

**EMPL-LIBE European Parliament committees' joint hearing on
"Consequences and lessons from the COVID-19 crisis for people living in
residential institutions: a social and human rights perspective"**

28 January 2021 (09:00-11:00)

**Intervention of Maciej Kucharzcyk,
Secretary-General of AGE Platform Europe**

Dear Chairs and Members of the European Parliament,

Dear Vice-President, dear Commissioner,

Congratulations for dedicating this hearing to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on residential care and the dignity of people using such services. As I was listening to the various MEP interventions this morning, often emotional, I believe that they show the gravity of the situation of older people particularly of those with care and support needs.

Since the creation of AGE Platform Europe 20 years ago, we have been continuously battling to ensure that our age or the care needs we may have will never determine whether or how much we enjoy our rights.

Sadly, COVID-19 is revealing how far we are still from a Europe for all ages, where dignity of every person is protected as we get older and may need care and support.

I will not repeat all the examples of the devastating impact of the pandemic on older people in need of care. We know that they suffered loneliness and exclusion, were often left abandoned, even to die. Let me just to remind that the WHO estimates that around 50% of those who died of COVID-19 in the first wave were older people in residential care. But with the lack of accurate and transparent data, as the Fundamental Rights Agency has pointed out, the figures in many EU countries may be higher.

To put it short: what we have witnessed is a flagrant violation of human rights, here, in the EU, before our very eyes.

The temptation to turn the page may be big. Governments and public authorities at national and regional levels face a heavy toll that some would prefer to ignore or minimize.

We cannot let this happen. On the contrary! We need to learn the lesson and assume it.

In July, together with our partners of the European Disability Forum and the European Public Service Unions, we asked you, Member of the European Parliament to put in place a parliamentary investigation into what has happened in residential care during the pandemic. Many of you supported our call. Thank you! **Today, we reiterate our call: please, do use your powers and investigate on this humanitarian tragedy of care homes across the EU.**

We should go further! To achieve the future we all desire, we will need even greater ambition. Care remains mainly a national competence, but the EU must play a key role in this respect. The principle 18 of the Pillar of Social Rights is unequivocal when it says that *“everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality...”*

The Pillar was formally proclaimed already four years ago. **We cannot lose any more time to build a true right to long-term care.** Therefore, we ask the European Commission to include a meaningful implementation of the right to long-term care in the Action Plan for the Pillar.

To conclude, dear Members of the European Parliament and chairs of the LIBE and EMPL committees, we are calling to take our messages for concrete EU actions on long-term care forward, including through an **own initiative report on care.**

I am turning also to you, dear Vice President and dear Commissioner. The EU should commit itself to equality at all ages. We encourage the Commission to work towards an EU Age Equality Strategy. For the moment, age equality is not protected by an equivalent strategy to equality EU strategies for other age and population groups. This means that older people remain invisible...

Thank you for for your attention and for giving the voice of older people in this debate which concerns us most.

For more information, you may contact Maciej Kucharczyk, maciej.kucharczyk@age-platform.eu