



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Ursula von der Leyen
The President

Brussels, 04 AOUT 2020
Ares (2020) 2789587

Dear Honourable Member,

I would like to thank you and the co-signatories for your letter stressing the importance of intergenerational solidarity in the EU response to and recovery from COVID-19.

I fully support your assertion that there is no place for ageism, or any other form of discrimination, in European societies. As outlined in Article 25 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, the Union recognises and respects the rights of the elderly to lead a life of dignity and independence and to participate in social and cultural life¹. Let me also refer to the European Pillar of Social Rights, namely its principle 15 that highlights that ‘everyone in old age has the right to resources that ensure living in dignity’.

As Member States are in the process of lifting confinement measures, this will need to be done in a gradual and coordinated way in line with the recommendations outlined in the Joint European Roadmap². Indeed, the recommendation to protect vulnerable groups, such as older people, for longer should not be seen as a one-size-fits-all approach. Careful reflections are needed on how to apply the recommendation to protect vulnerable groups, including older people, in such a way that negative effects of prolonged confinement measures on people’s wellbeing are reduced to the greatest extent possible. It is, however, to be noted that Member States have the right to handle this unprecedented situation differently, according to their overall population structure, capacities and needs. This also goes for confinement measures, which, at the same time, protect older people and expose them to adverse effects in terms of well-being, depending on their individual situation. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control recently published guidance to Member States on surveillance of COVID-19 at long-term care facilities, including nursing homes for the elderly³.

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¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:12012P/TXT>

² https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication_-_a_european_roadmap_to_lifting_coronavirus_containment_measures_0.pdf

³ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-long-term-care-facilities-surveillance-guidance.pdf>

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As you rightly point out, long-term care staff are another group at great risk, sometimes lacking sufficient protective equipment and testing to manage the crisis properly. This brings risks both for themselves and the persons they are caring for. I would like to highlight in this context that the Commission, together with many Member States, has launched joint procurement tenders for essential medical and protective equipment and has created the first ever rescEU stockpile⁴. I would also like to highlight that in particular through the European Social Fund (ESF) support is available for actions taken by Member States to help health care and long-term care systems by purchasing the necessary health care equipment and recruiting additional staff.

While there is limited evidence about the situation of informal carers during this crisis, reductions in the availability of formal care services could indeed entail more people having to step in to provide informal care to someone in their social environment and an increasing workload of people already providing informal care. The Commission is undertaking a number of measures in the area of work-life balance and care. Ensuring proper implementation of the Work-Life Balance Directive⁵, which entered into force on 2 August 2019, is a priority.

On 27 May 2020, the Commission also tabled a revised proposal for a Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027, which attempts to combine the necessary social investments and measures in the COVID-19 aftermath with the future challenges of green, digital and resilient economies. The Commission also proposed to complement this proposal temporarily with an emergency European Recovery Instrument (Next Generation EU) to boost the EU budget.

Rest assured that demographic challenges in the EU remain a priority for this Commission. The report on the impact of demographic change has been published, which explores how new demographic realities affect many different areas including social and regional policy, health, finance, digital connectivity, skills and integration. It will be followed up in 2021 by a Green Paper on Ageing.

Yours faithfully,



Ursula von der Leyen

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_476

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1311&langId=en>