



UNDESA Expert Group Meeting

Building Forward Better for Older Persons post COVID-19

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The aging of the population is a process that began in the 20th century, mainly in the most developed countries and is spreading to the rest of the world in the 21st century. This phenomenon, coinciding with the growing urbanization of the planet that equally affects all territories, although with notable differences between the more and less developed countries.

At present, the pandemic derived from COVID-19 has joined the two processes that affect the majority of the world's population: demographic aging and urbanization.

As Kofi Annan said in 1998, on the International Year of Older Persons *"we are in the midst of a silent revolution that goes beyond demographics with important economic, social, cultural, psychological and spiritual repercussions"*. Additionally, I feel today we should add ... URBAN PLANNING.

Euskadi, a small - large country located northern Spain, with a population about 2.2 million people, is also aging. With one of the oldest demographic profiles in Europe, demographic projections show that by 2030 half of the population will be over 55 years old and 10% will be over 80.

Behind this process is life expectancy, which is still higher for women (86 years) than for men (80 years).

Another characteristic of the elderly is the greater income gap based on gender: if in the general population the income difference is 10 thousand 4 hundred euros, but in the 65 to 69 age group, men exceed women in 17 thousand 3 hundred euros.

Not only the fall in the birth rate, but especially the increase in life expectancy (higher in women) is behind this aging process and here the Basque Country is again at the forefront worldwide.

According to the Active Aging Strategy of the Basque Country, the calculation of the Active Aging Index gives the Basque Country the seventh position in the ranking of the 28 EU countries analysed. The score obtained (36) is higher than the European average (34) and is ahead of Germany, Austria or France.

The scenario is clear: we live in an aging society and one that will continue to age. In addition, to this phenomenon, we must add the impact that COVID-19 is having on the older population.



Moreover, the first reflection that arises to me, is that with the exception of some areas - such as social health - aging is not generating the action expected, that should have to be at the height of a similar change in our society.

This change requires ANSWERS because:

- a) Today most of them are short term oriented and not focused on the crisis represented by this growing number of older people.
- b) Aging -which is a social success with its facet of opportunities- is a challenge in itself that must be approached in an innovative, transversal and multidimensional way.

Although the Urban Agenda - Bultzatu 2050 was launched before the pandemic, with the identification of the main challenges, it become apparent with its development, which involves the whole of society.

The Urban Agenda will have consequences and repercussions in all areas of daily life and it will force us to find new ways of living and living together, new ways of caring.

The World Health Organization regional director for Europe, Mr. Kluge, asked European countries: *"Supporting and protecting older people living alone is everyone's business. I remind governments and authorities that all communities must be supported to carry out interventions that ensure that older people have what they need. All should be treated with respect and dignity"*

In the "Declaration in favour of a necessary change in the long-term care model of our country", it was already pointed out that the health crisis that we are suffering as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic evidences issues related to the consideration and care for people in situations of fragility, disability and dependency.

It is claimed that this crisis is contributing to the emergence of significant gaps in our current care system. Future risks are also evidenced around how to combine values that must be balanced in care such as health and people's freedom.

It is clear that cities have to adapt to this new model of aging societies whose needs and demands are different and growing, both in terms of adapting homes and neighbourhoods, transport infrastructures, public spaces and to the satisfaction of their new aspirations for leisure and attention.

Consequently, that city will have to take into account the collective facilities necessary for caring for people, so that the task of caring can leave the private sphere (mostly women) and become a collective responsibility, a social responsibility.

In addition, that city also has to worry about generating public spaces for relationships between people creating that those networks of mutual support, so necessary for care.

It is undeniable that Technology and Innovation in sectors such as transport or IT will be decisive. In addition, technology has to be a great ally in housing and health.



The pandemic has changed many things in our daily lives: it has affected our way of living leisure, doing sports, working or socializing. It has changed our perceptions and behaviours about others, about other groups and the world in general. In some cases, discriminatory behaviour has increased.

It is clear that aging presents us with several social and economic CHALLENGES. Our Urban Agenda-Bultzatu 2050 echoes them.

Among the social goals, it takes into account demographic changes and the need to adapt urban policies to that context, favouring proximity and eliminating barriers for the elderly, and providing personalized care plans.

Also among the economic goals, demographic change will affect economic growth, savings, consumption and pensions. Therefore, to know how to take advantage of the opportunities to approach it, in an innovative way, is key.

The economic importance of this issue is so relevant that even the European Commission has included the development of the silver economy as one of its top priorities. In his analysis, European Commission makes an important differentiation between the elderly populations. This is how he divides this into three groups: active, dependent and fragile.

Challenges to which we must respond with a transversal and multidimensional approach.

And from this comprehensive approach, Territorial Planning in the Basque Country - through the Territorial Planning Guidelines - has tried to provide this plural approach by addressing issues such as the city model, health, housing, care facilities, quality of public space, commerce and proximity services.

Talking about Health is talking about life expectancy, which is also different in the Basque Country according to the geographical areas, because the decisions made in territorial and urban planning change the environments and affect the places where we live and work, the way we move and affect our health too.

Speaking of the aging of the population is to speak necessarily of the creation of the City of Care. That concept introduced as one of the contributions of the integration of the gender perspective, just because reality tells us that those of us who mostly deal with the tasks related to citizenship are women.

And the city model that would best respond to those needs of CARE for people is a compact city, with short trips, non-motorized mobility and public transport, with quality, safe and accessible urban spaces, with shops and proximity services.

Demographic and cultural changes will also influence the housing model. Many of the solutions will involve new technology integrated into the design of the homes themselves. The integration of health technologies (for quick diagnosis of diseases, assistance or care) in the homes themselves will be more and more



frequent, because the elderly population is going to increase, and shared housing formulas will be in progress.

Therefore, it will be necessary to make the classic housing model more flexible, taking into account the new social realities, and to promote the regeneration and refurbishment of the existing ones.

Mobility is a social right, which must be preserved and guaranteed equally, and for that, proximity and accessibility have priority. Let us not forget that mobility policies can be important tools for insertion and social cohesion.

Some Basque cities are trying to promote the “mobility of care”, ensuring that trips related to caring for other people and maintaining the home can be carried out in the shortest possible time, in the required time slots and at an affordable cost. This will allow people to reconcile paid employment with caregiving responsibilities.

Speaking of mobility and older people, the most sustainable thing is to reduce the need for travel. It is about reducing the distance between the home and the main activities (shopping, leisure ...) services, facilities and opportunities offered by the city.

This crisis reiterates the urgent revision of the current model of care for people who need support or care to provide diverse, global and ecosystem responses.

The COVID 19 pandemic affects people of all conditions, but not all equally. The existence of situations that favour the spread of the disease and that have revealed and/or made worse pre-existing situations such as dependence on other people to carry out the activities of daily living, overcrowding and economic fragility.

The current situation may become the opportunity to achieve better care for the people who need it, advancing in the construction of a society of care, where recognition, participation and support for those who are most vulnerable, necessarily become a commitment and a central social priority.



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