



European Union
Statement

WHO

73rd Session of the World Health Assembly

(9-14 November 2020)

Item 15.1 Decade of Healthy Ageing

Geneva, 10 November 2020

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EU Statement

Chair,

Director General,

I am speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States

The Candidate the Republic of North Macedonia* and Montenegro*, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Ukraine and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

The EU and the Member States recognize that healthy ageing is about enabling citizens to have a healthy, active and independent life in old age. In its Conclusions “Human Rights, Participation and Well-Being of Older Persons in the Era of digitalisations”, on October 9th, 2020, the EU and its Member States committed themselves again to promote active and healthy aging. It is a key element in the fight against multiple non-communicable diseases, like dementia, diabetes, heart and coronary conditions.

It is not merely about added years of life but also aims to increase the number of healthy years. Therefore the main focus should be at maintaining a functional ability as much as possible, so as to enhance the quality of life. Focus should be

* The Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

put on age-friendly environments, adapted to the elderly and an increased participation within society. Prevention and health promotion are key elements in enhancing a healthy elderly population. This should be the focus in the Decade of Healthy Ageing.

Inequality in ageing between different socioeconomic groups has to be addressed through health systems, and by improving adequate income and pensions as well as reducing poverty. And on top of all this, we need to shift its perception on the elderly, there is no place for ageism in our world.

The COVID-19 pandemic impacts healthy ageing in multiple ways. In the current acute phase of the pandemic we see that the elderly are more susceptible to the virus and are developing severe COVID-19 symptoms. For this reason, measures are being taken to protect the elderly by limiting the number of contacts. Though this protects the physical wellbeing of this vulnerable group, it can greatly affect the mental and emotional wellbeing by increased social isolation.

On the long term, we do not yet know what the effects are of the virus, though we start to understand that it can affect the whole body. We welcome the comprehensive ability centred approach of the Secretariat in focusing on healthy ageing and we encourage the Secretariat to include the impact of COVID-19 in the research models and in the recommendations to member states in the care for the elderly.

At the same time we stress that the scope of healthy ageing stretches beyond the limits of health care alone. It also touches on environment, labour, gender issues, health equity, social participation, digital technology, education and recreation, just to name a few. Healthy ageing is all about creating opportunities that enable people to be and to do what they value even in older age. It should be stressed that healthy ageing both mentally as well as physically does not start at

older age but involves the whole course of life. The common goal should be to deliver ageing policies that contribute to active, healthy, inclusive and independent lives.

We also need to see the broader impacts of healthy and active ageing on the sustainability of society. Longevity and ageing provide also possibilities for the labour market and the economy. They require supportive actions enabling people to make an active contribution to society and working life.

During the pandemic, healthy ageing has become even more important. In the current acute phase of the pandemic, we see that the older persons are more susceptible to the virus and are developing severe symptoms. For this reason, measures are being taken to protect them, including by limiting the number of contacts. Though contact restrictions protect the physical wellbeing of this vulnerable group, it may also affect the mental well-being, irrespective of age. At the same time their rights need to be respected.

For those who do get infected by the virus, the long-term effects are not yet clear, though it can severely affect the whole body. In this context, we must focus to ensure optimal and effective health care for the older persons during and after a pandemic, especially emergency medical care and primary care, following the Resolution WHA 73.1.

We encourage the Secretariat to include the impact of COVID-19 in the research models and the recommendations to member states on the care for the older persons.

In conclusion, the European Union and its Member States endorse the decision for a Decade of Healthy Aging 2020-2030 as an important driver for not leaving anyone behind. We request the Director-General to report back on its progress to

the WHA74 and would gladly receive insight into how WHO will bring this process forward regarding the resources and capacities needed.

Thank you.