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Dear Mr Visentini, Dear Mr Siciliano,

On behalf of President von der Leyen, thank you for your letter of 15 April 2020 on measures related to COVID-19. Please accept our apologies for the delay in replying.

I am particularly aware of the challenging situation that older people, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups are confronted with right now. Today, more than ever, solidarity and determined action is needed to protect those who are fragile and at greater risk of suffering serious consequences due to the pandemic, both in the world of work and in their personal and social environment.

The Commission is particularly concerned about the impact of COVID-19 in long-term care residences, including the high infection and mortality rates. We are in intensive dialogue with organisations representing older people and people with disabilities and with the organisations representing those who provide services to them.

The European Pillar of Social Rights stipulates that everyone should have access to quality long-term care. Any EU action to help achieve this ambition shall not affect the right of Member States to define the fundamental principles of their social security systems, including long-term care services. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the Commission has used all instruments at its disposal to support those being more exposed to this sanitary crisis.

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The Commission is working with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control to better protect vulnerable groups in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and the Centre published guidance on infection prevention and control in long-term care facilities. Furthermore, guidance on surveillance in nursing homes has been published and reports on medically and socially vulnerable groups will be published in the second quarter of 2020¹. We are in regular discussions with national authorities to support them in implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Several measures were introduced to bring flexibilities to the use of EU funds, including the European Social Fund, to support Member States' actions helping healthcare and long-term care systems. In order to discuss how to best use these funds to ensure the continuity and quality of care and support services, the Commission has recently brought together relevant actors at national and European level. Activities that are financed by the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived target the most vulnerable in our society, and offer funding for Member States to help people who feel lonely and abandoned.

As regards the world of work, EU legislation on health and safety at work clearly establishes the need to adapt the work to the individual and the obligation to protect particularly sensitive risk groups against the dangers that affect them specifically. The Commission has worked closely with the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) to prepare EU guidance for a safe return to work after COVID-19². The guidance highlights the need to pay special attention to workers who are at high risk and to be prepared to protect the most vulnerable, including older people and those with chronic conditions.

I admire the great commitment and extreme generosity of care workers. They are in the front line in supporting elderly people and people with disabilities, and deserve to be adequately protected. Protecting them is not only a legal and moral obligation – it is also in the interest of all of us. Thank you for your continued cooperation on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Valdis Dombrovskis

¹ https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/Infection-prevention-control-for-the-care-of-patients-with-2019-nCoV-healthcare-settings_update-31-March-2020.pdf and <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/covid-19-long-term-care-facilities-surveillance-guidance.pdf>

² Published on 24 April, available in all EU languages: https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/COVID-19:_Back_to_the_workplace_-_Adapting_workplaces_and_protecting_workers