

Brussels, January 18th, 2021

RE. EASPD's input for Green Paper on Ageing

Dear Vice President Ms. Dubravka Šuica,

We are writing to you on behalf of [EASPD](#) (European Association of Service providers for Persons with Disabilities) with regards to the upcoming publication of the *Green Paper on Ageing* with the aim to provide you with key recommendations for the provision of high quality care and support services to persons with disabilities who are ageing, as well as to persons who acquire disabilities as they age.

EASPD is a European NGO network representing over 17.000 social and health support provider organisations across Europe and across disabilities, working towards the promotion of equal opportunities for persons with disabilities through effective and high-quality service systems. EASPD works towards ensuring the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) through high quality support systems. It is based on the experience and expertise provided by our members that we write to you with our recommendations for your Green Paper.

As revealed on the European Commission's [report](#) on the impact of Demographic change, Europe is getting older and it is projected that by 2070, 30% of people in Europe are estimated to be aged 65 and above, up from about 20% today. And almost half of older people have a disability, with a percentage of 47.8% of people in the 65+ age group– with this figure getting higher as people get into the older age groups. (EU-SILC 2018).

The support provided to persons ageing with and ageing in a disability is therefore a crucial aspect of any work on Ageing yet faces several challenges. The “disability” and “ageing” sectors need to be viewed as unseparated when designing policies and developing services. The opportunities and synergies provided by this can promote mutual learnings and cooperation with the same goal, being the vehicles for millions of people to enjoy their Social Rights, to live dignified and independent lives, and provide the necessary support to enable millions of people to participate actively in the society.

Hence, it is imperative to strengthen the social services sector to facilitate the transition to care and support services in the community in line with the principles of the **UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (UN CRPD) and the **European Pillar of Social Rights** (EPSR). Article 19 of the UN CRPD supports the development of **home and community-based services**, as an alternative solution to institutionalized care, and signifies that everyone should have the right to choose where and with whom they shall live – irrespective of their age. Therefore, **de-institutionalisation**, meaning the transition to home and community-based support services, needs to be a priority.

One of the main challenges when designing services is the diversity of care and support needs of the service's beneficiaries. Many disability services have proven pioneers in overcoming this challenge by providing **person-centred** services, reflecting the wishes and preferences of their users. This expertise needs to be mainstreamed to support the [development of services](#) for the population ageing in and with a disability, ensuring access to person-centred and empowering services in line with the UN CRPD and the EPSR.

Social services, including [Long-Term Care](#) services, have an impact not only on the lives of the people they support but also on the lives of their families, caregivers and friends, as they complement the provided informal support. **Specialized services**, such as **respite care** can support the temporary relief of informal carers (mainly female), and subsequently, facilitate employment, improve work-life balance and gender equalities. Moreover, the development of **preventative services** prevents, or delays increased intensive care later in life, avoiding institutionalisation and facilitating independent living and inclusion in the community.

Long-term care (LTC) services are key to improving the life of the ageing population and enabling them to enjoy their rights, yet most of LTC is mainly provided by informal carers which impacts their career and life prospects in turn. Additionally, LTC faces challenges related with **access, affordability, sustainability, quality of services and workforce development**. Policy reforms need to respond to these challenges, as along with the increasing ageing in and with a disability population, there is an increasing demand for formal LTC services.

Policy reforms in LTC are also required if Principle 17 on the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities and Principle 18 on the right to Long-Term Care of the **European Pillar of Social Rights** are to be made a reality as they are very much complementary.

An additional important element in the reform of LTC policies is to strengthen the effectiveness and efficiency of its [funding; both the rates \(how much\) and the model](#) (how to). User-centred funding models, such as [personal budgets](#), have the potential to support the population ageing in and with a disability to choose the services they need, and they also have an impact in the quality of service provision. Public procurement has too often been misused in the field of long-term care and there exists little to no promising practices in this field; except in cases where markets may be reserved for not-for-profit organizations on the basis of partnerships.

The social care and support services sector is experiencing significant challenges in recruitment, retention and [workforce development](#). The 50-64 age group represents more than [a third of total employment](#) in the sector, low salaries, difficult working conditions along with exposure to psychological risks, growing staff and qualifications shortages and limited innovations are only a few to mention. Policies need to invest to human resources strategies for the recruitment and retention of a highly skilled workforce, ensuring ongoing training and re-training of the staff.

Policies need to guarantee that adequate funding and resources will be allocated for the development of **person-centred technology**, aiming in promoting **independence and quality of life** of the ageing population. [Person-centred technology](#) can lead to improvements in everyday life, work, communication, mobility... It may for example, facilitate better access to services for persons with reduced mobility and support the **workforce**, as digital devices can improve occupational health and safety.

[Digital technologies](#) in the social care and support sector:

- Provide opportunities for the **deployment of services in rural and insular areas**, for the creation of **new services** and for the improvement of **existing services**.
- Provide better **linkages** between the different social services and better flow of information across the care and support system, advancing the **cooperation between different service providers**.

Policies and adequate funding are needed to ensure that **digital infrastructure is available** and that everyone is trained in a way that can allow the use of such services. The **digital gap** is huge and needs adequate funding and the necessary actions to ensure the **full participation of the sector in the digital transformation** and to guarantee the **quality of the services** provided.

Finally, a crucial issue in these times concerns the consequences of the [COVID-19](#) pandemic on the sector. Older persons and persons ageing with a disability have being **hit hard by the pandemic** and it revealed that **existing services are unable** to address their care and support needs. Moreover, the pandemic revealed the serious challenges that social services, especially in LTC faced, such as **increased expenditures** in parallel with **unstable or decreased funding**, and **staff shortages**, which put at **risk the continuity and sustainability of support**.

The EU's funding and recovery instruments, specifically the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, need to respond to these challenges; guarantee the **development of community-based services**; ensure **access to person-centred and empowering services** in the community in line with the principles of the **UN CRPD** and the **EPSR**; and invest in building up a **skilled social care workforce**.

EASPD strongly believes that all these points mark important aspects of the ageing population and should thus be reflected in your upcoming Green Paper on Ageing. We would welcome the opportunity to further discuss these recommendations in a meeting with you and work together towards the strengthening of a social services sector that works for all the population, regardless of age and disability.

Sincerely,

Luk Zelderloo
Secretary General

Konstantina Leventi
Policy & Project Officer