

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

Several members experience our newsletter as a valuable way to keep in touch with each other. We are pleased to hear this and try to maintain contacts in different ways:

- On our Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/esu.eu> we regularly publish new posts. We reach a wider audience, but above all 'our loyal ESU readers'. Several senior associations have their own Facebook account, which enables us to follow the initiatives of - for example - our Finnish association "Kansallinen Senioriliitto" (<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=kansallinen%20senioriliitto%20ry>) and our Cypriot association "Senior Citizens Organisation of Cyprus" (<https://www.facebook.com/seniocitizenscy>). We like this communication tool; it gives a very 'direct' connection.
- The EPP also took initiatives to give our organisation a voice through online communication within the 'EPP family'. As ESU president I had a Skype meeting on April 29th with EPP policy adviser Nathan Shepura. It was my first time using Skype and the connection sometimes failed. Nevertheless, many people were able to see this conversation. Please find the Skype meeting here: <https://www.facebook.com/epp.eu/videos/626265844957338>
- All mail traffic with colleagues was also an opportunity to learn something about the fight against Corona in their home country but also ... to exchange good wishes for the well being of our colleagues and their families. Good news was always a 'shared joy'.
- Sometimes we also had very encouraging phone calls. With Vice President Nikolai Andreev, for example, he told us that the seniors of GERB had taken an initiative to raise money to buy protective clothing for nursing home staff. He called it: *'one of the many initiatives of solidarity that are now vitally important.'*

Also in this newsletter we let some of our colleagues share their experiences :

Bernard Worms (former ESU president), Edeltraud Paul (Austria), , Ernest Margon (Slovenia), Leena Jääskeläinen (Finland), Sean Hawkes and Tatsiana Zelko (Belarus).

These many 'digital' contacts obviously do not take away the hope of a quick reunion. We too hope and wish: stay healthy and well, and 'We will meet again'.

Enjoy reading our newsletter.

An Hermans



## **“Being prepared for a situation is already half the solution to the problem!”**

*Dr. Bernhard Worms  
Former ESU President*

- 1.) Thanks to excellent preparation by the health services, taking into account the many recommendations of the public health authorities, and supported by outstanding scientists, there were no bottlenecks in Germany. Nevertheless, we in Germany must also state that several thousands of compatriots, mainly older citizens, have died. This is where the new investigation begins, to find out the decisive cause of death and also to communicate it to the public so that everyone can draw the right conclusion. In this respect, the isolation of sick people and the absolute ban on contact in the family between healthy and sick people remained a problem for us in Germany; even if they were married couples, as a consequence, they could not say farewell to their partner when he died. It would be useful if we, as the ESU, could include this in our future work: how do we counter a sudden health crisis? Then who in our midst will take care of what? (comparable to the preparation for first aid!), who takes over responsibility, e.g. that the communication among each other can be maintained? From now on, we should take all this into our daily lives as a matter of practice, so that we are prepared for information, handling, cost coverage, providing offers of help etc. throughout the EU.
- 2.) I think, let's proceed like this, let's take the right path for our future because an occurrence such as the corona crisis, could also occur again in short term. It also applies here: preparing for a situation is already half the solution of the problem!
- 3.) Every economist knows the process of "as - if - politics," this means that in case of a crisis, all of us in Europe must behave as if we were one single society in which - for the time of the crisis - only one 'authority' can have the final decision and all others are subordinated. Personal political profiling during the crisis, without also assuming total responsibility for a proposal is extremely shabby!



## „Live together“

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### Edeltraud Paul

I think the biggest challenges in a quarantine are loneliness and not being busy and many seniors are affected by this. Staying busy requires ideas, but also material for example for handworks etc. But when the shops are closed, a lot of things are dropped out for realisation. During this long period of quarantine, senior citizens have stayed in contact via WhatsApp.

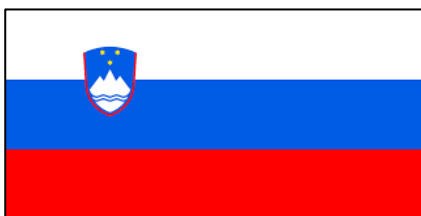
However, this requires that seniors have a mobile phone at their disposal, which provides this possibility. I suggest that after returning to "normal life", senior citizens' associations should offer help on how seniors can get technical and probably financial help for the purchase and use of a smartphone. It is not true that everyone already has such a mobile phone.

And for single people, communication with WhatsApp groups is a help against loneliness not only in times of quarantine.

I also missed the opportunity in the ORF television programme to watch cultural films in the afternoon and not only late in the evening. I think that it should also be possible for interested seniors to watch historical films in the afternoon, for example. In Austria there is a programme "Das Erbe Österreich" (The Austrian Heritage), in which the history of Austria is shown and one of the focuses is the Second World War. I think that such programmes are a good contribution to a better understanding of Europe. But with start times of such a program on television after 10 pm, not many seniors are reached. In quarantine a lot of television is consumed. Does it have to be in the entertaining and shallow area all the time?

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all the people who have helped us senior citizens and to all the people who have worked under difficult conditions for the benefit of the entire population. Maybe we should call on seniors to help the young people at this moment. We could help the little children to cope with their homework for school, maybe we could bake a cake for the young people who are not family members.

In short: to continue living together.



## **“We hope to meet again all the generations”**

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**Ernest Margon (Seniors N.Si)**

- *What are/were some of the main challenges during this crisis, especially for seniors?*

Seniors have been an endangered and sensitive group which was seen also in Slovenia as well as in other countries. It was a big problem, especially with older population. The biggest number of victims from the corona virus was among the people who stay in homes for the elderly. At the beginning there was a big challenge for all the institutions, hospitals, homes, volunteers ... because they did not have enough protective stuff, masks, .... In our community we organised volunteers – about 30 women, who were able to sew and had sewing machines so they made a lot of protective masks, which were made of washing material, and the masks could be washed and used again. It was also useful, because it was a quarantine and forbidden to move to other communities and parts of Slovenia. A lot of younger people offered their help to older to bring them the goods from the shop, from the pharmacy and some people who live alone got lunch every day. So it was well organised for older people to help them and also that they were not completely forgotten in isolation.

- *Are there positive solutions that have been put forward which should lead us also in the future?*

Yes, there were positive solutions. It was a lot of solidarity between generations. Volunteers, younger people, charity organisations worked practically day and night, psychologists offered their help by phone. A lot of seniors were included into sewing the protective masks. We cooperated with the local community and informed them if people needed the help or if they did not have a possibility of communication, especially, old people.

People started to go out to the countryside more often, we are lucky to live in such an area, we saw quite often that some people ( families with children) did not preserve the nature and threw the rubbish in the forest. We sent a notice on the Facebook and on local TV to warn those individuals, who had such a bad habit. We learned how to use modern communication devices, skype etc. to contact the relatives and friends in other places. We obeyed the authorities restrictions not to have contacts, so the quarantine was successful in the result. Let us hope that we have done a lot to beat the corona disease.

- *Are there particular stories you would like to highlight?*

A story of good practice was sewing the masks. There were many professional dressmakers, and ordinary women, who offered their help, it was even one male volunteer who was sewing masks.

There was a big intergenerational challenge, because especially the older generation has been endangered but at the same time we are still an active part of society. So it is necessary for the whole society, all the generations to respect the instructions of the health authorities and this will bring us positive results. We hope to meet again all the generations without such drastic restrictions. We wish that our life could be simple and calm with the care for the other, regardless age.



**„We are lucky that many members can use the internet.”**

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**Leena Jääskeläinen (2.05.2020)**

*What are/were some of the main challenges during this crisis, especially for seniors?*

- We (the old ones) have to stay at home/ indoors (a serious recommendation)
- There is no places open for meetings or meet anothers
- Libraries, swimhalls, traingrooms have been closed
- No restaurants open
- Not easy to get covid-19 test
- You are not allowed to meet children, grandchildren and other relatives (a serious recommendation)
- State level recommendation: do not hug neither to shake hands
- There have not been enough masks for normal use
- The worst: if you live in an elders home ( nursing home) and has got the virus, you have to stay alone in your room. Lots of old ones have died there.

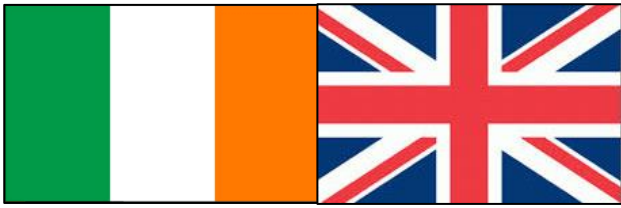
*Are there positive solutions that have been put forward which should lead us also in the future?*

- On the state level: everybody got a letter with facts on the covid-19 virus and the instructions how to handle through these limitations/restrictions
- On the municipal level: the official ones have taken a contact by phone to every person over 70 years
- Many shops have organized home delivering system or have the shop open from 07-08 to the old ones
- Lots of voluntary organisations are helping to do the shoppings and sending different programmes via internet
- Kansallinen senioriliitto: have very informative homepages. Lots of facts and ideas what to do. Our organisation have platforms for meetings and we are educating our members through the internet and to get more people to come with and also guide the members how to meet through internet in "cafeteria" or in certain "museum" or "concert hall"
- In Kansallinen senioriliitto 75 % of the members have e-mail address and 99% of them have a smartphone.
- Kansallinen senioriliitto have made for phones a member application including lots of facts, membercard, what's going on ....

*Are there particular stories you would like to highlight?*

Kansallinen senioriliitto have launched a project BRAVELY TO THE FUTURE to get more just retired people to come with. That slogan also give the guidelines for the association for the next 3 years. We have linked lots of gymnastics programs and also programmes how to study to use internet. We have a model how to organize through internet meetings on different levels.

We here in Kansallinen senioriliitto are lucky to have lots of members who can use internet. Because we started our internet project already some years ago. But still there are also, mostly the oldest ones, which are not interested (fear) to use it. That is a big challenge at least during this covid-19 time.



## **“I looked at the surprising difference in the treatment of older citizens under Covid-19 between the UK and Ireland.”**

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**Sean Hawkes**

Further to the Newsletter request for comments, I looked at the surprising difference in the treatment of older citizens under Covid-19 between the UK and Ireland.

In the Republic of Ireland, all citizens over 70 have been restricted to their homes since 13th March, in a measure entitled “cocooning”.

A group identified as “extremely medically vulnerable” included **all** over-70’s.

Guidance published on 5th May (<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/923825-guidance-on-cocooning-to-protect-people-over-70-years-and-those-extr/>) allowed them to “go out for a short walk for exercise beyond (their) garden or yard,” provided that they “adhere to 2 metres physical (social) distancing measures, avoid other people as much as possible, avoid touching people or surfaces, and wash (their) hands on returning home.”

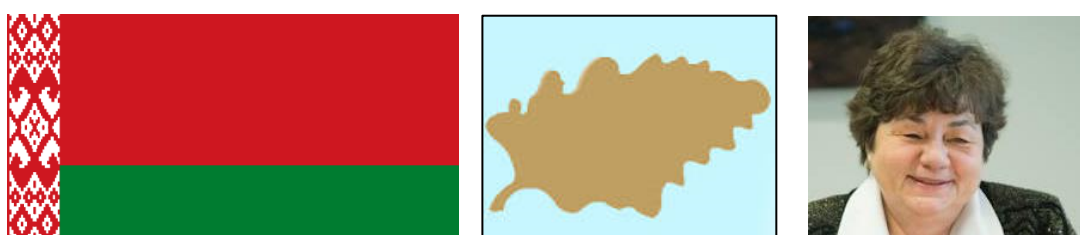
For households sharing accommodation with over-70’s, the advice is to “stay away from other people in your home most of the time in a well-ventilated room with a window to the outside that you can open; if you have to go into the same room with other people you should try to keep at least 1 metre (3 ft) and where possible 2 metres away from them.”

A five-phase road map published on 3rd May (<https://www.gov.ie/en/news/58bc8b-taoiseach-announces-roadmap-for-reopening-society-and-business-and-u/?referrer=/roadmap/>), states that “people who are cocooning can leave their homes up to 5 kilometres for exercise or a drive so long as they avoid all contact with other people” only after 18th May.

In contrast, in the UK there have been no age-based restraints (yet), with a lock-down from 23rd March allowing outings once a day for shopping or exercise.

However, Professor Sarah Harper, from the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing ([www.ageing.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ageing.ox.ac.uk)), stated in the Guardian newspaper today: “if you look at the mathematical models, you can see that **if we remove the over-70s** from everyday life we could slow down viral transmission and possibly stave off a second wave of Covid-19. But we would be doing something **purely on the basis of age**. Mathematical models are useful for describing different alternative scenarios but these then have to be considered in the light of societal acceptability by our policy-makers and politicians.” (source: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/10/100-days-later-how-did-britain-fail-so-badly-in-dealing-with-covid-19>).

The professor noted that other groups are also vulnerable, e.g. men are twice as likely as women to die, while 91% of those who died with Covid-19 had a pre-existing condition (UK Office for National Statistics, 16.04.2020). This would support the thesis that age-based cocooning is an inappropriate response.



## The impact of the coronavirus on senior citizens in Belarus

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*Tatiana ZELKO (28 APRIL)*

**Coronavirus.** According to the official information at present, there are 20168 cases of the coronavirus in Belarus (900-950 per day). There are 116 fatal consequences. But this information is underestimated in the opinion of the WHO and Belarusian society. For example: *11 deaths were confirmed in the Stolbtsy (small settlement in the region of Minsk), but official statistics say only about 7 deaths for the twenty-four hours at the same time...*

The government did not take drastic measures concerning quarantine despite the difficult epidemiological situation in the country. For example: the public events were not cancelled: parades on May 9; compulsory subbotniks (Soviet tradition of free employment by cleaning the territory); the lessons in the schools were not cancelled; Easter could still take place in the churches... As a result, our country seems to be living in a war-like situation: we get information from all parts of the country about new cases of illness and deaths. Meanwhile, medical staff generally received the necessary resources from representatives of public organizations, the business community and volunteers. But it is absolutely clear that Alexander Lukashenko is endangering the citizens of Belarus. He rejects the imminent danger in the country. - We remind you that this year (end of August) presidential elections will take place in Belarus. -



**Inflation.** Prices in the country have risen sharply since the beginning of the pandemic. For example, ginger and lemon have risen 4 times in price (ginger - 13.9 Euro for 1 kg, lemon - 3.5 Euro for 1 kg.). The common inflation rate for two months is 20 %, the national currency falls by 10 %. Retired people do not receive any compensation and their pensions are not indexed. Note: the average pension in Belarus is EUR 130.

**Relationship to the senior citizens during a pandemic.** The corresponding state organisation (mainly on a paid basis) and pro-government organisation (Red Cross) assist the retired during a pandemic (shopping). These structures assist lonely retirees and residents. According to official statistics, 100,000 seniors use the services of state organizations (but the number of lonely pensioners and residents is 870,000 and the number of pensioners is 2.5 million). In this context, Belarusian society calls on caring citizens to help their elderly relatives. In addition, there is neither coordination nor structure in the organisation of this help. Meanwhile, senior citizens have to deal with their difficulties mostly on their own (shopping, going to the pharmacy, etc.).

**Activity of the organization.** PUBP "NashaPakalenne" renews our way of sharing information and we plan to make short messages in English. Meanwhile, we plan to open an Internet site about our activity during this pandemic. For example, we want to join the volunteers who aim to help their elderly relatives, share information among retired people, learn about senior citizens' initiatives and how to support them, address the business world to provide support to the elderly, raise funds for humanitarian aid to the disadvantaged retired people. We hope that in the future our source of information can be a platform for discussion and cooperation between seniors from different countries!

**Call for help.** Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to carry out this activity at the moment. We have no projects & possibilities to continue the daily activity. We welcome your support and dissemination of this information. We also welcome any information about senior citizens in your country and the actions of society/government on these matters.