaries that our societies artificially impose on older people, when we urge politicians to tackle the gender gap in pensions or employers to make the workplace inclusive and empowering for older workers.

I hope you will enjoy this captivating and meditative essay during the shorter autumnal days, to judge what really belongs to ageing and what does not – so that we can cut out the false assumptions, prejudices and stereotypes about ageing, taking the example from the falling leaves out of windows.

*Keep safe and be well!*

**Maciej Kucharczyk**

*AGE Platform Europe Secretary General*