

# “ *A letter from AGE Secretary General - Winter 2020* ”

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Dear Readers,

At the beginning of 2020, we at AGE vowed to strengthen a world where human rights underpin social, economic, and environmental development.<sup>1</sup> As we approach the end of this hectic year, we see that the reality exceeds our promises and expectations. The year 2020 has had an impact on every one of us without exception, forever marking our individual consciousness and our collective memory.



Over time, we are beginning to look at the pandemic from a distance, to see beyond its tragic events which touched so many older people, our families, friends, and communities. As we are looking forward to the end of the pandemic, we wonder what the return to "normal" will look like. What lessons do we learn from 2020, as individuals, societies, decision-makers, civil society?

Beyond proving that we are all vulnerable to the virus, the past months have shown the importance and potential of solidarity between people and generations. We have learned that being united, including beyond our borders, is the only effective response to a crisis such as the pandemic, to any crisis. This evidence is even more important at a time when many of our societies are divided not only on the exit strategy from the pandemic but also on other issues, such as economic growth, environmental and societal changes, or equal rights.

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<sup>1</sup> Newsletter CoverAGE, Special Briefing, January 2020 by Maciej Kucharczyk; <https://www.age-platform.eu/special-briefing/age-vow-2020-strengthening-world-where-human-rights-underpin-social-economic>

I believe that one of the main lessons of the pandemic is the need to build collective resilience to face all the challenges in the increasingly complex world in which we live. Our ability to recover from the pandemic will depend on our collective intelligence and political will across borders to prevent similar crises from putting lives at risk in the future. We also need to respect diversity within our societies while cherishing and strengthening social ties; this will be a lever for building alliances and finding compromises and, ultimately, for being able to cope with change.

The European Union has a unique role to play in this complex environment, particularly in promoting dignified and fulfilling ageing for all. The forthcoming consultation on a Green Paper on Ageing will launch a debate on long-term perspectives and solutions to grasp the full potential of population ageing and to address the burning challenges related to it, such as long-term care or income adequacy. At AGE, we will mobilise and get involved in this debate. Moreover, we will continue our discussion on the rights of older people in the era of digitisation, building on the promising results of our cooperation with the German Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We hope that the countries taking the lead in the EU Council in 2021, Portugal and Slovenia, will continue the dialogue with civil society and older people.

Next year, AGE will be 20 years old! Let us hope that we can fully and joyfully celebrate both our anniversary and the end of the pandemic. It will be a time to celebrate but also to reflect on the future of AGE. Born in a different political, economic, and social context in 2001, AGE, as the largest and most representative network of older people's organisations in Europe, is facing new challenges, both internal and external. Our new 2022-2025 strategy should help us to further develop our network, and ultimately to make our vision – that of an inclusive society for all ages, based on solidarity and cooperation between generations where everyone is entitled to participate fully and enjoy life with full respect for their rights, in all its diversity and throughout their life course – a reality.

Next year, the EU will have a new relationship with the United Kingdom. We are sad to see many of our UK member organisations leave AGE. Some of you were among the founding members of AGE in 2001 and since then have been contributing to our common vision. However, this is not a farewell, but rather an invitation to stay in touch and work together. We are looking forward to keeping our cooperation in the new context. Concerned about the change in rights for older EU citizens living in the

UK and UK citizens living in the EU because of Brexit, we will continue to raise awareness about its impact on older people, including the portability of their social rights in relation to employment, unemployment benefit, retirement, disability, health care or long-term care.

Winter is rarely people's favourite season. Through the cold and dark months, it is harder to remain energetic and optimistic. Yet, this is a perfect time to build resilience and get prepared for future challenges. While accepting the mistakes we made before and throughout the pandemic, we should move towards a goal of enhancing wellbeing at all ages, seize every opportunity that arise and take decisive action in this direction. As we will relax over the Christmas holidays, let's take care of ourselves and our loved ones, look at things in perspective and prepare for spring.

*Enjoy your Christmas holidays and see you next year!*

**Maciej Kucharczyk**

*AGE Platform Europe Secretary General*