Old continent growing older - possibilities and challenges related to ageing policy post 2020

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Beata SZYDO (ECR, PL) on an old continent growing older – possibilities and challenges related to ageing policy post-2020.

Europe's ageing population is a demographic phenomenon which involves a decrease both in fertility and mortality rates and a higher life expectancy. Life expectancy is expected to rise from 78.3 to 86.1 years for men and 83.7 to 90.3 years for women between 2016 and 2070. The report stated that the current demographic situation has a severe impact on the social, economic and territorial cohesion of the EU. Therefore, it is important for the EU to mainstream demographic aspects into all of its policies. All policies addressing demographic opportunities and challenges must take an inclusive, rights- and evidence-based, people-centred approach, and must uphold the principles of equality and non-discrimination.

Combating discrimination against older people

A 2019 Eurobarometer survey shows that 40 % of people in the EU feel discriminated against on the grounds of age. Members stressed that valuing older people and tackling discrimination against them is only possible through social, cultural and economic inclusion policies which focus on providing fair pensions that ensure a good quality of life. They stressed, therefore, the importance of public social security systems that are distributive and based on contributive solidarity between generations, providing everyone, regardless of their own contributions (which is particularly relevant, for example, for women who have spent their careers working as carers), with a decent quality of life free from poverty and social exclusion.

The Commission and the Member States are called on to:

- strengthen their efforts to combat all forms of discrimination against older people, particularly against women, especially in the areas of employment, access to financial products and services, healthcare, housing, promoting autonomy, education, training and leisure activities;

- promote a positive perception of old age in society and the social inclusion of older people by stimulating age-friendly environments in the EU through appropriate measures, and to support the exchange of good practices at all governance levels and strengthen their support for the silver economy in the EU.

Members called on the Commission and the Council to establish a **Year of Intergenerational Solidarity and Active Ageing** complementing and building on the aims and spirit of the European Day of Solidarity between Generations and the 2012 European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, in order to raise awareness about the problems older people face and promote strategies to mitigate them, as well as to eliminate stereotypes and prejudice, strengthen the links and solidarity between the generations, counteract social exclusion and address sexual health issues.

Long-term care for older people

The report highlighted that older women are more affected by the high costs of long-term care as women's life expectancy is higher, while their health outcomes at the end of life are lower, increasing their need for

long-term care and assistance. Women make up the vast majority of informal carers, leaving in particular older women of working age with fewer opportunities to access the labour market and to build up their own pension entitlements.

The Commission and the Member States should adopt a uniform definition of dependence on the assistance of others, also taking into account the needs of informal carers. The Commission should put forward a **care deal for Europe and a European carers' programme** aimed at making the transition towards a care economy that entails relevant investment and legislation at EU level, taking a comprehensive approach towards all care needs and services and setting quality guidelines for care throughout the life course. Moreover, the report called for the adoption of an **EU strategy on carers**. Investment in care services is essential as it will not only increase women's employment rates, providing job opportunities in the formal economy for previously informal carers and promoting a work-life balance for women, but also improve the living conditions of older people through investment in long-term care facilities.

Active ageing

Members stressed that the creation and implementation of age-appropriate lifelong learning opportunities is a vital and indispensable element for enhancing social and economic sustainability and personal welfare. They stressed, in this context, the need to strengthen the digital skills of older people, which can help them not only to benefit from online education, but also improves their access to healthcare and other digital services.

Member States are called on to devote greater attention to older people, who are particularly vulnerable to viral infections, including COVID-19. There is also a need to combat isolation, neglect and social exclusion experienced by older people during the COVID-19 pandemic by promoting awareness-raising campaigns, conducting research, facilitating exchanges of views, and combining EU structural and investment funds. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for more solidarity from the EU and in this regard, the Commission is called on to devise and adopt an EU charter for the rights of older people on the basis of Article 25 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.