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Immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic ageing

Report¹

Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

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Summary

The demographic ageing in Europe and the worrying reduction in the youth and working age population will have profound implications for individuals, public services and business, impacting in particular health and social care systems, labour markets, public finances and pension entitlements. In the timespan of 50 years, the old age dependency ratio is projected to more than double, reaching 56.7% by 2050 in the European Union, compared to 25.9% in 2001. The report underlines the need for increasing support for elderly people, and for appropriate adjustments in terms of health care, urban planning, housing and transport, to enable them to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

To meet the challenges related to demographic ageing, in addition to adopting positive action to support an increase in birthrates, States should improve migrants' general integration and social cohesion. These comprehensive integration policies range from the regularisation of undocumented migrant workers in the informal economy to the promotion of direct and targeted aid in local communities and job training. Immigration can be one means through which Europe could fulfil its current and future labour shortages, particularly in care provision occupations. Specific programmes must be implemented to build bridges between various communities by relying on civil society organisations and strengthening their capacities.

1. Reference to committee: [Doc. 15629](#), Reference 4694 of 25 November 2022.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes that, in the past decade, the global refugee population has more than doubled, reaching more than 36,4 million refugees, according to the data of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). In most cases, refugees in Africa, who were fleeing war, persecution and climate crisis, were not able to reach Europe or North America and took shelter in neighbouring countries. By UNHCR's calculations, in 2023, Uganda recorded 1,6 million people of concern including 1,5 million refugees. Another country, Ethiopia, which was at the crossroads of several of the world's largest refugee crisis, was the host to over 900 000 refugees, and Chad, was the 10th largest host community for refugees with more than 700 000 refugees recorded in 2023. Most had escaped conflict in Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan.
2. Migration pressure has become a key issue for Europe. European solidarity to host refugees has been limited, but there have been some countries that have provided sanctuary. 3,4 million refugees are hosted in Türkiye including 3,3 million Syrians under temporary protection. Germany hosts 2,5 million refugees, which largely include people from Syria and Ukraine. Poland, as a country sharing a border with Ukraine, accommodates nearly 60% of all refugees from there. Sadly, however, there are countries that have refused to contribute to the common effort of receiving asylum seekers.
3. The Assembly deplores the fact that the rising populist discourse blames migrants for public policies' failures. For political reasons, non-European migrants are left without any chance to integrate in a host community. Many countries in Europe are confronted with considerable changes due to population ageing and the newly arriving migrants could, if given such an opportunity, integrate, work, and live decently in Europe, contributing like all other European citizens to strengthening the society they live in.
4. Europeans are living longer than ever before, and the age profile of society is rapidly developing. Due to demographic ageing, the proportion of people of working age in Europe is shrinking, while the number of older people is expanding. Several countries experienced a worrying reduction in the youth and working age cohorts as opposed to the exponential growth of the number of retirees, many of whom were reaching the fourth age, often associated with dependency. This pattern will continue in the next few decades, as the post-Second World War baby boom generation completes its move into retirement.
5. At personal level, physical and cognitive impairments brought by ageing increase dependency. This may lead to reduced mobility, resulting in increased vulnerability and, often, social isolation. The help of social care workers might be of vital importance to meet older dependent people's daily transport or care needs and ensure a minimum of socialisation, which, alongside healthcare, improves the emotional well-being.
6. Demographic ageing will have profound implications, not only for individuals, but also for public services, business and civil society, impacting, among others: health and social care systems, labour markets, public finances and pension entitlements. Demographic indicators that describe the latest developments for an ageing Europe show that, in the timespan of 50 years, the old age dependency ratio is projected to more than double. The old age dependency ratio for the European Union-27 was 25,9% in 2001. It will reach 56,7% by 2050, when there will be fewer than two persons of working age for each older person. As a result, the elderly population will require increasing support to meet their needs and the future generations will find themselves having to bear the costs for an aged society with less social security and a weaker public welfare system.
7. The Assembly is convinced that the current demographic ageing requires, therefore, positive action to help support an increase in birthrates and assist parents with child upbringing. More generous policies are needed to raise fertility rates at national and European levels. This is, however, not sufficient. Adequate integration policies for newly arriving persons are needed to bridge the population pyramid gaps due to rapid demographic ageing. Specific measures must, therefore, be taken to avoid severe macro-economic and social implications, for the benefit of all.
8. The Assembly therefore calls Council of Europe member States, as a matter of priority, to develop effective policies and initiatives to ensure the well-being and quality of life for the elderly population. Countries need to build a "longevity society", which aims to promote healthy ageing and to exploit the advantages of longer quality lives. It requires a cultural shift, investments in research, and the development of social policies that empower older citizens towards a more inclusive, healthy, and prosperous society for all generations.

2. Draft resolution adopted by the committee on 2 October 2024.

9. In parallel to that, States should strive to improve their policies promoting migrants' general integration and social cohesion. Comprehensive, gender-responsive and multidimensional integration policies must be implemented, from the regularisation of undocumented migrant workers in the informal economy to the promotion of direct and targeted aid in local communities and job training. Failure to address migrants' integration needs would lead to negative outcomes, including social tension, cultural clashes, and economic disparities, with a decline in overall well-being for all.

10. The Assembly strongly encourages member States to support programmes aimed at building bridges between various communities. In this context, public authorities should consider investing in relevant capacity building measures for civil society organisations. Promoting engagement within existing social infrastructures, such as membership of sports associations or participation in local festivals and events, can also lead to more sustainable integration.

11. The Assembly strongly believes that intergenerational and intercultural co-operation programme can improve community connections. Intergenerational learning for children brings higher self-esteem and helps them make new friendships. As for the older adults, they feel valued, their health and fitness improve, there is reduced isolation, they learn new skills, including the use of new technologies. Finally, their general physical well-being improves. Communities are benefiting from it, altogether, thanks to the social inclusion that is brought by intergenerational solidarity.

12. The Assembly underscores the importance of developing European programmes to support non-formal education and to provide space for inter-cultural and inter-generational solidarity. Adequate recognition and resources are needed to help newly arriving persons socialise and get access to public services or informal support. Creating spaces for informal meetings, where intergenerational and intercultural contact is possible, should be key in developing policies at the local, national and international levels.

13. The Assembly calls upon member States to put into practice its [Resolution 2502 \(2023\) "Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved"](#), acting in particular to:

13.1. establish a new social contract, which sets out the rights and responsibilities of all parties involved in the integration process. Acceptance of this new social contract depends on the existence of democratic practices that build social support. Highlighting the rights and responsibilities for the newly arriving populations provides clarification from the start and builds trust and respectful co-operation between local communities and the beneficiaries of resettlement programmes;

13.2. support mentoring programmes and integration guides;

13.3. develop nationwide interpretation services to support integration;

13.4. enhance education, from language training to democratic citizenship and human rights education;

13.5. improve recognition of skills obtained abroad;

13.6. take into consideration the special needs of vulnerable groups, such as women, children, including unaccompanied children, elderly people, persecuted religious minorities, people with disabilities, members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+) community, stateless people and others, who need specific support in order to successfully integrate into the host country;

13.7. create spaces to bring migrants, refugees and the local community together;

13.8. improve financial settings, with a person-centred approach to integration support and adaptation of national services to take into account specific needs and circumstances;

13.9. develop targeted housing policies for affordable and decent accommodation;

13.10. invest in social cohesion with partnerships between private investors, public authorities and civil society organisations;

13.11. match migrant skills with job opportunities to support access to the labour market;

13.12. develop effective communication strategies to support integration, including a more positive narrative towards refugees and asylum seekers;

13.13. ensure respect for refugees' and migrants' dignity in the media, while avoiding messages that are stigmatising, xenophobic, racist, alarmist or inaccurate;

13.14. develop welcoming programmes at municipal level, emphasising diversity as an advantage;

13.15. enhance public health support for vulnerable refugees and migrants.

14. Urban planning needs to be reconsidered towards enhancing multicultural and intergenerational solidarity at local level. Projects aimed at bringing together the ageing population and the newly arriving migrants and refugees need to be supported, including through specific actions to facilitate the integration of refugees and migrants and to help elderly people cope with loneliness and dependency due to old age. Bringing different generations together is essential.

15. Care-related challenges in the urban and rural settings would need special consideration. Immigration can be one means through which Europe could fulfil its current and future labour shortages in care provision occupations, thereby decreasing the caregiver support ratio. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), foreign-born workers already make up around 20% of the current caregiver workforce, or even more, taking into account the large informal and home-based care provision. In general, most foreign-born long-term care workers immigrated through non-economic channels, including family reunification, student visas, general migration routes for non-specialised workers, and international protection.

16. The Assembly strongly encourages member States to develop policies to attract high-skilled migrants to enhance Europe's capacity to meet future challenges. The European Union member States and candidate countries should support the implementation of the EU Blue Card (Directive (EU) 2021/1883 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 October 2021 on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purpose of highly qualified employment), which is a work and residence permit for non-European Union/European Economic Area nationals that provides comprehensive socio-economic rights and a path towards permanent residence and European Union citizenship.

17. Finally, States should foster positive communication and information in local communities and counter hate speech in public discourse. A shift from emergency approaches to tackle immigration to structural and sustainable approaches is crucial.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Kate Osamor, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. In November 2022, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons was seized for a report based on the motion for a resolution put forward by Mr Pierre-Alain Fridez (Switzerland, SOC) entitled “Immigration, one of the answers to Europe's demographic ageing”. I was appointed rapporteur on 15 March 2023. To enhance the discussion surrounding immigration as one of the answers to European demographic ageing, I have conducted consultations with several grassroots organisations operating within Council of Europe member States to gather valuable insights and good practices that have been implemented in different Council of Europe member States³. Furthermore, on 19 March 2024, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced persons held an exchange of views with Mr Zakaria Ibrahim, cultural mediator of EUROCOOP Servizi “Jungi Mundu”, Italy (online), Ms Dragana Curovic, project manager at SällBo, Sweden, and Ms Giulia Cortellesi, co-director at International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI), Netherlands.

2. Migration pressure has become a key issue for our continent. Faced with an unprecedented arrival of migrants since 2015, Europe has great difficulty in facing this challenge in a united and responsible manner. European solidarity has shown its limits and many countries have refused to contribute to the common effort in this area. The very definition of the right to asylum is being questioned by some countries. Some talk of “Fortress Europe”. And we may not have seen anything yet, as suggested by the consequences of the climate crisis looming ahead.

3. Migration, however, may well be an opportunity for Europe, an ageing continent with several of its countries depopulating. This phenomenon finds its causes in the increasing life expectancy thanks to medical progress and improved living conditions, coupled with declining birth rates on the continent, as a whole.

4. The age pyramid in several countries shows a worrying reduction in the youth and working age cohorts, as opposed to the exponential growth of the number of retirees, many of whom are now reaching the fourth age, which is often associated with dependency.⁴

5. As demonstrated by Eurostat's statistics, in Europe the share of population aged 65 and over is constantly increasing, while the share of population aged 15-24 and 25-64 is decreasing.⁵ Demographic ageing will have profound implications, not only for individuals, but also for public services, business and civil society, impacting, among others: health and social care systems, labour markets, public finances and pension entitlements. Demographic indicators that describe the latest developments for an ageing Europe show that, in the timespan of 50 years, the old-age dependency ratio is projected to more than double.

6. The old age dependency ratio may be used to study the level of support that can potentially be given to older people by the working-age population (people aged 20-64 years). This ratio expresses the relative size of the older part of the population compared with the working-age population. The old age dependency ratio for the EU-27 was 25.9% in 2001. As such, there were slightly fewer than four persons of working age for every person aged 65 years or more. By 2019, the old age dependency ratio was 34.1%, in other words, there were fewer than three persons of working age for every older person. Population projections suggest that the EU-27 old age dependency ratio will continue to climb and will reach 56.7% by 2050, when there will be fewer than two persons of working age for each older person.⁶

3. Online exchanges of views were held with Ms Pip Cannons (The Somerset Micro-enterprise programme, Community Catalysts CIC, United Kingdom), Ms Costanza Raguso (Homefull Centre, Italy), Ms Tinna Harling (Cooperative Egnahemsfabriken), Co-housing with newly arrived refugees, young and elderly, Sweden), Ms Dragana Curovic (The Sällbo Project, co-housing, Sweden), Mr Mario González Somoano (Asociación Pueblos Con Futuro, matching depopulated areas with migrants in search of a new life in rural Castilla-La Mancha, Spain), Ms Margaret Kernan and Ms Giulia Cortellesi (TOY for Inclusion, involving grandparents and other senior citizens from the local community – including migrant, refugees and people from minority groups – in organising and participating in the activities in the Play Hubs, Netherlands), and Ms Gabriella Debora Giorgione and Mr Angelo Moretti (Piccoli Comuni del Welcome, a network of rural communities in southern Italy, creating opportunities for inter-generational solidarity and migrant integration, Italy).

4. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ageing_Europe_-_statistics_on_population_developments#Older_people_.E2.80.94_increasingly_old_and_with_growing_dependency.

5. “Proportion of population aged 65 and over” and “Population by age group”, Eurostat Data Browser, 2023; see also “Elderly population”, OECD Data.

6. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Ageing_Europe_-_statistics_on_population_developments#Older_people_.E2.80.94_increasingly_old_and_with_growing_dependency.

7. In 2012 already, the Parliamentary Assembly noted in [Resolution 1864 \(2012\)](#) “Demographic trends in Europe: turning challenge into opportunities” that in 2050, people aged 60 and over are expected to make up one third of Europe’s population, and highlighted that Europe is going to face a “double ageing” phenomenon as the share of the population aged 75 and over will also be greatly increasing”.⁷

8. This demographic ageing trend determines an increase in the age dependency ratio and impacts the economy, the social structure, and the well-being of ageing societies.⁸ It triggers an important slowdown of economic growth and raises concerns over the financing of social security and pension scheme systems.⁹ It is likely to impact investment and public budget, exacerbate labour shortages, and affect productivity and entrepreneurial activity. In addition, it has implications in health care, urban planning, housing, and transport schemes, hence requiring age-friendly adjustments to enable people of all ages to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.¹⁰

9. As rapporteur Domagoj Hajduković (Croatia, SOC) pointed out in his 2021 report entitled “Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved”,¹¹ increasing immigration could represent an opportunity to tackle these structural challenges. Moreover, immigration can also be perceived as a sound and sustainable solution to concrete, practical needs induced by demographic ageing. States should, therefore, take concrete steps to implement the Assembly [Resolution 2502 \(2023\)](#) “Integration of migrants and refugees: benefits for all parties involved”.

10. What will be the future of demographics in Europe? Who will take care of our elderly? Who will keep society running? What can States do to cover the shortages of personnel in various sectors? The answer, at least in part, may lie with work force from elsewhere.

11. This report aims to draw up an analysis of the demographic situation in Europe, globally but also regionally, as well as to explore innovative solutions towards the opening of legal and safe mobility channels articulated around reception policies and respect for the common norms and values that unite Council of Europe member States.

2. Practical challenges of demographic ageing in economic and social terms

2.1. Demographic data

12. To begin with a brief overview of current demographic dynamics, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), Europe has one of the highest shares of the population aged 60 and older in the world, and it is expected to continue to grow rapidly in the coming decades.¹² More specifically, according to a report released by the European Commission in October 2023, the European Union’s population is projected to reach its peak around 2026 and then gradually decrease, with a dependency ratio expected to rise from 33% today to 60% by the end of the century.¹³

13. In particular, a historic shift is about to occur in Europe by 2024. That is, the number of older individuals aged over 65 will outnumber younger individuals aged under 15 across the 53 countries of the WHO European Region, according to the WHO projections.¹⁴

14. The population decline is sharper in some countries than in others. To illustrate this, according to United Nations predictions, Germany’s population is expected to drop from 84 million to 74 million by 2050, while Italy’s population will decrease from 60 million to 51 million.¹⁵ Greece is the EU member State with the

7. [Resolution 1864 \(2012\)](#) “Demographic trends in Europe: turning challenge into opportunities” and report ([Doc. 12817](#)).

8. Harper, “[Economic and social implications of aging societies](#)”, *Science*, 2014.

9. Bloom, “[Population 2020](#)”, International Monetary Fund (IMF) website, 2020.

10. “[Ageing Europe](#)”, World Health Organization (WHO) website.

11. [Doc.15785](#).

12. “[Unlocking the future of healthy ageing: The Lisbon Outcome Statement](#)”, WHO website, 2023; Aurambout et al., “[The Demographic Landscape of EU Territories](#)”, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021; “[Ageing Europe](#)”, WHO website.

13. “[Commission sets out tools to manage demographic change in the EU](#)”, European Commission Press Release, 2023; “[Brussels sounds alarm about EU’s rapidly ageing population, recommends migration to fill vacancies](#)”, *Euronews*, 2023.

14. “[By 2024, the 65-and-over age group will outnumber the youth group: new WHO report on healthy ageing](#)”, WHO website, 2023.

15. Kenny, “[Global Mobility: Confronting A World Workforce Imbalance](#)”, Center for Global Development, 2021.

fastest ageing population, and, together with Italy, Portugal, and Spain, will experience major demographic shifts, with more than seven people aged over 65 for every ten people between the ages of 20 and 64 by 2050.¹⁶

15. This reflects a major global trend. Notably, while the population ageing trend started in high-income countries, it is now low- and middle-income countries that are witnessing the most significant shifts. By 2050, the global population of people aged 60 or older is expected to double, with those aged 80 or older tripling, with 2/3 of those over 60 expected to live in these countries.¹⁷

16. This data shows how the achievement of broad social and economic progress over the past decades has turned into a challenge due to the widespread decline in both mortality and fertility rates, with significant economic and social implications.

2.2. Macroeconomic and social structural challenges

17. An ageing population reveals a decline in its working-age cohorts. Labour shortages are at unprecedented levels in the European Union already now. As highlighted by a 2023 European Commission Communication, about 30% of all firms in the European Union report labour shortages, with SMEs reporting 74%.¹⁸ These shortages affect different sectors and concern all skill levels. There is high demand in STEM skills (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), ICT (information and communications technology), construction, care, and transportation (notably truck and coach drivers) across multiple member States and regions.¹⁹

18. Fewer children being born also implies a smaller labour force in the future, suggesting long-term effects on economic growth and sustainability. The European Commission has recently projected that the European Union will lose 57,4 million working-aged people by 2100.²⁰ Among the implications, the decline in working-age population exerts downward pressure on revenues from personal income taxes and social security contributions.²¹

19. An ageing population reveals an increase in the elderly cohorts. Notably, as older individuals require more healthcare resources, the demand for medical services grows as life expectancy increases. This results in rising spending on healthcare – especially long-term care – and pensions. Such an expenditure is projected to increase in the European Union from 24,6% of GDP in 2019 to almost 27% in 2040.²²

20. Combining the two trends, fewer working-age people supporting a growing elderly population places a strain on social welfare systems and pensions, increasing overall pressure on public budgets.

21. The effects of these dynamics overlap at the regional level too. The need to fill labour shortages in some countries may foster a brain drain in others, exacerbating further shortages in countries of origin. A example of this fallout concerns Albania, which, already having the lowest number of doctors and nurses *per capita* in Europe, has tried to prevent doctors and nurses from leaving for other countries in need of workforce, such as Germany.²³ The case of Poland provides a further example. Poland faces one of the most severe shortages of care workers in the European Union. Due to an ageing population together with inadequate care infrastructure, Poland, a historic supplier of overseas healthcare workers, has become a country that relies on migrant healthcare workers, the majority of whom are Ukrainian.²⁴

22. By taking a deeper look into healthcare, the healthcare workforce and caregiver occupations are already among the most scarce in Europe.²⁵ Ireland, Czechia and Italy, already fall below the threshold set by the International Labour Organization (ILO) for adequacy of service delivery.²⁶ The ratio of elderly persons per

16. [“Commission sets out tools to manage demographic change in the EU”](#), European Commission Press Release, 2023.

17. [“Ageing and health”](#), WHO website, 2022.

18. [“Communication ‘Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action’”](#), European Commission Publications, 2023.

19. *Ibid.*

20. [“Commission sets out tools to manage demographic change in the EU”](#), European Commission Press Release, 2023.

[“Brussels sounds alarm about EU’s rapidly ageing population, recommends migration to fill vacancies”](#), *Euronews*, 2023.

21. [“Commission sets out tools to manage demographic change in the EU”](#), European Commission Press Release, 2023.

22. European Commission, [“The 2021 Ageing Report, Economic & Budgetary Projections for the EU Member States”](#), 2021.

23. [“Albanian medical students protest ongoing controversial university policy”](#), *Euractiv*, 2023.

24. Florek & Rogalewski, [“The future of live-in care work in Europe”](#), European Economic and Social Committee, 2020.

25. Ribeiro, et al., [“The Caregiver Support Ratio in Europe: Estimating the Future of Potentially \(Un\) Available Caregivers”](#), Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2022.

26. Kumar et al., [“Migration and the future of care: Supporting older people and care workers”](#), ODI Report, 2022.

care provider is already too high and is likely to increase in the future if policy changes are not set up.²⁷ The situation is even more worrying for older persons living in rural areas, where access to care services is already generally inadequate.²⁸

23. In the coming decades, not only the demand for long-term care is expected to grow, but also the supply of both informal and formal long-term care workers is expected to shrink. To maintain the current ratio across OECD member countries, it would be necessary to add 13.5 million care workers by 2040.²⁹ Notably, in Europe, countries such as Luxembourg, Ireland, and France, would require an 80% or more increase in the workforce over 2016 levels.³⁰

24. Alongside the structural economic and social needs related to population ageing, it is paramount to also consider the specific needs experienced by the growing social group of the elderly, at the individual as well as collective levels, to ensure their rights to dignity and healthy ageing.³¹

2.3. Specific care-related challenges

25. As people are getting older, they are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases, and/or to develop some medical conditions, due to their increased frailty, also facing greater risks of dependency. Besides physical health, elderly people may also develop cognitive impairments such as aggregated cognitive decline, dementia, Alzheimer's disease, etc.

26. These conditions present significant challenges in the daily lives of older people, as they can prevent them from carrying out activities of daily living. Therefore, as people age, beside facing enhanced healthcare needs, they also require daily support to ensure they meet their basic needs.³²

27. Physical and cognitive impairments also reduce mobility, resulting in increased vulnerability and, often, social isolation. The help of social care workers might be of vital importance to meet daily transport needs of older dependent people and ensure a minimum of socialisation, which, alongside healthcare, improves the emotional well-being of the elderly.

28. Numerous studies now belonging to a specific scientific field, namely, the economics of happiness, find that social relations improve people's both physical and cognitive well-being. Loneliness and social isolation, to the contrary, have been associated with increased risks of dementia and premature deaths.³³

29. To address these age-related health and social challenges, older people may need to rely on specific assistance, and may consider moving to a nursing home or seeking support from home caregivers. Family and relatives-based solutions, where possible, present limits, not only because they may have a negative impact on the family member's personal life by reducing the time available for other activities, but also because the dependent elderly's condition may call for some specific support requiring professional assistance. In addition, isolated older people may not have relatives who can provide the support they need. It is therefore vital to support the well-being and healthy ageing of the older population to ensure that they have access to adequate care services.

2.4. Urban-rural dichotomy specific challenges

30. The living environment is also a key factor in the safe and healthy ageing of the population. If urban areas are generally attractive for all age categories and offer many socialisation opportunities for elders, they are also a source of challenges, among which health issues (for example related to high pollution levels) and material issues, in particular the ability of people to afford to live in cities.³⁴

27. Stroobants et al., "Severe shortage of caregivers at heart of European healthcare crisis", *Le Monde*, 2022.

28. Augère-Granier & McElDowney, "Older people in the European Union's rural areas, issues and challenges", European Parliamentary Research Service, 2020.

29. OECD, "Who Cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly", OECD Health Policy Studies, 2020.

30. Ibid.

31. "Protecting the human rights of older persons", Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Statements, 2021.

32. Jaul & Barron, "Age-related diseases and clinical and public health implications for the 85 years old and over population", Front Public Health, 2017.

33. Age UK, "Later life in the United Kingdom", 2019.

34. "The Urban Data Platform Plus", JRC ISPRA Newsroom, 2020.

31. Meanwhile, rural areas face different challenges, often including severe difficulties in accessing basic services, with people being forced to travel long distances to reach generic facilities, including healthcare, also contributing to increase social isolation and loneliness.³⁵ For the elderly, access to services is even more challenging, due to their psychomotor and household conditions. Compared to the non-elderly population, they face slightly higher average distances.³⁶

32. Due to population ageing, rural areas are the ones experiencing a tougher population decline, with acute labour shortages, which can culminate in the abandonment of entire villages. People, often the youth and working-age groups, tend to emigrate to urban and industrialised centres in search of better opportunities for work, education, and training. Such a population decline has been particularly severe in some Eastern EU member States.³⁷ Overall, in the European Union, rural areas have lost more than 5 million people since the 1960s, and the trend for the future is expected to further deteriorate, with an increasing old age dependency ratio in remote areas. Bulgaria, Spain, Romania, Cyprus, and Austria are projected to experience the worst-case depopulation scenario by 2050.³⁸ In this regard, the Serbian Government has voiced alarm, warning that every year the Balkans lose a city.³⁹

33. Another reverse phenomenon sees adult people emigrating from cities before they reach older age, so they can retire in quiet and human-scale places. In the United Kingdom, a large proportion of older adults tend to move to rural, semi-rural, and coastal areas in the periphery. As many of these areas are often lacking healthcare and transport services and infrastructure, including housing, people who have settled in these areas in later life often lack the social support networks they need.⁴⁰

34. These two phenomena make ageing in rural areas growing more rapidly compared to urban centres.

3. Contribution of refugee and migrant communities in addressing elderly people's societal needs

3.1. The economic impact of migrant integration

35. Coping with demographic challenges would require targeted policies at the household level, promoting more work/life balance, and at the territorial and societal levels, enabling youth to fully contribute to society and the economy in a dignified way, and supporting healthy and active ageing. The European Union has already developed a set of policy tools to manage demographic change and its impacts.⁴¹

36. Complementing these efforts, labour mobility appears to be an effective policy tool to address the demographic crisis, going beyond unpopular policies such as raising the retirement age or labour taxes. Promoting legal migration and ensuring the effective integration of third country nationals can be instrumental in easing labour market pressures, also fostering innovation and well-being.

37. While rich countries age and struggle to fill vacancies in key sectors of the economy, other countries face challenges in providing economic opportunities to their citizens. For example, the working-age population in Sub-Saharan Africa is projected to grow by another 2 billion.

38. Migration implies costs and benefits for both origin and destination countries. However, as highlighted in the World Bank 2023 report, when the skills of migrants strongly match destination countries' needs, then destination countries gain significantly, especially when migrants work in the formal market at their qualification level.⁴² However, this is not always the case as migrants, especially in the informal market, are often employed in underqualified occupations. The costs associated with receiving immigrants and related to the use of public services, the support provided to negatively affected nationals, and social integration, are far fewer than the benefits.⁴³

35. Age UK, "Rural Ageing (England)", Policy Position paper, 2018.

36. Aurambout et al., "The Demographic Landscape of EU Territories", Publications Office of the European Union, 2021.

37. "The impact of demographic change in Europe" (europa.eu).

38. Perpiña Castillo et al., "A demographic assessment of EU remote areas by 2050", European Commission, 2021.

39. "Nothing to return to: Serbia is losing one town every year through population decline", *Euronews*, 2020.

40. Whitty, "Chief Medical Officer's annual report 2023: health in an ageing society", Department of Health and Social Care of the UK, 2023.

41. "Communication 'Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action'", European Commission Publications, 2023.

42. World Bank, "World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies", 2023.

43. Ibid.

39. Looking at data, in 2022, the European Union received 3 million migrant workers through legal pathways, which represents a significant boost to its workforce, compared to 300 000 who arrived irregularly.⁴⁴ By taking part in the regular labour market, migrants pay taxes and national insurance contributions that contribute to public revenue. Migrants contributing to social security schemes during their working lives, not only allow them to access their pensions but also make them contribute to the pension funds' income for the benefit of all retirees, particularly natives. Moreover, as average migrants have lower elderly dependency ratios than natives, they also help alleviate the challenges posed by the pension system.

3.2. The multidimensional impact of migrant integration in the care sector

40. Immigration can be one means through which Europe could fulfil its current and future labour shortages in care provision occupations, thereby decreasing the caregiver support ratio. According to the OECD, foreign-born workers already make up around 20% of the current caregiver workforce. However, given the presence of large informal and home-based care provision, this data is likely to be an understatement.⁴⁵ In general, most foreign-born long-term care workers immigrated through non-economic channels, including family reunification, student visas, general migration routes for non-specialised workers, and international protection.⁴⁶

41. Covid-19 has shown the reliance of many countries on precarious and irregular foreign workers, notably in the elderly care sector. Indeed, in countries where migrants made up most caregivers, special policies had to be put in place to guarantee continuity of provision.⁴⁷ For instance, Austria arranged specific transfers for migrant care workers, while Italy granted temporary legal status to domestic and care workers.⁴⁸

42. In the care sector, distinct migratory patterns together with some specific migration chains have emerged in Europe.⁴⁹ High-income EU countries tend to rely on workers coming from lower-income eastern European countries like Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria. Ukrainian and Belarusian care workers entered the informal economy in Poland to fill the gaps left by Polish workers who moved to Germany and the United Kingdom to work in the formal economy.⁵⁰ On the other hand, some countries of origin, notably the Philippines, have opted to specialise in supplying healthcare professionals to overseas destinations. Many migrants coming to Europe, in fact, received healthcare or home care training.⁵¹

43. By increasing the size of the workforce and bringing potentially new skills and methods, immigration help to ensure higher safety of the dependent elderly (through the reduction of patient per care provider ratio), and to improve the quality of the care services provided in nursing homes or by "at home"-aides.⁵² Several case studies suggest that immigrant labour is associated with a positive effect on patient outcomes, such as fewer falls, less usage of restraints, and fewer injuries.⁵³ Moreover, immigration fosters the opportunity for elderly and disabled people to maintain their independence, since in places with higher immigrant populations, natives are more likely to age in their own homes rather than residing in institutional settings such as nursing homes.⁵⁴

44. Other studies found evidence of a positive impact of immigration on the mental health of older natives through social connections, as well as on subjective well-being and depression.⁵⁵ Social integration benefits as well, with increased institutional connections and social participation. On the other side, working in local communities helps migrants to build relationships and feel valued.

44. "Brussels sounds alarm about EU's rapidly ageing population, recommends migration to fill vacancies", *Euronews*, 2023.

45. OECD, "International Migration Outlook 2015", 2015.

46. OECD, "Who Cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly", OECD Health Policy Studies, 2020.

47. Kumar et al. "Migration and the future of care: Supporting older people and care workers", ODI Report, 2022.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Harris, "Aging Alone: Elder care infrastructure in the EU", *Harvard International Review*, 2022.

52. OECD, "Who Cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly", op. cit; "Who will care for aging baby boomers Immigrants?", Brookings Webinar, 2022.

53. Furtado & Ortega, "Does Immigration Improve Quality of Care in Nursing Homes?", IZA Discussion Paper, 2020; Grabowski et al., "Immigration, The Long-Term Care Workforce, and Elder Outcomes in the U.S.", National Bureau of Economic Research, 2023.

54. Butcher et al., "Immigrant Labor and the Institutionalization of the U.S.-born Elderly", *Review of International Economics*, 2022.

3.3. Social and cultural benefits of labour immigration: the gender perspective

45. Labour immigration can bring about a multitude of social and cultural benefits too. For example, migration can empower women by increasing their agency, autonomy, and resilience and lead to the re-formulation of gender roles, both in destination and countries of origin, hence fostering overall social cohesion and contributing to more inclusive societies.⁵⁶

46. In recent decades there has been a feminisation of labour migration, with women migrating alone in search of opportunities.⁵⁷ Women migrant workers constitute approximately 20% of the female labour force in Northern, Southern and Western Europe. Furthermore, the labour force participation of women is higher for migrants as compared to non-migrants. According to ILO figures, Northern, Southern and Western Europe is the region that hosts the largest number of women migrants, and their labour force participation rate was at 68.8% in 2019. In the same year, in that region, the share of women surpassed men among migrant workers.⁵⁸

47. Female labour migration tends to be concentrated in services sectors, and especially in the care industry, including health and domestic work (for example includes nursing, elderly and childcare, cleaning, and other related work in households). This type of work, called reproductive labour, counts in a predominantly female labour force being traditionally associated with specific gender roles, and is typically undervalued, undercompensated, and with little social protection.⁵⁹

48. Women migrant workers present several intersectional vulnerabilities. Indeed, in addition to facing the economic and non-economic barriers as migrants, they are also exposed to gender discrimination in the labour market. This may push them to the informal labour market and calls for gender-responsive policies. In recognising migration as a key aspect of development, the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda urges governments to “Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.” (target 8.8).

3.4. The impact of migrant contributions in urban-rural communities

49. Particularly in rural areas, immigration might be a key source of sustainable development, sometimes essential to ensure even the survival of rural communities, given the ongoing depopulation process. Immigration in remote areas contributes to covering the demand for labour, maintaining basic services (such as education, health, and food facilities), and preserving the population level. In short, it essentially contributes to boosting the economic and social life of small municipalities.

50. In urban areas both youth and elderly individuals often experience social isolation, with a general lack of social relations and social support networks, both formal and informal, including childcare facilities, and exclusion from the labour market, which can be detrimental to their overall well-being and quality of life. Rethinking the urban organisation, including migrants’ integration, is fundamental to overcoming these challenges.

4. Creating social bridges between migrants and ageing societies: good practices

51. Governments can adopt a wide range of measures and policies at the international, national, and local levels to address demographic ageing. Countries need to build a ‘longevity society’, which aims to promote healthy ageing and to exploit the advantages of longer quality lives.⁶⁰ It requires a cultural shift, investments in research, and the development of social policies that empower older citizens towards a more inclusive, healthy, and prosperous society for all generations.

55. Akdede et al., “The Impact of Migration Flows on Well-Being of Elderly Natives and Migrants: Evidence from the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe”, Social Indicators Research, 2022; Escarce & Rocco, “Effect of Immigration on Depression among Older Natives in Western Europe”, IZA Discussion Papers, 2019; Akay, “The impact of immigration on the well-being of natives”, IZA Discussion Papers, 2012; Escarce & Rocco, “Immigration and the Health of Older Natives in Western Europe”, Global Labor Organization (GLO), 2018.

56. Kumar et al., “Migration and the future of care: Supporting older people and care workers”, ODI Report, 2022; UN Women, “Women migrant workers’ contributions to development”, Policy Brief 2, 2017.

57. Ibid.

58. International Labour Office, “ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers – Results and Methodology – Third edition”, 2021.

59. UN Women, “Women migrant workers’ contributions to development”, Policy Brief 2, 2017; Orav, “Migrant women and the EU labour market: Overcoming double discrimination”, European Parliamentary Research Service, 2023.

60. Scott, “The longevity society”, *The Lancet Healthy Longevity*, 2021.

52. In doing so, it is important to focus on promoting the integration of migrants, especially considering the significant and increasing role that regular immigration will have in future ageing societies.⁶¹ Indeed, immigration's positive impact on local and national labour markets and the social life of ageing societies is highly dependent on the policies implemented to facilitate migrants' proper integration within host countries, i.e., through language training, access to education, employment opportunities, adequate housing, and social welfare. Adequate immigration policies must be implemented as well and should seek to guarantee the regular entry of migrants. For example, policies to attract high-skilled migrants should be developed in order to enhance Europe's capacity to meet future challenges. The implementation of the EU Blue Card -- a work and residence permit for non-EU/EEA nationals that provide comprehensive socio-economic rights and a path towards permanent residence and EU citizenship -- should be supported.⁶² Failure to address migrants' integration needs might lead to negative outcomes, including social tension, cultural clashes, and economic disparities, with a decline in overall wellbeing for all.

53. Policies aiming at undermining bias and discrimination against migrants, and promoting social cohesion can be implemented by host countries.⁶³ With regard to building bridges between migrants and elderly in local communities, some European countries already set up community-based initiatives such as intergenerational programs bringing together young migrants with locals, especially the elderly, to promote interaction amongst generations and cultural exchange (for example the "Migrantour" initiative, operating hand in hand with local partners, that encourage dialogues, as well as exchanges of culture and perspectives through migrants-led guided tours of cities).⁶⁴

54. Alongside governmental policies, civil society initiatives also play a prominent role in connecting migrants and local communities, including the elderly (for example, the Neighbours for Newcomers program, launched by the charity RESET, which connects local volunteers with skilled healthcare migrant workers, as they start their new life in communities across the UK). Such initiatives should be further encouraged and upheld, including by public funding, to further enhance intergenerational and intercultural exchanges, benefitting both the elderly (increased socialisation) and foreign newcomers (better inclusion and integration into local communities).

4.1. Rural transformation: combating ageing and socioeconomic isolation through immigration

55. The consultations with civil society organisations have shed light, first of all, on the significant contribution of immigration in addressing the challenges faced by depopulating rural areas. This is particularly evident in villages located in central inland Spain and in the South of Italy, as well as in the rural, semi-rural, and coastal areas of the UK, succumbing to ageing, isolation, and depopulation.

56. Many of these communities have been revitalized through the successful welcoming, reception, and integration of migrants. Some organisations stated that without immigration, they would have been on the brink of extinction, but the influx of migrants has brought them back to life, together with significant social development and economic growth. Rural municipalities provide work and housing for families in need, which in return help to cover the demand for labour, maintain services and preserve population levels in these areas.

57. To address continuous depopulation ongoing for decades in the Spanish region known as "La España vaciada", namely, "the hollowed-out Spain", the NGO Asociación Pueblos con Futuro is actively connecting villages with less than 500 residents with families in need, many of whom are migrants and refugees in search of a new life.⁶⁵ These families play a crucial role in sustaining the villages by providing vital labour and maintaining local bars, social centres, and other municipal facilities open, as well as filling vacancies in elderly care both in private homes and nursing homes.

58. The Jungi Mundu project prevented the extinction of an ageing Italian village, Camini.⁶⁶ A successful program of welcoming, reception, and integration of refugees with international protection was carried out by the EUROCOOP Social Cooperative Society, in collaboration with the municipality and local governments. This ground-breaking initiative has brought about a positive transformation in the entire village, revitalising it with new residents from other parts of the world.

61. WHO, "Decade of healthy ageing: baseline report", 2021.

62. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32021L1883>.

63. OECD, "Working Together for Local Integration of Migrants and Refugees", OECD Regional Development Studies, 2018.

64. "Train to become a 'Culture carrier'", *Réfugiés.info*, 2022.

65. "'We need people here': the Spanish towns welcoming migrants", *The Guardian*, 2020.

66. "Services Eurocoop Social Cooperative Society 'Jungi Mundu'" website.

59. In Camini, the youth used to emigrate to the more industrialised North – a historical pattern in Italy, leaving the elderly alone. The elderly, being usually owners of shops and land, could not find employees, and therefore everything was doomed to ruin, but since the gradual welcoming of refugees, most of the population is now made of young and working people. There are more education and transportation services, and new circular economic and social activities, including shops, labs, and workshops to learn new jobs that target both refugees and locals, making the programme sustainable.

60. On 19 March 2024, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons held an exchange of views with Mr Zakaria Ibrahim, a former refugee from Syria, who lived in the village of Camini and served as cultural mediator of EUROCOOP Servizi “Jungi Mundu”. He noted that from 1991 until 2011 the population of Camini decreased dramatically by almost 27%, from 620 to 450 people. Young people left to bigger cities and elderly people stayed. Provision of services discontinued, given that the working age population left the village. The authorities accepted to start welcoming migrants, who arrived in small groups of 10-15 people, reaching about 120 people in total. Service provision started improving with the arrival of families with children. The village that risked having to close its school (with only seven kids in the elementary school) had seen a considerable change with more than 80 children going to school in the past two years. The school has about 20 teachers now and is fully functioning. The other problems that the people living in Camini saw was the lack of labour force in the local farming communities. Many farmers were getting older, and the village needed more people to work on farms. Another example of positive changes is the various workshops that were created, such as the pottery workshop and the musical instruments workshop, where migrants’ experience and contribution are quite appreciated.

61. Co-operation between the migrants and host community works well. The Jungi Mundu co-operative is now counting about 60 workshops and small companies. Businesses that were once about to close were revived and the whole village got refreshed and became more dynamic. There are also opportunities to meet and discuss things at local small restaurants and a variety of trade fairs or cultural events in the area. Finally, given that the village is more dynamic and offers now new employment opportunities, the young Italian people who were once gone in search for a better living in cities, came back to Camini and the surrounding villages, which was highly appreciated by the locals. The young migrants that arrived are studying the Italian language and this allows them to communicate better, including with the elderly Italians who do not communicate in English, a language which is often spoken by the arriving migrants and refugees. The revival of the village can also be seen in the restoration of once abandoned houses. Almost 40% of houses in Camini needed to be restored. This work has been taken care of by the local community with the participation of the migrants. One of the projects consisted in refurbishing places for social housing and, possibly, hotels for tourists. The village and the surrounding area have been transformed into a multicultural town. Mr Ibrahim concluded by stressing that immigrants were not a problem, that they could be a solution for many problems that the ageing population in Europe was confronted with.

62. Another good practice refers to a network of rural communities in Southern Italy (Piccoli Comuni del Welcome) that has used the Ministry of the Interior funds for the reception and integration of asylum seekers to match the needs of the local population and those of migrants.⁶⁷

63. In these small towns, those over 70 years old used to be the larger group. In the general lack of welfare services, community co-operatives have been created to meet the needs especially of the elderly. This represents a new paradigm shift, with a welfare State becoming a welcoming State, ensuring the provision of welfare to citizens. Several small and medium enterprises have been created, run both by migrants and locals, with the first effect being the reduction of young natives’ emigration to urban areas. New activities have been implemented in different sectors such as agriculture, skilled trades, tourism, and hospitality, improving living conditions for everyone. One of the results was the building up of circular, mutual help between the elderly and migrants, showing a good example of social cohesion. In particular, the elderly helped take care of migrants’ children.

64. Community Catalysts, a social enterprise operating in the United Kingdom, is dedicated to facilitating the engagement of individuals in care and support services fostering strong and inclusive communities. Its initiatives have been particularly beneficial for immigrants seeking employment in the traditional job market, as they often felt overlooked or discriminated against. The organisation aims at empowering individuals to use their talents to set up community enterprises.

67. Patuzzi et al., “[Building Welcome from the Ground up: European Small and Rural Communities Engaging in Refugee Resettlement](#)”, Migration Policy Institute, 2020; “[Piccoli Comuni del Welcome](#)” website.

65. One successful case study involves the Borough of Wrexham, in North Wales, where the local authority commissioned the social enterprise to help meet the increasing demand for home care and fill gaps in services. The area, which has seen an increase in the number of people aged 65 and over in the last decade, includes remote villages, and the only care agency providing support ceased operating there because it was not financially viable. Dozens of micro-enterprises have been set up, providing care for many people and creating local jobs, 10% of which are run by refugees or migrants, including a Ukrainian couple who set up a cleaning business, thus earning a living while contributing to the local economy and providing much-needed support for older people.

66. Based on these experiences, one can underscore that refugees can truly be an asset, even though, compared to other categories of migrants, refugees may initially represent a cost for the host country, as noted by the World Bank 2023 report: as refugees move for safety, they are not always able to reach destinations where their skills are in demand, and prolonged refugee situations can result in a financial and social burden for host countries that requires sustainable management.⁶⁸ Host countries can lessen their expenses by implementing policies that foster internal mobility, self-reliance, and integration into national services. International co-operation through responsibility sharing is crucial for managing these costs and demands complementing global efforts with regional action.

67. These integration initiatives actively work towards resolving crucial challenges faced by rural and remote areas due to their ageing population, including social isolation, loneliness, and inequalities, as highlighted by the studies mentioned previously. They aim to build care capacity, facilitate the creation of local employment opportunities, and support the healthcare system in managing the demands arising from an ageing population. One significant outcome that emerges from the welcoming and integration of third-country nationals, including resettled refugees, is the restoration of essential services. Additional infrastructure has been developed, greatly improving the quality of life of all residents. The arrival of migrants had a positive impact on the population size, benefiting local businesses and those facilities that depend on regular attendance, such as doctor's offices, grocery stores, schools, and transportation lines.

68. In terms of employment, in North Wales, another consideration requires attention. Immigrants are often employed in positions that have become less common for locals, such as shepherding. This trend is the result of a broader issue, partly due to a lack of interest among locals for these types of jobs, which are viewed as undignified and low status. More attention needs to be directed towards improving the working conditions of these valuable professions, to transform these employment opportunities into dignified and desirable options, which may get the interest of the local workforce.

69. The success of these initiatives largely depends on the effective integration of newcomers. Language and cultural exchange programmes can be implemented to foster mutual learning and support between different cultural groups and generations. The tailored support services provided in most of these programmes enabled migrants to learn the language. Informal support from the local community, such as assistance with administrative formalities has been also crucial. To prepare the hosting communities, especially those with limited exposure to migration, localities can organise meetings to provide detailed information about the arriving individuals.

70. Several actions can be taken to ensure that beneficiaries accept immigrant workers. For example, training and coaching programmes could be offered to migrant care suppliers to improve their overall communication skills; clients and co-workers could be educated on a zero-tolerance policy towards racism; and training on the local cultural environment and care delivery could be delivered.⁶⁹ Orientation sessions could also be provided for municipal workers and community members who will be interacting with incoming migrants, such as social workers and teachers.

71. Promoting engagement within existing social infrastructures, such as membership of sports associations or participation in local events, can also lead to more sustainable integration.⁷⁰ For instance, in Italy, local authorities and civil society partners included refugees in traditional events, such as religious festivities and festivals celebrating local products.

72. Matching job offers available in the villages with the job demands of incoming families is crucial. Understanding the needs, qualifications, and aspirations of the families is necessary to ensure their successful integration. Field knowledge, gained through visiting the local communities and assessing job opportunities as

68. World Bank, "World Development Report 2023: Migrants, Refugees, and Societies", 2023.

69. OECD, "Who Cares? Attracting and Retaining Care Workers for the Elderly", op. cit.

70. Patuzzi et al., "Building Welcome from the Ground up: European Small and Rural Communities Engaging in Refugee Resettlement", op. cit.

well as housing options and proximity of educational and health facilities, is also essential. Finally, to ensure the sustainability of integration efforts, follow-up and support should be provided to the families for several months until they have fully adapted to the rural environment.

73. The integration of migrants presents both opportunities and challenges. In some cases, the inclusion of foreign families happens naturally, as in the project in Spain. Successful integration can be attributed to external factors that facilitate the immediate assimilation of the migrant group, such as greater cultural affinity. In Spain, most immigrants come from South America, so in addition to sharing a similar culture and lifestyle, they also speak the same language. The interviewed representatives of the Spanish co-operative project noted, however, that their project did not include immigrants with different cultural backgrounds, for example Arabs/Muslims, given the difficulty they had in sharing a common collective life. For example, it was challenging to get them to run a bar or social centre that served alcoholic beverages (which was a cultural identity feature in a specific village). This difficulty is amplified in cities, where foreign families tend to concentrate in specific neighbourhoods, enabling them to maintain their religious and cultural lifestyle, on one hand, but isolating them from the rest of the city, on the other. A more balanced and cosmopolitan approach to urban development could help avoid ghettoization of certain migrant communities. The promotion of cultural diversity and social cohesion all over the municipality could help develop stronger ties between the autochthon populations and newly arriving residents.

74. Rural communities may offer advantages for integration over urban centres as they provide informal institutions that facilitate information exchange, resource mobilisation, tailored support, and, overall, a stronger human dimension.⁷¹ On the other hand, given the smaller size of the community, every detail about the hosted families influences the perception of migration of all the neighbours. In some cases, a family that is not integrated well in the community may have to be relocated.

4.2. Urban transformation: towards more inclusive, multicultural, and intergenerational cities

75. Demographic ageing poses significant challenges in the urban environment, making it necessary to reevaluate urban planning processes by giving priority to the participation of citizens in the transformation of cities. In light of rapid global social and environmental changes, new approaches to build more resilient, inclusive, multicultural and intergenerational cities should be adopted. Urban planning should be centred around principles of equity and human needs. By breaking down isolating barriers, particularly for both the younger and older generations who tend to be confined to private spaces, opportunities for socialisation and interactions with diverse communities can be enhanced.

76. The participatory planning aims to overcome class, race, gender, ethnic, and ideological biases. The Swedish co-operative Egnahemsfabriken demonstrates how collaborative housing and community management approaches can address housing shortage, exclusion, and the difficulty for new arrivals to enter the labour market. By establishing a gathering place that fosters integration, collaboration, and creativity, the project supports anyone who wants to build their own house or help others build theirs through idea-based, co-design, and collaborative housing methods, especially empowering three vulnerable groups in the housing or labour market: youth, elderly, and refugees.

77. Young migrants are hired so that they can get a work permit while contributing to society. Furthermore, isolated elderly women, often with limited financial resources, can continue living in their own homes, remaining independent, but not alone. The project supported retired women living in communities, fighting depression and social isolation.

78. Decent housing is key to refugees' and migrants' successful integration into the local community since it provides social contacts, access to services, and employment. In contrast to traditional social housing, new types of housing have emerged across Europe with a stronger focus on collaboration, participation, and social support among residents.

79. The Homefull project, managed by the Programma Integra association in collaboration with the social cooperative Meta onlus, and backed by the regional authority in Rome, Italy, promoted intergenerational co-housing.⁷² This innovative model guides migrants towards self-sufficiency while combating feelings of isolation in older people. Notably, the cohabitation scheme posed some initial challenges as some families hesitated towards this unusual living arrangement.

71. Ibid.

72. "Accoglienza alternativa: anziani soli convivono con giovani migranti", *Redattore sociale*, 2015 [Italian only]; see also the Homefull website [Italian only].

80. In Sweden, the SällBo co-housing project brings together young people aged 18 to 25, including refugees, and individuals over 70 years old.⁷³ The goal is to support social interactions of people who can easily feel like outsiders, isolated, and lonely. This initiative aims to combat involuntary loneliness and insecurity, while fostering social inclusion for all residents, including the elderly, young adults, and young refugees who arrived as unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the country. The project adapted an existing empty building by creating small apartments and common areas. Additionally, it implemented a selective application process and mandatory socialisation meetings to promote peaceful coexistence.

81. On 19 March 2024, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons, held an exchange of views with Ms Dragana Curovic, who presented SällBo. The project started with a decision of the municipality to build a senior-living home for elderly people over 70. Most of them were ethnic Swedish people elderly people. Just as in Italy, the youngsters had left the area and elderly people stayed. The refugee crisis in Syria brought a high number of refugees. Public authorities decided to find ways to accommodate refugees. In October 2015 about 459 persons were supposed to be placed in Helsingborg. The social housing buildings where elderly people lived allowed for the ground floor to be given to refugees, with 51 apartments becoming home to migrant youngsters. Cohabitation was not always easy, especially at the beginning when the youngsters smoking at night was triggering fire alarms. Building social ties between the two communities took time. A lot of efforts were put into social mediation, to bring the two groups – the elderly people and the young migrants – together.

82. The management of SällBo organised various meetings to facilitate the dialogue between tenants. It was clear that the elderly people felt very socially excluded and lonely, which was a big surprise given that many had children. The argument was that their grown-up children were in their 50', working and having their children to take care of. The young migrants were also lonely, with their families being far away. Without mediation, these two groups would not have naturally communicated with each other. This social housing project allowed for a home to be created for people with diverse backgrounds, embracing diversity in all its forms. Moreover, the direct democracy that governs the project did not stop the focus on diversity, quite to the contrary. When places are becoming vacant, the decision of who to invite to live in that co-housing project, is voted on. The group dynamic changes over the years but it is still an important intergenerational and intercultural co-housing good practice that one could learn a lot from.

83. The success of the project can be especially attributed to the element of socialisation, which acts to the benefit of both sides. Indeed, the social network the elderly had in the city helped the youth to find jobs, attend schools, improve their language, receive coaching, and generally integrate. On the other side, the elderly's sense of health improved, while they were kept updated of the world around. During the global pandemic lockdown, it was particularly clear how intergenerational collaboration could be beneficial, with young people going shopping for the isolated and vulnerable elderly. Young migrants helped elderly people with numerous daily tasks. In addition, given that the elderly people could not physically meet their own family due to social distancing requirements, the presence of young people who lived in the same building, including the refugees, helped them to cope with pandemic-related challenges.

84. Regarding intergenerational exchange, TOY for Inclusion, promotes social inclusion, intergenerational learning, integration of services, and community based early childhood education and care in 10 countries.⁷⁴ The initiative establishes inclusive, high-quality Play Hubs where children of all backgrounds and caregivers can connect, play, borrow toys, participate in workshops, and access community services.

85. On 19 March 2024, the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons also held an exchange of views with Ms Giulia Cortellesi, co-director at International Child Development Initiatives (ICDI) with headquarters in the Netherlands. Ms Cortellesi presented the "TOY for Inclusion" project that worked for the development and well-being of children and young people growing up in difficult circumstances. In 2012, they started the intergenerational programme putting together old and young people. This project began as a research project sponsored by the European Commission in seven European countries.

86. To understand the benefits of intergenerational learning between young children and older adults, they focused on the younger children. They noticed that young children were spending most of their times in childcare facilities or kindergartens from 8:00 am till 4:00 pm or even until 6:00 or 7:00 pm. Elderly people, especially the vulnerable ones where spending their times in nursing homes, and they were hardly meeting young children especially in urban settings. Nursing homes for elderly people had very beautiful premises and

73. "Overcoming isolation: multigenerational and multicultural co-housing in Sweden", *Cooperative City Magazine*, 2023; see also the SällBo website [Swedish only].

74. TOY for Inclusion website; Toys to share play to care website; International Child Development Initiatives website.

gardens, which the kindergartens and schools did not have. A decision was taken to set up intergenerational activities. This would allow not only to make use of the pleasant premises of the nursing homes, but also to build bridges between the different groups.

87. There were many migrant families involved in that project. Migrant families had experienced integration problems if they could not speak the language of the host country. It became clear that intergenerational practice could respond to three societal concerns: one was the age segregation, another one was the global ageing population, and the third one was the need for social cohesion and solidarity in societies that are becoming more and more culturally biased. They developed training materials and set up a network of intergenerational practitioners and facilitators.

88. They started by establishing some intergenerational spaces that use the excuse of play to bring young children and older adults together as a trigger for social inclusion. These places were called “Playhouses”. These are inclusive play hubs, where families from all backgrounds can get together. They were designed to promote the so called “progressive universalism”, which means that they are for everyone but that they adopt special strategies to reach out more vulnerable groups to ensure that their participation happens. They might also promote some special projects to cover the specific needs of specific groups (Roma or migrant children). There are toy libraries families can borrow toys from, group activities and workshops.

89. Most of the activities are organised by volunteers and by staff of different services. Staff from services devoted to young children or refugees can work in co-ordination with each other and not in silos. This includes education, health care, and social services to develop a common vision and common plans to promote the well-being of the population in these communities. When the Ukrainian refugees came, there was an effort by the older Ukrainians to offer their support and experience, including teaching in non-formal learning setting. There were mostly women, mothers and their children, and a lot of older people. They have been offered a space where they would feel useful and valued. A lot of Ukrainian seniors also organised workshops for Slovak and Hungarian children.

90. The European programme supporting non-formal education provided space for intercultural learning. This work needs proper recognition and resources. In many communities where these projects were implemented, they helped families to feel welcome: they make friends and are better equipped to solve other problems they face on a daily basis, they are able to find jobs, socialise, learn the language, access courses, or have access to a variety of services or informal support. Creating spaces for informal meetings where intergenerational and intercultural contact is possible should be key in developing policies at the local, national, and international levels. Intergenerational learning for children brings higher self-esteem and helps them make new friendships. As for the older adults, they feel valued, their health and fitness improve, isolation is reduced. Finally, their general physical well-being improves. Communities benefit from it, altogether, thanks to the social cohesion and inclusion that intergenerational solidarity brings.

91. Intergenerational contact fosters intercultural connection and social learning. By involving grandparents and senior citizens from the local community, including migrants, refugees, and minority groups such as Roma and Sinti, intergenerational learning promotes social inclusion in our diverse societies.⁷⁵ In particular, immigrant communities are typically among the groups that have more children but cannot count on the social support of grandparents. In this context, intergenerational contact acts as a bridge with locals, getting migrants to know the service system, making friends, building trust with institutions, and coming out of the relatively close migrant community. On the other side, participation in these hubs allows especially the elderly to remain active and to combat social isolation.

5. Conclusions

92. With this report, I aimed to focus on concrete examples of contributions of migrants in addressing the challenges posed by demographic ageing in Europe. The continent is ageing rapidly, and we need to take measures to avoid severe macro-economic and social implications, for the benefit of all. In fact, an ageing society not only poses challenges for the elderly, who will need increasing support to meet their needs, but above all for future generations, who will find themselves having to bear the costs of an ageing society with less social security and a weaker public welfare.

75. “Together Old and Young to Build Old Age Friendly Communities” website; “IGL in Play and Learning Hubs for Ukrainian refugees in Slovakia”, Toy Project Blog, 2022; Kernan et al., “Together Old & Young: How should we live together?”, 2016.

93. To address this demographic shift, member States should consider developing effective policies and initiatives to ensure the well-being and quality of life of the elderly population, as well as implementing strategies to promote higher fertility rates. In parallel, regular migration channels should be promoted to fill labour shortages already now.

94. The contribution of migrants affects both new and old generations. From the introduction of new school classes and educational structures, to frequent public transport links between neighbouring communities, and migrant labour in support of home-based elderly care, the impact of migrants on society is far-reaching and multifaceted.

95. Comprehensive, gender-responsive, and multidimensional integration policies must be implemented in order to promote the overall integration of migrants and social cohesion: from the regularisation of informal and undocumented migrant workers to the promotion of direct and targeted aid in local communities and job training. A further effort is required to dignify core jobs in society. Urban planning also needs to be reconsidered towards building multicultural and intergenerational co-operation. Policies aimed at strengthening the non-formal sector are also needed. States should foster positive communication and information in local communities and counter hate speech in public discourse, including during election campaigns. In conclusion, a shift from emergency approaches to tackle immigration to structural and sustainable approaches is crucial.