



Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
Charles Michel
President of the European Council

Brussels, 20 April 2020

Re.: The rights of older persons and of those who care for them must be adequately protected in EU member states COVID-19 exit strategies

Dear President von der Leyen and President Michel,

Given the dramatic situation of older persons in nursing homes, AGE Platform Europe (AGE) is turning to you to ask for your support in ensuring that national and local authorities across the EU will implement immediate measures and allocate adequate long-term financial resources to protect everyone equally regardless of age.

We welcome the Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures¹ you have presented on 15 April and applaud your conclusion that *'scientific advice, coordination and solidarity in the EU are the key principles for Member States to successfully lift the current confinement measures.'*

Now that the Covid-19 crisis is approaching its peak in several EU countries, discussions have started on the exit strategies to lift currently imposed confinement measures. AGE members support the attention paid in the Roadmap to the impact confinement measures will have on people in vulnerable situations, such as many older persons, persons with an underlying health condition (e.g. cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory and cancer diseases) or simply those persons who are diagnosed or with mild symptoms. However, we would like to warn against one-size-fits-all solutions. Whatever measures individual Member States will take, they should be assessed from the perspective of people's wellbeing and human rights considering all possible implications of the prolonged confinement. We must not let anyone suffer more than justified by the public health emergency.

From the very first moment of the coronavirus outbreak, AGE warned against any infringement to the respect of human dignity of older persons and other groups in vulnerable situation. AGE fully supports the joint call by Commissioners Stella Kyriakides, Helena Dalli and Nicolas Schmit to pay attention to *'the most vulnerable people of our societies, who are severely exposed to risks and need particular support'*. We share the Commissioners' attention drawn to the situation of *'older persons, persons with disabilities, persons in confinement with abusive partners, LGBTI persons, Roma communities and homeless.'*

Moreover, we would like to stress that the health, security and well-being of these persons depends equally on the health, security and well-being of those who care for them.

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_a_european_roadmap_to_lifting_coronavirus_containment_measures_0.pdf



In the short and medium term, Member States and the European Commission should act in a coordinated and mutually supportive way, undertaking immediate actions to cope with the most urgent consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak. AGE calls on them to:

- Address the dire situations in nursing/care homes which lack protective equipment, sanitizers and updated hygiene routines, the widespread isolation and loneliness of residents cut off from their loved ones and, in the most extreme cases, situations where residents are found dead after several days or abandoned without essential care.
- Ensure the availability of screening tests for older residents and staff and the continuous provision of protective equipment for all, provide ad-hoc trainings on how to deal with the specifics of the COVID-19 pandemic and recommend respite support to overburdened carers, whenever possible.
- Consult with civil society organisations representing older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as trade unions representing care professionals, to ensure that the representative voices of those targeted by specific measures will be involved in the discussion on how to best proceed to ensure these groups are adequately protected with a minimal impact on their rights and freedoms during and after this unprecedented global public health emergencies.

In the long-term, our common objective should be to mobilise all existing EU financial programmes to invest in health, including health promotion and disease prevention and in the long-term care sector, to make health and care systems in EU more resilient to crisis such as the current one. The Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative is just a first step in this direction. The principle of solidarity on which the European Union project is built should prevail over national interests. AGE calls on the European Commission, European Parliament and Council of the European Union to:

- Use EU new budget 2021-2027 to help national health and care systems tackle the long-term consequences of COVID-19 through earmarked co-financing for dedicated measures; this should follow the example of EU Council's most timely decision from 14 April to amend the EU budget for 2020 in order to free up funds to respond to the consequences of the pandemic.
- Implement with no further delay the European Pillar of Social Rights, paying due attention to principle 16 and 18 to ensure health for all and access to quality, safe and affordable long-term care.

The pandemic context has sadly proved how crucial it is to safeguard and strengthen a social Europe based on solidarity and coordinated action. COVID-19 is the biggest challenge for the European Union in its entire history. From the beginning AGE has called for unity and solidarity across generations and population groups, between countries and regions across the EU. AGE network remains mobilised to join the efforts of our national governments and the European institutions in the fight against the pandemic and its long-term consequences.

Yours sincerely,



Anne-Sophie Parent
AGE Secretary General