

EUROPEAN COMMISSION
ASTRID DENTLER
MEMBER OF CABINET OF VICE-PRESIDENT DUBRAVKA ŠUICA

UN OPEN-ENDED WORKING GROUP ON AGEING
PANEL ON RIGHT TO WORK AND ACCESS TO LABOUR MARKET

31 MARCH 2021

- Check against delivery -

Thank you Ms Andrees,

Dear Madam Chair,

Dear distinguished co-panellists,

Excellencies,

Good morning, good afternoon, good evening to all participants.

First of all, let me thank you for the invitation to the European Commission to participate in today's panel discussion. It is a great pleasure to address you today as part of the 11th session of the UN Open-Ended Working Group on Ageing.

I would like to use the next couple of minutes to present to you the most recent work of the European Commission in the area of ageing, namely the Green Paper on Ageing, but also some aspects of the European Pillar of Social Rights. And with this I will also address a few labour market-related aspects.

With the start of the new mandate of the European Commission in 2019, the work on ageing has gained new momentum. We have now for the first time ever a Vice-President's portfolio dedicated to demography. And with this, Vice-President Dubravka Šuica has taken on the task of looking more closely and addressing the challenges and opportunities of demographic change, including ageing. For the Vice-President, it is very important to maintain this balance of challenges and opportunities in all aspects of our policy-making.

As a point of departure for the work on demography, the European Commission adopted last year a Report on the Impact of Demographic Change in the EU. This report identified longer life expectancy at birth as a major development within the Union. Over the last 5 decades, Europeans have gained 10 years in life expectancy. And indeed, living longer in better health is one of the greatest achievements in this regard. Undoubtedly ageing is the demographic mega-trend of the European Union.

Against this analytical background, we came forward with a Green Paper on Ageing at the end of January this year. A Green Paper is a document with which the European Commission launches a debate and public consultation on an issue that we consider of importance at European level. So, we invite stakeholders and citizens to participate in this process and respond to specific questions that we raise on the topic of ageing.

What is the starting point of the Green Paper on Ageing? First of all, it is not a Green Paper on older persons. Instead, given the multi-dimensional and universal

impacts of ageing, we approach ageing from a life cycle perspective and we look at both the challenges and opportunities of ageing for individuals and society in different stages in our life – namely in 4 broad phases:

- 1) **Young, formative years** – the years where we lay the foundations for lifelong learning and acquisition of skills as well as active and healthy ageing.
- 2) **Working age** – here we look at labour market participation but also issues such as productivity, innovation and business opportunities – including senior entrepreneurship and the way we can better integrate older workers in the labour market.
- 3) **Retirement** – also in this stage of life, persons are often still fit and active and so societal and economic participation, for example in the form of volunteering plays an important role. But likewise, the adequacy, fairness and sustainability of pension systems must be discussed.
- 4) **Phase where persons have growing needs** – and where especially the health and long-term care needs are a central element of the debate.

I would also like to mention that there are specific reflections on the autonomy, participation and rights of older people included in the Green Paper.

This reflection and debate process that we have launched in January is not intended to stand isolated. Instead, it forms part of a number of interlinked initiatives and I would hereby like to highlight the connections between the Green Paper and the European Pillar of Social Rights: several principles of the European

Pillar of Social Rights relate directly or indirectly to ageing or older persons, such as the principles on old age income and pensions, long-term care, health care, inclusion of people with disabilities, work-life balance, education training and life-long learning.

As the effects of the pandemic will start to abate, we need to implement policies and measures leading to a fair, inclusive and sustainable recovery. And so, the recently adopted action plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights embeds progress on jobs and social rights in our recovery strategy and strengthens the social dimension across all policies of the Union.

The action plan points in particular to active labour market policies and employment services, to adapt working environments and ensure adequate working conditions, to tackle labour market segmentation and atypical contracts, to ensure quality and inclusive education, to promote skilling, upskilling and reskilling, to boost employability and guarantee gender equality through equal wages and opportunities. It also points to improving the wellbeing of older persons, allowing dignified living conditions, providing essential services such as health and long-term care.

Let me come back briefly on the aspect of labour market policies: part of these active labour market policies that we see as an important element in the recovery is also taking into account that upskilling and reskilling can facilitate flexible career pathways for working professionals, including older people.

This is a theme that is also present in the Green Paper on Ageing where we discuss the need to adapt working conditions, including occupational health and safety, to the needs of older workers. This is particularly important given the fact that older workers - so those aged between 55 and 64 - are a growing force in the labour markets in the EU. In 2010, 44.7% of them were in employment, while today we stand at 59.1%.

While these numbers indicate an important progress, there is always the need and possibility to improve. Therefore, we look forward to the contributions that we will receive over the remaining weeks of the public consultation on ageing and then deliberate and work on the concrete follow-up measures.

With this short introduction into the current work of the European Commission on ageing, I will stop and look forward to the discussion.

Thank you very much for your attention.