

“ A letter from AGE Secretary General Spring 2022 ”

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A letter from Secretary General - Spring 2022

We were all looking forward to spring, to its longer and warmer days, to finally being free of the fear and constraints that the pandemic had imposed on us over the past two years. And suddenly this brighter horizon darkened. Our peaceful reality vanished on Thursday 24 February when we woke up and tuned in to our radios for the latest news. The invasion of Ukraine is a shock to a liberal world, an unequivocal attack on our values. We were naïve. Putin's intention is not only to dismantle the European security architecture – built over decades through multilateral cooperation between states, institutions, nations and people of all ages – but also to undermine our entire world based on human rights, diversity, freedom and democracy. Ukrainians are fighting for all these values today.

In these uncertain times, we older people and our organisations could be discouraged and doubt the relevance of our small efforts to build more just and inclusive societies where all people live life to the fullest, and where our rights are effectively protected. Does our work to promote and create societies for all ages still matter in this appalling global context? More than ever!

Firstly, the older people in Ukraine need our support, both those who are fleeing the war and those who remain and live under the bombs. The evidence from previous military conflicts around the world and from the previous Russian invasion of Ukraine regarding older people is very clear. The [research made by our friends from HelpAge International](#) after the 2014 conflict in Ukraine points out to the specific needs of older people: difficulties when escaping or avoiding fighting; risk of severe income shortages; a lack of access to and the affordability of healthcare; poor living conditions and a lack of support for those with disabilities.

Secondly, the lack of a binding international instrument to protect the rights of older people sadly takes on a concrete meaning in the context of war. For the time being, older people are only (at least) covered by existing human rights standards, such as those included in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, i.e. article 11. AGE joined, on 3 March, a Global Rally of older people around the world demanding to age with rights. Our participation in this initiative is part of AGE's long-standing efforts to get our states to support



a UN convention on the rights of older people given the current weaker protection of human rights in old age. We are not claiming for new rights for ourselves; we are simply asking for the same protection for everyone. The lack of respect for democracy and the rule of law by some does not undermine the intrinsic value of human rights, nor question the role of international institutions. On the contrary, this is the time to extend human rights scope and to support the democratic institutions.

Thirdly, the initiatives underway to address the ageing population are not being put on hold. Together with our members, we are influencing the preparation of the EU care strategy that the Commission has announced for this summer, as well as the development of adequate minimum income that we hope will provide safety nets for older people, too. While the urgency of the international situation will probably delay the implementation of the policy agenda at European and national level, we must keep up the pressure on policy makers to address the structural shortcomings of social protection systems that impede the dignity of ageing. The most recent scandals of elder abuse in care institutions across the EU are putting the responsibility on policy makers even more. In response, we launched on 5 March a civil society coalition on long-term care. More than twenty organisations have joined. Through this channel, we will be promoting our alternative vision of long-term care, focused on the autonomy, independence, empowerment of older people rather than vulnerability. Our work to fight ageism and intersectional forms of discrimination remain the priority.

Finally, every effort counts. We are not a humanitarian organisation, we may have no expertise in helping the victims of war, we may feel overwhelmed as witnesses to the horrors taking place in Ukraine. And yet we have the power and opportunity to act as individuals, as organisations *of* and *for* older people, as a European network. This is not a question of hope. When we add up all our respective actions, then we stand united as a strong movement of older people, of human beings, cherishing life, freedom, democracy and peace. If we want that things get better, we need to take small steps to make them change. And spring will come!

By Maciej Kucharczyk
