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*FEDERATION OF CATHOLIC FAMILY
ASSOCIATIONS IN EUROPE*

THE ELDERLY AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

INTERGENERATIONAL SOLIDARITY AND CARE IN TIMES OF DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

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A. Introduction

“As our median age increases, so does the number and share of people in the older age groups. By 2070, 30% of people in Europe are estimated to be aged 65 and above, up from about 20% today. From 2019 until 2070, the share of people aged 80 or over is projected to more than double to 13%”¹. Europe is facing a significant, systemic and epochal change. This change has been presented mostly in negative terms as if the life expectancy increase was a problem and not an opportunity for which to be profoundly grateful. The present reflection paper would like to focus on the positive and crucial role that elderly people have in our communities, in order to contribute to the current discussions at the EU level on the demographic challenges and the future of Europe.

This reflection has two sides: it starts from the assumption that the human person is relational by definition. The elderly cannot be separated from society and relational networks, in particular the family. They are an integral part of the family, a source of support and encouragement for the younger generations. We will first look at their essential role and promote the best practices for their full inclusion in our communities. After which we will consider the need for social cohesion, as required by the European treaties² in the respect of the competences of the European Union. Which are the policies that could help in establishing the needed balance necessary for a real intergenerational solidarity?

The covid-19 pandemic has shown to the world many hidden vulnerabilities - including in our old continent. It has also created a real awareness of the “richness of many years of life” as a treasure to be valued and protected. It has become clear that “it is time to stop the ‘culture of waste’ and focus on more public policies supporting families”³. Indeed, this crisis has also unveiled the family as the “rock of people’s life”⁴. Those who have suffered the most have been precisely those who are either far away from their families or isolated. Thanks to the specific relation between those who generate and those who are generated, the family is the first place for intergenerational solidarity. As such, it is not possible to speak of generations without referring to the family chain; even more so since the first mediation between the person and the community is up to the family.

European Bishops underlined that this time of crisis showed the great limits of individualism and stressed the central role played by the family as “the true cell of solidarity and sharing, but also a place to pray together. Investing in the family is the first step towards a just social, economic and ecclesial recovery”⁵.

The fact that Europeans are living longer is really good news, but at the same time the EU has less and less children: “The working-age population (20-64 years) is projected to decrease. In 2019,

¹ [European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change](#), p. 10

² See Art. 174 to 178 TFEU

³ As the COMECE General Secretary has declared in the midst of this public health crisis, quoting Pope Francis. Cfr. Time for the EU to take a stand for the rights of the elderly, 13 May 2020, <http://www.comece.eu/time-for-the-eu-to-take-a-stand-for-the-rights-of-the-elderly>

⁴ Cf. [The COVID-19 crisis unveiled the rock of people’s lives: the family](#), 5 June 2020

⁵ CCEE-COMECE joint message, “Let’s work all together for a recovery that leaves no one behind”, 4 June 2020

it amounted to 59% of the entire population. By 2070, it is projected to be down to 51%. In that time, the number of children and young people (aged 0-19) is projected to decrease by 12.6 million”⁶. There are many factors that lead to the current situation and we cannot ignore that it is also caused by a profound loss of hope and confidence in the future. At the same time, we see too many cultural and economic obstacles, which also have an effect on the development of real networks of solidarity for more flourishing communities.

Investing in intergenerational solidarity, in social inclusion⁷, in the family and in network of families is indeed the key to face the current demographic challenges. Family networks can better ensure solidarity and subsidiarity and they can fully play their role in the encounter between generations. In fact, the elderly are fully part of our families and taking care of them is not enough in itself. Indeed, families should be put in the best conditions to flourish and to be hubs of social cohesion⁸: “We can no longer speak of sustainable development apart from intergenerational solidarity”⁹.

B. The role of the elderly in our communities, as a gift and a resource

1. Elderly people share their wisdom: they transmit knowledge, values, faith and hope to the next generation

Older persons are crucial actors in building pluralistic societies where human dignity and freedom is valued and respected. Their life experience of democracy, freedom or pluralism provides a concrete content to the values which can often only seem theoretical to the younger generation. It is thus essential to facilitate time and to create spaces for coming together. The elderly play an undoubted role in the future of Europe, it is them who have seen the European project emerge and develop from the ruins of the XX Century’s totalitarianisms.

The transmission of principles includes as well the transmission of faith: “If intergenerational links can be built and the spiritual and cultural resources of older people made available to younger generations, older people can be ‘missionaries of the family’, supporting younger families through difficulties and trials. They can be masters and teachers of hospitality”¹⁰.

At the same time, elderly wisdom is not limited to the past. They are able to have a broader view than only short-term concerns and are a source of hope in the future for the younger generation. Grandparents can help their families realise what really matters on the scale of a lifetime. The elderly are an essential source of orientation for the next generation. Considering their experience and perspective, they are giving support and encouragement.

⁶ [European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change](#), p. 10

⁷ Cf. Catholic Inspired Organisations toward a more inclusive society, Forum of Catholic Inspired NGOs, 2019

⁸ Cf. [Joint Workshop on Family as a hub for social policies](#), co-organised by the Department for Family Policies of the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers and the European Social Cohesion Platform (PECS) of the Council of Europe, Rome, 9-11 October 2019.

⁹ [Encyclical Letter Laudato Si'](#), 159

¹⁰ The Richness of Many Years of Life. Report on the International Conference on the Pastoral Care of the Elderly, Rome, 29-31 January 2020, Rome 29-31 January 2020, p. 6, <https://www.csan.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/20200304-The-Richness-of-Many-Years-of-Life-Report.pdf>

2. Elderly people receive care: they give a crucial testimony for the younger generations

Longer life expectancy and the possibility to live longer, healthy and autonomously are indeed good news. However, we should not ignore that the increase in life expectancy also corresponds to an increase in situations characterized by complex pathologies with consequent fragility, which mainly occur after the age of 80.

With age comes a decrease in health and an increase in dependency. Elderly people need to be surrounded, supported, and cared for when their health deteriorates. Age bound vulnerability is part of the human condition, but it is often hidden during the healthiest part of a lifetime. To care for elders is a good reminder of a broader circle of life, and of the inalienable dignity of the human life, whether healthy or sick.

3. Elderly people are carers too: they are actors of the intergenerational solidarity

Elderly people are carers too. They have been the first carers for their children, and when these become parents, they continue to support them and help them in their parenting role. They produce unpaid care work when taking care of their grandchildren. In that sense, they represent a big support for the work-life balance of many parents: the elderly are the main actors of “generativity”. They are the first to be directly concerned by the wellbeing of the next generation and are also actors and subjects of “social generativity” - their actions are motivated by a sense of responsibility for the community.

C. The fragilities unveiled by the covid-19 crisis

From a health point of view, the Covid 19 pandemic is a difficult challenge for the countries of the European Union. Its serious consequences will be indirect and on the long-term. In today's world, the economy and society are indeed much more efficient but also much more fragile; the contemporary man risks to remain unprepared in the face of the most serious consequences of the pandemic.

The COVID 19-pandemic has undoubtedly affected us all, having a devastating impact on every aspect of our lives and putting a strain on every sector of society. The unsettling experience of the Coronavirus pandemic has shown that we are not isolated individuals, but persons in need of human relations, with the awareness of interconnectedness. The interconnectedness that binds humanity has also been revealed by the Covid-19 pandemic. We are all dependent upon one another, making us strong or vulnerable, “depending on our own attitude toward it.”¹¹

The elderly in our families and communities were put in the center of the crisis situation. Older people were more vulnerable to the virus: according to Eurostat, in October 2020 those

¹¹ Pontifical Academy of Life [“Humana Communitas in the age of pandemic”](#).

aged 70 years and over accounted for 161 000 or 96% of the 168 000 additional deaths recorded when compared to the average rate registered for the same period between 2016- 2019.¹²

More strikingly, the covid-19 crisis revealed another fragility: that of a society where the elderly are in the periphery of daily life. The World Health Organisation ¹³estimates that up to 50 percent of all COVID-19 deaths during spring 2020 have occurred among care home residents in Europe.

1. The pandemic saw the emergence of the risk of discrimination in access to healthcare

In a world context of health emergency where medical capacities and equipment are limited, access to healthcare cannot be always guaranteed to all. Yet this should never lead to situations of active discrimination, based on age for example.

During the pandemic, it was often possible to observe a lack of concepts and sensibilities for organizing social and intergenerational solidarity, as the lack of sanitary protocols in nursing homes has clearly shown.

It is important to learn these lessons and avoid repeating the same mistakes, which led to discrimination and disrespect of the dignity of many persons during the public health crisis. In this sense, we reiterate the statement pronounced in the international call “There is no future without the elderly” : “We believe that the principles of equal treatment and the universal right to care, which have been achieved over the centuries, must be strongly reaffirmed. It is time to devote all necessary resources to safeguarding the greatest number of lives and humanizing access to care for all. The value of life should remain the same for all.¹⁴”

2. Raising awareness of the issue of elderly abuse

The covid-19 crisis has also put a light on the phenomenon of elder abuse, which is often ignored and overlooked. Even within private settings, elderly persons are increasingly living in situations of social isolation today. While many European countries have at least oversight procedures against the risk of violence and abuse in the institutions¹⁵, the exposure of the elderly in care homes can make them more vulnerable to mental and physical violence and abuse¹⁶.

¹² [Eurostat](#), 19 October 2020.

¹³ [Question for written answer to the Commission \(E-002934/2020\)](#).

¹⁴ [Community of Sant'Egidio Appeal](#), “There is no future without the elderly”.

¹⁵ See WHO, [European Report on Preventing Elder Maltreatment](#), 2011

¹⁶ Also for this reason, the Federation of Catholic Family Associations in Europe (FAFCE) has stressed that “More family is the best answer to prevent elder abuse.” [Press Release on the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day](#), 15 June 2020.

3. Loneliness

Loneliness has become one of the new scourges of this generation.

As they gradually watch their spouse, coworkers or friends pass away, older persons see their social circle reduced over time, leading to isolation and loneliness.

In addition, while labour mobility in Europe has expanded job opportunities for European workers, it has also increased the distance between family members. Today, more and more children live away from their parents¹⁷. It is important to underline the importance for the elderly to keep in touch with their family members and their close ones (also digitally) and to grant them with spiritual assistance. At the same time care homes can also become places of socialisation: more efforts should be made in this sense at all levels.

Loneliness is also a consequence of the fact that Europeans have less and less children. Children not only ensure the future of Europe¹⁸, their presence also improves the intergenerational balance and consequently strengthens the intergenerational solidarity.

Social isolation and loneliness can also be predictive factors for mental sickness. The provision of professional services is not sufficient to answer to the human need for contact and relationship. What is needed is the sustaining of contexts within which people can relate to one another, thus having people whom they can care about and who can care about them. It is also a responsibility of the entire society to foster social ties and prevent isolation and loneliness of its most vulnerable members.¹⁹

“The need for solidarity between generations is one of the driving forces of Europe’s recovery. Managing the impact of long-term demographic change has many different facets: how we manage our public health, public budgets or public life, but also on how we tackle issues like loneliness, care in the community and access to vital services.²⁰”

In this context it will be also important to analyse the activity of the European Commission to create a long term vision for rural areas and to discuss the role they have to play in our society. This initiative will set out a vision for the future of rural areas by 2040 and gather views covering challenges such as: demographic change, connectivity, low-income levels and limited access to services.²¹

¹⁷ “Older people may be particularly subject to Loneliness as peers die or relatives move away; they may suffer from a Lack of purpose as a result of retirement or increasing frailty; and the prospect of approaching death may bring increased Awareness of creatureliness and finitude”. [Conclusions of the Dicastery Event on the richness of many years](#), Par. 3.

¹⁸ Cf. European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) [Opinion on Demographic challenges in the EU in light of economic and development inequalities](#), 5.1, 5 May 2020.

¹⁹ Cf. COMECE, [Mental Health in Europe](#), 2017.

²⁰ [European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change](#), p. 4.

²¹ Cf. [Rural development - long-term vision for rural areas](#).

D. Concrete Proposals for the European intergenerational solidarity

1. Demographic challenges: we need to acknowledge the intergenerational unbalance

The demographic challenges in Europe are now a visible reality. The recently published Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change recognises the need to adapt to an ageing European population. It presents the main drivers of demographic change and the impact they are having across Europe. The report aims to bring the discussion on the impact of the demographic change in the different policy fields.

Yet, the issue is not about the European population getting older, this is on the contrary a sign of the success of our health systems and of our living standard. The demographic unbalance mostly comes from the fact that Europeans have less and less children - which threatens the viability of our economic and social life.

It is crucial to recognize that demographic change is an issue that needs to be tackled. Demographic policies need to address the declining birth rate by erasing every obstacle (economic, social, cultural) families face in their wishes to welcome new children. We should not forget that, while policies that are increasingly favourable to parents and families are undoubtedly helping, declining birth rates - with all its consequences towards the vitality of the family as a whole - remain to be the result of a crisis of hope and trust.

The decline in number of births also affects the current adult population and incoming elderly generation. We will be faced with an increasing number of solitary elderly people with no children, grandchildren or family. The close link between the demographic decline and the characteristics of the next elderly generations should be considered for future projections. Given the lack of relatives present in case of need, these aging adults will need the assistance of their communities and churches.

2. Family-friendly policies: support the intergenerational solidarity

The EU Recovery Plan to be implemented in the upcoming years should also be used to boost family and demographic policies to promote social cohesion and enhance new structures of solidarity amongst generations: this will be an important form of investment in the future.

Recognise the value of unpaid care work for dependent relatives

“In the EU, 15 % of women and 10 % of men are involved in informal care for older persons and/or persons with disabilities several days a week or every day. Among informal carers, 42 % of women and 56% of men are working.”²² Families play a crucial role in taking care of their dependent relatives. This unpaid work is work, and constitutes a win-win action for our communities as it is performed for free and with an attention on quality. In economic terms, it represents a

²² Cf. [2019 EIGE Thematic Focus on Work-Life Balance](#).

positive externality for the economy and the society overall. It is crucial to recognise the value of this type of work and consider it in labour and family policies.

Support flexible working arrangements for a better work-life balance

In the light of Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on long-term care, under EU Directive 2019/1158 on work-life balance for parents and carers, workers are entitled to take 5 working days per year for carers' leave. 5 days per year remain extremely limited, especially when the dependent relative lives in another part of the country. Carers should also rely on flexible working arrangements to continue to both work and care for a dependent relative.

On a larger scale, care for dependent relatives is only possible when children live close to their parents. Special focus should be given to rural regions where young people often move away in order to find better job opportunities. "Addressing the impact of local and regional demographic change needs to factor in what makes people want to move to or leave a region. This often comes down to employment opportunities and the quality of life. The quality of life in a specific region can be influenced by many different factors, be it the natural environment, access to services (such as childcare, accessibility for people with a disability, good quality education, healthcare, long-term-care, housing, leisure and cultural services) or the availability and quality of the infrastructure (such as roads, rail, energy supply, internet access)"²³.

Give families and generations more time to spend together

A work-free Sunday and decent working hours are of paramount importance for citizens throughout Europe. "Work-free Sundays traditionally support the independence of persons from a purely economic-driven lifestyle (...). Sunday serves to strengthen social cohesion in our societies. Only a well-protected common work-free day per week enables citizens to enjoy full participation in cultural, sports, social and religious life, to seek cultural enrichment and spiritual well-being and to engage in volunteer work and association activities. Without this day, all these forms of social interaction and pastime would be endangered²⁴". On Sundays, grandparents, parents and children are able to spend time with each other. A school-free and work-free day enables families to visit their older relatives and spend time with them. This day is crucial to maintain intergenerational bonds. For these reasons, the EU should "secure working hours respecting workers' health, safety and human dignity" and uphold the need of Sunday as a common weekly day of rest.

3. Continue to invest in healthcare systems, with a special focus on the needs of the elderly and their dignity

"We spend a large part of our life in good health. The number of reported healthy life years varies by sex and country. For the EU as a whole, the number of healthy life years at birth in 2018 was 64.2 years for women and 63.7 for men.²⁵" Due to an improvement in healthcare in Europe during the last decades, the concept of fragility of the elderly is changing. This new concept gives a new relevance to the aging of people: older adults can live longer in self-determined and active

²³ [European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change](#), p. 22.

²⁴ Cf. the Founding Statement of the [European Sunday Alliance](#).

²⁵ [European Commission Report on the Impact of Demographic Change](#), p. 8.

life circumstances. Europe must live up to its responsibility and has to develop the best healthcare possible within EU competences.

It is to be welcomed that the European Commission suggested in the context of the Recovery Plan, with the new instrument of “Next Generation EU”, a new health programme “EU4health”²⁶ as an answer to the COVID -19 crisis. It will be important to provide this program with sufficient funds to achieve its objectives of reserving medical supplies for crisis, increasing surveillance of health threats, developing the digital transformation of health systems and giving access to healthcare for vulnerable groups. The European Commission also presented several proposals to build a strong “European Health Union” that will prepare and give a unified response to the current health crisis by all Member States. The approach of strengthening the medical and scientific agencies in the EU is specially welcomed for improving the exchange of information on health-related data.²⁷

Furthermore, Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan²⁸ is an important milestone in EU health policy. With its four pillars of prevention, early diagnosis, treatment and follow-up care it will work alongside Member States to improve cancer prevention and care in Europe. Healthcare for elder adults also on establishing the necessary conditions to respect their dignity during the last period of their life until natural death. Investments need to be made to improve palliative care, which does not only include care for elder adults, but by age groups, excluding any form of euthanasia or anticipation of death²⁹.

4. Develop a flexible and diversified long-term care system

Support families caring for a relative at home

When autonomous living is no longer possible for elderly people, care systems have to offer best possible living conditions. Most of the elderly people wish to stay in their family settings as long as possible. However, a considerable percentage of elderly people do not share a family setting and are not in the possibility of being connected with the younger generations. We see a structural change in the modality of family life.

In this sense, the concrete proposal of ‘family custody’ and foster care for older people could be a solution and a best practice to be implemented and promoted by Member States.

At the same time, it should be underlined that families taking care of a dependent relative often lack time and available space in their household. In order to support families when ensuring long-term care, the European Commission should encourage Member-States to implement flexible work-life balance arrangements for carers, propose housing benefits for

²⁶ Cf. https://ec.europa.eu/health/funding/eu4health_en

²⁷ European Health Union, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union_en.

²⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/health/non_communicable_diseases/cancer_en

²⁹ Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Samaritanus Bonus. On the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life](#), 2020.

households welcoming an elderly relative and create a tax-free system for modifications regarding access and accommodation for elderly people.

The situation of so-called 'live-ins' in private households of EU Member States has to be pursued. Mainly women from Eastern European Countries, often far away from their own families, take care of an elderly person and support the families taking care of a dependent relative. It is important to create a fair care mobility scheme by establishing legal employment relationships and fair working conditions in private households "with a transparent labour contract, corresponding insurance protection, fair pay and regulated working hours, as well as free time."³⁰

Promote new forms of long-term care for social inclusion

Institutional long-term care is not the only alternative to provide care for elderly people. Many possibilities exist in the perspective of community-oriented solutions, promoting significant links even between people who are not close, such as day care centers open to the area, residential family homes, different forms of social caretakers, neighbourhood solidarity projects, groups of volunteers of the elderly who work in favour of other elderly people and intergenerational housing projects. The subjects that promote and provide these interventions belong to the public, private and private social sector and document the ongoing experience of a synergy between welfare actors. The strict distinction between the public and private sector and the third sector is inefficient to describe the peculiarities of these services. We are in the presence of experimental forms of subsidiarity in place, which, starting from needs, identify the resources closest to people. In all cases, families should not be alone when taking care of an older or dependent relative. Families who care for an older relative feel supported and stronger when they can join a community of solidarity. There is a great future for innovative community-oriented solutions to the care of the elderly. As demonstrated by many good practices on the national and local level, the creation of networks of family associations should also be supported.

Grant access to affordable and quality institutional long-term care

The European Pillar of Social Rights (Principle 18) lists access to affordable and good quality long-term care services as a core principle. The Pillar gives special priority to home care (provided at the home of the person in need of care) and community-based services (the range of non-institutional care services). At the same time, having a well-developed and qualitatively good residential care sector (including semi-residential care) is of vital importance. The EU could monitor accessibility, affordability and quality of long term care. It is important to establish a fair care system in a society that cares for everybody. Flexible models which establish a good network of solidarity between families and the public system are key.³¹

³⁰ Caritas Europe, [Position Paper on Fair Care Mobility and Migration in Europe](#), 27 April 2019.

³¹ "Contrary to healthcare, social protection for long-term care does not exist in all Member States. Formal long-term care is expensive and is often taken on by the person in need or their family. As Europe's population gets older and households get smaller, this is likely to be a continued challenge for many", EC Report on the Impact of the Demographic Change, p. 18

5. Fight old age poverty by offering decent housing and better pension systems

Old age poverty is increasing³². The reasons are manifold. Low income earners, single persons and women have the highest risk for poverty in retirement age. A just and social balanced system of retirement and pensions needs to be developed.

The European Pillar of Social Rights, principle 15, states that everyone in old age has the right to resources that ensure living in dignity. Building on the latter and all other relevant policy processes (e.g., the Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 with its objective of 'no poverty' or the Charter of Fundamental Rights), the EU has to focus on the respective needs of elderly people.

Pension pay gap is directly fueled by the motherhood pay gap. Years taken off to care for the upbringing of a child are not considered as work, are even unpaid, and not considered in the calculation of pension entitlements³³. To reduce the pension pay gap of mothers, the time taken off for maternity leave and child education must be considered as a valuable period of informal work in the calculation of pension entitlements.

The issue of housing also needs to be tackled: fiscal benefits for family-friendly and elder-friendly housing should be considered as best practices and promoted in all Member States. Furthermore, the European Commission could promote projects which would involve family associations and social partners.

6. Active aging - precious contributions of the elderly to social communities

Elderly people are not just people to be cared for. Most volunteering work is produced by retired people, who have more time than working persons. Although they do not professionally work anymore, their volunteering work remain to be work, and creates positive effects for the community: "The EU should better value the contribution of volunteering as an active expression of citizenship and promote the recognition and validation of non-formal as well as informal qualification gained through volunteering"³⁴. Elderly people are not only vulnerable persons but are also active actors of social life. To overcome this confusion between age and vulnerability, elderly persons need to be welcomed in all spheres of community life, also through life-long learning and digital education, both as teachers and as users. Inclusion is key to enable the full participation of the elderly in our communities.

³² "Old-age poverty is likely to be a growing concern as demographic change continues. Today, the majority of retired people have an income from pensions that enables them to maintain their living standard and protects them against old-age poverty. This does not mean that old-age poverty has been eradicated among people above the age of 64. In 2018, in the EU-27, 15.5% of people aged 65 or above were at risk of poverty." EC Report on the Impact of the Demographic Change, p. 19

³³ "Women are more likely to be affected by old-age poverty. This is because they tend to have lower employment rates, more career breaks, lower wages and they work more in part-time and temporary work. Women receive monthly pensions that are about one third lower than those of men, while they have a longer life expectancy." EC Report on the Impact of the Demographic Change, p. 19

³⁴ [COMECE 2018 Reflection on the Future of Work.](#)

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the EU's mechanisms for managing health threats need a more structured Union-level approach. Cross-border threats of health call for a new limited legal framework. For a better and consistent approach - specially for the exchange of health-related data - the proposed legal regulation on serious cross-border threats to health should be implemented in the respect of the competences of the Member States.
- Implementing Principle 18 of the European Pillar of Social Rights on long-term care across EU social policies to ensure a balanced approach between different care models and reflect the different needs of dependent elderly people. In addition, the upcoming European Commission's Action plan towards the implementation of the Social Pillar should build bridges and coherence with the other EU strategies, such as the long-term vision for rural areas in order to fully implement the Social Pillar and enhance equal opportunities for all people, and in particular the elderly living in rural areas. Regions lacking essential basic and healthcare services should be particularly looked after.
- The Work-Life Balance Directive should be fully implemented taking into account the specificities of each Member State.
- Mobility of care-workers in the EU has to be monitored. It is most important to establish fair working conditions for care-workers and to set up legal employment relationships and fair working conditions with a transparent labour contract, corresponding insurance protection, fair pay and regulated working hours, as well as free time. Also, the challenges for the care-workers related to a special attention to left-behind persons, especially to elderly and children have to be seen.
- While health systems are receiving increasing attention in the European Semester process, monitoring and reporting on the adequacy and the quality of long-term care should be further built into the annual cycle. This should happen with the full involvement of social partners, civil society, family associations and Churches in the design and implementation of the Semester, and at national level in the preparation of the recovery and resilience plans to support the development of governments reforms.
- The EU should give more consideration to the potential for job creation in the care sector and to improve the working conditions.
- A considerable part of the EU Recovery Plan and of other EU funds should be allocated to investments in new structures of solidarity (informal care, volunteering, family-friendly urbanistic) and in demographic and family policies.
- Best practices on fostering care for the elderly should be shared and promoted at the EU level.

- The Working Time Directive should be updated and new instruments should be proposed in the light of the current challenges and the fragilities unveiled by the Covid-19 crisis, with a special focus on family-work life balance, tele-working, on the right to disconnect and on the protection of Sunday as a common day of rest.