



In Europe

TAKING A STAND

**for Aging Well to Be a Right,
Not a Privilege**

GroupeSOS
Entrepreneurs for common good

**European
position paper**

Current European Context

In January 2021, the European Commission presented its Green Paper on Ageing: “Fostering Solidarity and Responsibility Between Generations” that confirms the need for practical and decisive measures to support the elderly in all fields of action. A 2023 review by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) called on the EU to embrace a new European strategy for senior well-being, aimed at safeguarding older people’s rights and ensuring their participation in society and the economy. The EESC also emphasises the need of an urgent shift in the perception of the elderly, moving away from an assistance-based approach towards one focused on autonomy, and putting an end to prejudiced attitudes towards older people.

In 2022, 21,1 % of the European population was 65 or over¹, and this percentage keeps on growing. Eurostat even predicts that the share of people over 80 in the EU population should increase 2.5-fold between 2021 and 2100, rising from 6% to 14.6%. While population ageing is a positive indicator of an increasing life expectancy, it forces



3 key figures

An average of
16,8 % OF EUROPEAN RETIREES
are threatened by poverty, according to Eurostat².

Estimations are that
BY 2070,
30% of European citizens will be 65 or over, when they are on average 20% today³.

The Old age dependency ratio* in the EU was 28.8% in 2015 and should rise to
39,1 % IN 2030 AND 50 % IN 2050⁴.

*According to the OCDE, the old-age dependency ratio is defined as the number of people aged 65 and over per 100 people of working age (20 to 64 years). Changes in the old-age dependency ratio depend on mortality and fertility rates and net migration.

¹Eurostat, Principaux indicateurs de population, 2024

²Carte du taux de pauvreté des retraités en Europe, Toute l'Europe, janvier 2023

³Rapport de la Commission sur les conséquences de l'évolution démographique, juin 2020

⁴European Nursing Homes report, Cushman & Wakefield, 2019

For over 10 years, Groupe SOS Seniors association has been supporting older people, regardless of their past, financial means, or place of residence, to ensure they can age in the best possible conditions, whether in care facilities or at home. With 114 facilities and services and more than 69 nursing homes, Groupe SOS Seniors is the second-largest manager of non-profit residential care facilities for dependent older people in France.

We champion a private, non-profit model of facility that is flexible and innovative, offering a differentiated pricing structure to ensure equal quality of services for all. As a non-profit organisation with no shareholders, we place people at the heart of everything we do.



#1

REINVENTING OUR FACILITIES TO TURN THEM INTO SERVICE HUBS OPEN TOWARDS THEIR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT

Let us anticipate the consequences of demographic ageing by rethinking the purpose and place of health and social care facilities. The 5th edition of the Senior Barometer, conducted among 8,000 people in four countries (France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium), reveals that many older people feel they lack services and amenities close to home: support for mobility (31%), cash machines (26%), access to public services (25%), as well as training centres (24%) or markets (23%). At the same time, 70% of respondents say they live within 5 km of a retirement home⁵. These facilities can serve as service hubs, benefiting both residents and older people living at home. To achieve this, we must open them to the outside world and break down barriers with actions complementing the offer of other local actors.

OUR ACTIONS

Groupe SOS advocates for a model of residential care facilities for dependent seniors that are fully integrated into their surroundings, working closely with local actors, accessible to all, and respectful of the dignity of each resident. Our facilities have a strong local focus and are resolutely open to their local environment: older people living nearby can visit during the day for adapted physical activities, meals, health check-ups, or respite stays. They also serve as information and resource centres for family caregivers.

At the same time, we are piloting mobile teams based in residential care facilities to visit older people in their homes, working alongside other local healthcare professionals to help prevent loss of autonomy.

FOCUS

For an open nursing home

In Cadalen, in the French Occitanie region, the Groupe SOS Seniors Saint-François nursing home has embarked on an ambitious and pioneering community centre project, in partnership with 1000 cafés, another Groupe SOS organisation. In this facility, projects are teeming: a digital access point, film screenings, a programme of activities by local charities, a caregivers' café, cultural events, well-being sessions, etc. By opening fully to the outside world, the nursing home has become the beating heart of the village. By welcoming both vulnerable and non-vulnerable people, community centres are fully involved in promoting the inclusion and innovation which are our daily commitments.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

Promote and support experiments and programmes aimed at opening residential care facilities for older people to their surroundings.

Strengthen the European momentum in favour of senior care professionals mobility and the exchange of best practices facilitating a transition towards care institutions that are open towards their environment and foster social connections.

⁵Les seniors en Europe face à l'isolement et l'inaccessibilité de leur ville, Ipsos, septembre 2020

#2 PRESERVING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS TO PREVENT LOSS OF AUTONOMY

Let us preserve older adults' social lives, a crucial factor in enabling them to continue living at home. While data on the number of isolated elderly individuals by country remains scarce, the European Social Survey, conducted every two years, reveals that feelings of isolation are widespread among older Europeans. In Hungary, 60% of people aged 65 and over have no social life at all. In Belgium, 23% of those aged 65 and above experience isolation, representing 512,700 isolated seniors⁷. In France, according to the latest report by Les Petits Frères des Pauvres, 36% of people over 60 – equivalent to 6.5 million individuals – frequently feel lonely⁸, and 530,000 are in a state of social death⁹. This situation is specially concerning since maintaining social connections is key in preventing the loss of autonomy among older adults. A study on social connections as a public health issue, published in **The Annual Review of Public Health**, highlights the effects of social isolation on health deterioration and emphasises that between 40% and over 80% of health and well-being can be directly or indirectly attributed to social factors¹⁰.

OUR ACTIONS

Within Groupe SOS Seniors, we innovate to preserve the social lives of older adults by offering services well before the onset of dependency. We have created shared community life spaces at the base of social housing buildings, enabling older people still living at home – especially the most vulnerable – to benefit from group activities and personal support with daily tasks. This includes assistance with administrative procedures and applications for aid, digital support (such as setting up phone or internet services), connection with local services, management of appointments, and help in booking leisure activities. We focus on being present locally to help people continue living at home in an environment where they do not feel alone but connected to their neighbourhood and its residents. We also promote local solutions that leverage intergenerational connections, an amazing way to maintain social ties for older adults. In France, we have developed intergenerational housing solutions ranging from cohabitation between individuals (inspired by the Spanish model) to hosting young people in sheltered housing or social housing accommodating many older adults.

Groupe SOS Seniors has also drawn on its expertise in advanced ageing, its understanding of issues related to social isolation, and its knowledge of the ecosystem of actors combatting it, to launch Ogénie. Through this programme, digital tools are developed, and workshops are organised to raise awareness among a wide audience (older adults, caregivers, and civil society in general) about the issue of social isolation and the solutions available at a local level. The programme's website serves as a unique information hub, cataloguing all social connection initiatives flourishing across France. The Ogénie team works daily with local councils, social housing providers, and all actors combating isolation in France.



RECOMMENDATIONS :

Support the development of intergenerational programmes as a means of breaking isolation.

Support the development of new forms of support for older adults living at home through neighbourhood hubs aimed at fostering connections and ensuring access to local services.

Build on the development of information and guidance tools on social connections for older adults and their caregivers.



⁶Où y a-t-il le plus de personnes âgées en Europe ? Petits Frères des Pauvres, juin 2024

⁷Rapport sur l'isolement des personnes âgées, Petits Frères des Pauvres, juin 2024

⁸Rapport sur l'isolement des personnes âgées, Petits Frères des Pauvres, juin 2024

⁹Social Connection as a Public Health Issue, Annual Review of Public Health, volume 43, 2022

#3 RESTORING AGENCY TO OLDER ADULTS

Let us empower older adults to drive their lives and choices, whether they live at home or in care facilities. Demographic changes, public policies favouring ageing in place, shortages of healthcare professionals, and ecological challenges are all factors that now impact the functioning of residential care facilities (Ehpad), the living conditions of older adults and their family caregivers, and the working conditions of professionals in the sector. We deem essential to question our models and the space given to the agency of older adults, an essential to ageing well. Too often, societal attitudes towards ageing lead to decisions being made on their behalf about their daily lives, preventing caregivers and professionals from listening to their wishes and meeting their expectations.

OUR ACTIONS

For several years, Groupe SOS Seniors has undergone a shift: while care remains essential, we have transformed our facilities into social hubs, ensuring residents find comfort, enjoyment, and social connections. The «Mon Établissement, Mon Domicile» (My Facility, My Home) project has led us to rethink the layout and comfort of our facilities, give agency to our beneficiaries, and strengthen the involvement of families and loved ones. Care homes must become social and motivational hubs where residents, caregivers, volunteers, and professionals are empowered to invest in improving quality of life and making the facility a new home. In our nursing homes, residents can participate in the running of the facility through simple and rewarding activities and are encouraged to carry out tasks independently. These missions have a triple benefit: they enable residents to fully embrace the space as their own, to maintain physical activity, and to share values of mutual support. The same momentum fuels our actions in shared community life spaces, where seniors are invited to take the lead in managing the space with the support of coordinators and animating it by choosing the programming of group activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

Encourage a European reflection on the space given to the agency of older adults living in care facilities.

Combat discrimination against older adults by carrying out awareness campaigns about ageing.



About Groupe SOS

Groupe SOS is a non-profit organisation committed to fostering social cohesion. It develops associations and social enterprises, united by their social and environmental commitments.

Its initiatives are structured around two main priorities:

- Managing non-profit facilities dedicated to youth, healthcare, vulnerable individuals, and the elderly
- Preparing for a sustainable and inclusive future through initiatives for ecological transition, regional revitalisation, responsible businesses, and access to culture.

Secular and non-partisan, it promotes a genuine social vision focused on the common good.

With 26,000 employees, 2 million beneficiaries each year, and a presence in 50 countries, Groupe SOS demonstrates that large-scale impact is both desirable and achievable in building a fairer and more inclusive future.

In Europe

Groupe SOS is committed daily to initiatives and projects that contribute to the development of the Social and Solidarity Economy in the European Union.

With over a hundred projects carried out with more than 85 European organisations from 19 countries, Groupe SOS demonstrates its ability to build strong connections across Europe. Its projects are supported by over 15 European funding programmes, including Erasmus+, Creative Europe, the New European Bauhaus, and the FAMI, ESF+, and ERDF funding programmes. Thanks to EU support, Groupe SOS and its partners lead diverse, impactful, and innovative initiatives, such as vocational training and professional integration projects, activities aimed at improving support for people with disabilities and promoting the social integration of migrants through sports.

Through its partnership network and innovative projects, Groupe SOS is resolutely committed to making the Social and Solidarity Economy a catalyst for social progress in Europe.



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Crédits pictures :

*Photos taken by Groupe SOS teams within its establishments,
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