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Vice-President Dubravka Šuica
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1049 Bruxelles
Belgium

Dear Vice-President Šuica,

I am writing to you regarding the European Commission's recent publication, *Demographic change in Europe: a toolbox for action*, on how to manage the EU's ageing population.

While it's promising to see action on demographic change, we believe a core part of the strategy needs to focus on promoting healthy ageing across the life course. Lifestyle and medical advances have successfully helped us to live for longer, but many people are spending those extra years in poor health. Preventative health interventions, therefore, need to be embedded across our longer lives.

The ILC Europe Network – a pan-European organisation represented by academics, practitioners, civil society representatives and business leaders – is a key advocate of healthy ageing and seeks to address demographic change in positive and productive ways. Our members are keen to identify policy solutions that support Europe's shifting demography.

This includes the ILC-UK – a founding member of the ILC Europe Network – who earlier this year launched the [Healthy Ageing and Prevention Index](#) at the World Health Assembly in Geneva.

The Index ranks 121 countries against six indicators: **life span, health span, work span, income, environmental performance**, and **happiness**. This allows us to compare how sustainable different countries are, both in terms of longer lives and the extent to which their governments are investing in efforts to prevent ill health and support healthy ageing.

The Index also ranks nine political and economic country blocs, including the EU. While the EU ranks 2nd for life span (life expectancy) and health span (healthy life expectancy), there is a 10.5-year gap between the two (81.2 years versus 70.7 years). This means that across the EU, the average person spends over a decade of their life in poor health. When it comes to work span (working life expectancy), the EU ranks last (9th) – on average, only 28.6 years of life are spent working. In an ageing Europe, this simply isn't going to be enough to support longer lives.

Within the EU, there are clear disparities between Member States too. Sweden is the best performing country in the EU and ranks 4th globally, while Bulgaria ranks the lowest in 56th. People in Sweden can expect to live 5.6 more years in good health than someone from Bulgaria, as well as being able to work an average of 3.9 more years. These inequalities highlight an imbalance across the bloc, with Eastern European countries fairsing much worse with healthy ageing.

Given that the earnings of those aged 50 and over account for 14% of GDP and one-third of total earnings across the EU, there is a huge economic incentive to ensure people age well and remain in good health for longer. To improve its Index score and to maximise the opportunities associated with demographic change, we believe the EU should make healthy ageing a key policy priority. Improving the health and wellbeing of Europeans across the life course is crucial to ensure they can work, live, volunteer, and spend for longer.

Greater investment in preventative health interventions should act as another pillar of the EU's comprehensive approach to demographic change. Our findings show countries that spend a higher proportion of their health budgets on prevention perform better on the Index. While health is a national competence, we implore the Commission to encourage Member States to utilise health prevention as a means of ensuring longer and healthier lives. We believe that Member States should:

- **Inspire and engage** policymakers, healthcare professionals and individuals to invest, promote, and take action on prevention.
- **Democratise access** to prevention to reduce health inequalities.
- **Use technology effectively** to improve access to preventative healthcare, improve uptake rates, reduce barriers, and empower patients.

We know that prevention is better than cure, and that if we take the right actions now, we can create a society where everyone ages well and enjoys the benefits of demographic change.

Yours sincerely,

David Sinclair

Chief Executive, ILC-UK

Founding Member, ILC Europe Network