

Holding Generations Together in an Ageing Society



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While its effects may not always be immediately evident, demographic change is clearly one of the defining phenomena of our times. It has a direct impact on all generations and all Member States of the EU. It defines our competitiveness, our democracy, our unique social market economy model and the EU's role in the world. The combination of falling birth rates and increasing life expectancy needs to be factored into our aspirations for continued prosperity and strategic autonomy. We need a solid vision for a new approach to policymaking in the face of these challenges, with the objective to leave no citizen behind. A new and inclusive vision that will strengthen our democracy and secure economic and social wellbeing for all generations.

This calls for a comprehensive, life-cycle approach. Young people can act as powerful agents of change. Older members of society can contribute in a meaningful and measurable way to social good and economic progress, and our active, working generations deserve all support in achieving growth and prosperity as the basis for social welfare! All willing members of society, without discrimination as to age, should be empowered to be and to feel useful and fulfilled. Together, we can drive constructive change, renew our democracy and enhance economic and social progress.

Together, we can share insights, teaching, inspiring and motivating each other. Initiatives that are rooted in an intergenerational perspective improve wellbeing and develop social cohesion, at all levels. We have an obligation to nurture, promote and support these intergenerational relationships.

Living a healthier life

A longer life is good news, as long as it can be enjoyed. While some have sounded alarm bells at the prospect of 8 billion or more people inhabiting our planet, we believe that with sustainable and targeted approaches, this is something to celebrate. Because people are living longer, healthier lives in almost all parts of the world. And this is a good thing!

The EPP believes that health must be ensured by having access to timely, top-level, affordable care systems and health facilities, and by combining healthy diets and physical activities at all ages. Individual responsibility for a healthy and active lifestyle should be encouraged.

Lifelong physical activity should be emphasized, and specific attention needs to be paid to the physical activity and wellbeing of older persons.

This requires **longevity education** and appropriate longevity literacy that promotes lifestyles which contribute to a longer healthy life. Mental health and well-being are key: we are still properly assessing the implications on this of the COVID pandemic, which may well be extensive and long-lasting for persons of all ages. Group activities of many kinds – sport, culture, education, volunteering etc - can be fundamental to stay healthy, to combat mental health problems and to prevent loneliness.

Never before have so many generations been alive at the same time! It is an unprecedented and rich moment in our history. We are laying the groundwork for a society that is healthier and more equitable. The entire society can benefit from opportunities offered through healthy longevity.

This must be coupled with supporting citizens to build a secure livelihood from the start, as long lives require new pathways for working, saving and retiring. Financial literacy, for example, can play a key role in ensuring that people are empowered in the daily management of their finances, and in taking important long-term decisions such as those regarding their retirement and pension plans.

Quality (long-term) care for everyone who needs it

Receiving and giving care is a fundamental aspect of our European way of life. The EPP welcomes the recent EU initiatives to optimize long-term care. As today's demographics affect both young and old generations, we want to establish future sustainable systems which can secure qualified and affordable Long-Term Care (LTC), following the mutual agreements of EU Council, the European Commission and the European Parliament. This can happen by installing a high-capacity mix of professional care services, including homecare, community-based care and residential care.

We are concerned about underinvestment, the shortage of workers, and the gender gap in the healthcare and care sectors, as well as the gap between how urban and rural and remote areas can access relevant and adequate LTC facilities and services. We therefore call for a multifold strategy for these sectors, which should involve: an increase in wages and professional career paths; improvement of working conditions; professional support for workers; and the recognition and assistance of informal caregivers in their role. The integration and coordination of health and social care, which support older persons' independence and caring relationships, can be improved as well by unlocking the potential of innovative digital and non-digital solutions. We invite Member States to mobilize adequate, substantial funding, including by leveraging EU funds.

Towards an intergenerational pact

The provision of affordable, accessible essential services and care of appropriate quality for citizens of all ages will require increasing financial efforts, which cannot be put on the shoulders of a shrinking younger generation. Therefore, we will engage in a new **intergenerational pact** which would allow citizens of all generations to fully participate in policymaking. This pact would grant senior citizens the guarantee that their needs of old age will be taken care of; for younger generations the pact will effectively build on the provisions of the Youth and Child Guarantees, while taking into account the competences of Member States.

Flourishing families are a prerequisite for better demographic development. The EPP commits to create a **family- and child-friendly environment**. We therefore need to invest further in high-quality social services and family-friendly policies, in particular early childhood education and care, building on an inclusive and supportive labour market, a thriving social market economy, and sound public finances.

Additionally, we must address the pressing issue of housing for young people in Europe, ensuring affordable and accessible housing options that meet their needs. Housing affordability and availability are crucial factors in providing opportunities for young individuals to thrive and contribute to society.

Longer lifespans also mean working more years with more flexible opportunities. The way we work has already changed dramatically and more could be done to offer choice. Citizens rightly seek flexible career paths, like working from home or abroad at times, or changing their work patterns, including paid and unpaid intervals, for care giving, health needs, family needs, lifelong learning and other transitions to be expected over a century long life.

The Universities of the Third Age, a model for lifelong education after retirement also known as senior universities, provide activities that nurture intergenerational exchange and cooperation. The EPP proposes that Universities of the Third Age be established across European communities. Building a European

network connecting all such relevant kinds of organizations would be beneficial for sharing experiences and future cooperation. The role of the Universities of the Third Age and of other formal and informal initiatives under the longevity education should therefore be supported and policies should draw on their experience. This could be done by encouraging and promoting reciprocal learning, with younger students and older adults mentoring each other via various programs of academic assistance and guidance; social and cultural events, shared courses and other learning opportunities where people of all ages interact, contribute, and learn alongside each other; volunteering, and more.

Addressing the changing labour market

Healthier seniors may be willing to work longer. The EPP believes that every citizen should have this possibility and indeed this is a choice to be seriously taken into account. In addition, senior citizens should be able to share their knowledge with the younger generation, tackling the current **inter-generational brain drain**.

Ensuring the possibility for senior workers to continue their active life should go hand in hand with pro-active policies for young people in terms of education, employability and access to good and affordable standards of living. Education, Vocational Education and Training (VET) and lifelong learning will benefit from the transmission and interaction between generations.

It may be time to explore the idea of de-coupling pension from retirement, aiming at empowering pensioners to lead a productive life and keeping older citizens professionally active as long as they are healthy and willing. Evidence shows that an active role in society is a positive factor which helps to keep health issues at bay. In this sense, a **Senior Guarantee** (complementing the Child Guarantee and the Youth Guarantee) should be envisaged to ensure that every older person in Europe at risk of poverty or social exclusion has access to the most basic of rights and services.

In order to contribute longer to the labour market, people will need to up- and re-skill several times during their career; this needs to be a **lifelong learning process** and not only in theory but also in practice. Notably, workers will be engaged increasingly in jobs that require enhanced scientific and technological (STEM) skills.

Moreover, we want to stimulate initiatives from European businesses with regard to the growing '**silver economy**': to come up with innovative, automated solutions for challenges posed by shrinking work forces and the specific demands of an ageing society, as well as to cater for a larger cohort of older consumers. In addition, lawful and well-managed, regulated migration will be necessary to overcome increasing gaps on the labour market. However, illegal migration into the EU economic area must also be tackled in order to create acceptance for the need for qualified migrants within European society. The EPP welcomes the attempts made to train workers in third countries to prepare them for a job in Europe, with a view to brain circulation rather than brain drain.

Focusing on the whole lifecycle

Starting with our youngest, we want to eradicate child poverty and foster equal opportunities for children and young people, in particular in education, training and on the labour market. Every child and young person has the right to a safe and healthy physical and mental development. We commit to investing more in pediatric oncology. And we engage to ensure a healthy environment online as well as offline.

In this respect we will step up the fight against all forms of child sexual abuse, including online, building on the Better Internet for Kids Strategy.

We strongly support EU efforts for Ukrainian refugees and children in particular in the framework of the Temporary Protection Directive.

Regarding the older generations, they should be able to live a life of dignity and one that is active as their health allows over time. Age should not be an obstacle to anyone in their role as active and engaged citizens.

The EPP supports the EU's initiatives on tackling **mental health and loneliness**, which aim to ensure that citizens of all ages, in particular children, young people and vulnerable older persons, can have access to quality and affordable mental healthcare and treatment. Mental health – particularly after the impact of the Covid pandemic – is and should be on top of the EPP's priority agenda.

We want to promote and support various modes of **multigenerational community projects**, for instance in housing, schools or care. We are convinced that intergenerational projects and co-entrepreneurship have great potential and there is clear evidence of their success. Projects that bring together and mix younger and older citizens, notably those with a mentoring objective, have considerable added value: they strengthen (social and digital) connectedness, societal cohesion, counter loneliness and isolation, help reduce stereotypes and discrimination especially against older citizens and avoid ageing being seen as a cost.

We invite the European Commission and Member States at all levels of governance to prepare and roll out **European, national, regional and local strategies and policies to** convert demographic change into demographic opportunity for all. These strategies can be supported mainly via the EU Cohesion funds, the Just Transition Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Recovery and Resilience Fund. We encourage Member States to prioritise these actions when programming their best use of those EU funds and to coordinate their efforts for the well-being of older persons, possibly by means of a coordinator.

We believe that the time has come for the European Commission to further develop its demographic policy initiatives. As called for in the conclusions of the European Council of 29-30 June and as clearly requested in the final report of the Conference on the Future of Europe, we support the launch of a **Demography 'toolbox'**. Such a toolbox aims to provide the means to address demographic change through enhanced cooperation between Member States and the European level. While addressing a broad array of needs, one key objective should be to prepare our citizens for a longevity-ready Europe.

Reinforcing the bedrock of democracy fit for the future generations

Holding generations together is also vital for a democracy fit for the future. Electoral discontent or Euro-scepticism is often fuelled by combined demographic, economic and social factors, which divide rather than unite and tend to create a geography of discontent.

The large majority of European citizens, from the early age to the older ones, feels the need to be part of the same team, the same Union. A Union where everybody has a role to play, is involved in debate and policymaking, enjoys freedom and assumes responsibility, and can lead a meaningful life.

An in-depth intergenerational democratic dialogue will help to safeguard our precious democracy. Including young people in policy processes will contribute to bringing out new generations able to tackle the challenges that our societies are facing. Intergenerational dialogue and responsibility are a cornerstone of sound policymaking. Democracy cannot be taken for granted. Therefore, more than ever, we want to invest in the meaningful engagement of citizens, across all generations. This can take the form of regular exchanges through innovative intergenerational citizens' assemblies and citizens panels or other deliberative fora at any level of governance. They will strengthen our representative democracy. Initiatives that deepen citizens' relationships and trust in the democratic institutions and representatives serving them, will bring innovative ideas and will facilitate greater buy-in to the policy choices.

Matching aspirations with resources

Appropriate capacity can usefully be developed at the European level to address these issues in a more comprehensive manner, in order to underpin and to complement Member States' demography efforts. We therefore want to invest in collecting and analysing data, as well as in proposing concrete policy solutions that can be applied across a broad range of sectors to effectively tackle the demographic challenges by means of a truly intergenerational approach.

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