

# Porto.

**Speech 'Ageing communities – ensuring access to  
quality social care for older persons'  
Mayor of Porto, Mr. Rui Moreira**

16th October 2024  
Plenário do Conselho da Europa

Dear President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Dear Ambassador of Portugal to the Council of Europe, Excellency

Dear Head of Portuguese Delegation for the Congress

Dear congress members

Dear youth delegates

Ladies and gentlemen

I am delighted and deeply interested to be part of this session focused on ageing communities.

I would like to thank you for inviting the Municipality of Porto and myself, and congratulate the Council of

Europe for organising the 47<sup>th</sup> Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

I firmly believe that discussing population ageing is of crucial importance for the future of Europe. The demographic transition we are experiencing is undoubtedly one of the great challenges of our time.

The forecasts for ageing trends in Europe are concerning, not only due to the social risks they pose but also because of the economic pressures they bring.

The European Commission estimates that the costs of an ageing population will weigh around 27% on Europe's GDP in 50 years' time.

In fact, decent, active and healthy ageing is a priority investment area for the European Union.

This is an issue that concerns all EU citizens. Otherwise, we would allow the humanist principles of our civilisation heritage and the welfare standards of the European social model to deteriorate.

In 2070, more than 30% of Europeans will be over 65. This demographic change is jeopardising the sustainability of healthcare, the welfare systems, the

labour market, the socio-economic fabric and the family structure.

With almost 75% of European citizens living in urban centres, it is easy to understand the crucial role of cities in creating the conditions for decent, active and healthy ageing. In other words, to become ageing communities.

The longevity challenge heavily relies on municipal policies in areas such as social action and housing, health and the environment, urban planning and mobility, culture and leisure, among others.

Cities are expected to provide adequate health care and social support for the elderly. Ageing citizens expect products and services that promote civic participation among older people. They expect elderly-friendly places and settings. They expect equipment and transport that meet the longevity challenge.

Finally, they expect innovative policies to deal with the impacts of an ageing population, without jeopardising the future of new generations.

Population ageing is the result of medical, technological and social advances. However, the

existence of a large number of healthy and active elderly people is a challenge for communities.

In Portugal, 80 to 90% of elderly services and support are provided by spouses, adult children and other informal carers. However, as ageing is accelerating, this family and informal care-based model is no longer sustainable.

The 'new old age' highlights the advantages of ageing in place. This concept embodies the expectation of being able to grow old at home and in the community, safely, comfortably, with well-being and independence.

Ageing in place is nowadays the central principle of the active and healthy ageing paradigm advocated by the World Health Organisation.

Given its complexity, the longevity challenge requires cities to commit to this new community life paradigm.

A paradigm that guarantees older people the fundamental principles of dignity, autonomy, well-being and citizenship.

It is unacceptable for the elderly to be at such high risk of poverty, isolation and social exclusion.



It is unacceptable for the elderly to be excluded from civic participation, the labour market, and access to essential goods such as housing.

It is unacceptable for the elderly to be faced with buildings, facilities, public spaces and transport that are unsuitable for their physical characteristics.

It is unacceptable for the elderly to face intolerance, prejudice and discrimination every day.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Porto is Portugal's second largest city and is located in the north of the country. It has an area of

approximately 42 km<sup>2</sup> and a population of almost 240 thousand inhabitants.

Over the last decade, Porto underwent profound urban transformations. Those transformations were motivated by the city's growing attractiveness. Porto is attractive not only as a tourist destination, but also as a place to study, work, invest, or enjoy retirement.

Due to this attractiveness, the city of Porto is currently experiencing a population growth trend. Between 2013 and 2023, the number of local residents increased by 6.1%. This reversed the downward trend in the city's population.

Porto's population growth was largely due to the increase in foreign population. Between 2012 and 2022 this increase amounted to more than 200%.

The growth of immigrant communities has an effect on the age pyramid. Everything points to Porto witnessing not only a population growth, but also a rejuvenation. This is because immigrant communities have high fertility rates.

Moreover, many immigrant children are now studying in our schools and more and more foreign babies are being born in our hospitals, which brings hope for the city.

Despite these positive signs, the city of Porto has still not managed to halt the reversal of its demographic pyramid, similarly to the rest of Europe.

The over-65s already constitute 26% of our city's resident population, corresponding to around 60 thousand people, half of whom live alone.

Porto's ageing indicators are even above national average. The city has been hand-in-hand with the European demographic trend, as a result of a low birth rate combined with increasing longevity driven by medical, technological and social advances.

As we know, older people tend to have more health problems and disabilities than the remaining population, which is a natural consequence of getting older.

The elderly are therefore one of the city's most vulnerable social groups, as is the case in many other developed societies.

Aware of this socio-demographic reality, the Municipality of Porto included longevity in the city's agenda and began implementing policies exclusively aimed at the elderly.

Porto has been a member of the Network of Age-Friendly Cities since 2010. Notwithstanding the progress made in recent years, we feel the need to promote in-depth reflection on policies to promote active and healthy ageing in the city.

We developed it with our local partners: parish councils, schools, health centres, professional associations, charities and many other organisations.

The contributions of this wide-ranging collaborative network are reflected in the 'Porto Age-Friendly City' Action Plan, which we are implementing until 2025.

With this plan, the municipality hopes not only to mitigate the effects of the city's current ageing population, but also to avoid the future consequences of reversing the age pyramid.

The 'Porto Age-Friendly City' Action Plan lists a series of initiatives and projects to develop a decent urban environment for the elderly.

An urban environment that promotes the health and autonomy of the elderly. That ensures their quality of life and prolongs their social usefulness. That allows them greater civic participation and effective community life.

I believe the Municipality of Porto has all the conditions to make this strategy a reality. On the one hand, the city has good living standards, enjoys social harmony and has managed to preserve community ties, neighbourly relationships and the structural value of family.

On the other hand, the city has a capillary network of health, social solidarity and community support organisations which, together with the Municipality, guarantee the success of this plan.

Recent figures show that the 'Porto Age-Friendly City' Action Plan already has around 80 projects and more



than 30 local partners. Around 9,900 elderly people benefited from the actions of this plan in 2023.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In terms of decent, active and healthy ageing, the city of Porto wants to be at the forefront in Europe and in Portugal.

Since joining the Network of Age-Friendly Cities in 2010, the Municipality of Porto has demonstrated a firm commitment to promoting inclusive and welcoming urban settings for the elderly population.

Foreseeing the structural consequences of the demographic transition, the municipality activated its

resources and partners in a collective determination that ended up materialising in the Action Plan described here.

We are truly committed to strengthening the city of Porto as an ageing community, within the municipal social cohesion promotion policy.

I must stress that social cohesion is one of the three main pillars of the city's development strategy, along with culture and the economy. Our municipality is well aware of the vulnerabilities of Porto's social fabric, and has been seeking more efficient, integrated and participatory responses to those vulnerabilities.

We have the knowledge, critical mass, tools and resources to deal with the problems that an ageing population entails. We also count on the contributions of a network of experienced partners who are well aware of Porto's socio-demographic reality.

The human dignity, social inclusion and quality of life of our elderly must be fully guaranteed.

This is an unwavering duty of our society, and failure to fulfil it represents a step backwards in civilisation terms.

Thank you very much for your attention.