

Inclusive environments for all

The SPI CGIL's commitment to ageing women and men

Article 3 of the Italian Constitution states that all citizens have equal social dignity and are equal before the law and that it is the task of the Republic to remove economic and social obstacles, which, by limiting the freedom and equality of citizens, prevent the full development of the human person.

The accessibility, infrastructure and habitat (transport, housing and access) of Italian cities, as they stand today, in fact prevent this founding principle of substantive equality from being implemented with regard to elderly, disabled and dependent persons.

In Italy, in a few decades one third of the population will be over 65 years of age. There is not yet adequate social awareness of this profound change. With the increase in the number of people who will live longer, the quality of places will emerge in all its importance, referring to housing, neighbourhood relations, the system of proximity social and health services, cultural and transport services, etc.

Italian towns and villages have not been designed to meet the new needs imposed by the fragilities accompanying demographic change. Measures to improve the functional housing quality of dwellings, buildings and neighbourhoods still do not meet those aimed at supporting the needs for social inclusion, protection and independent living. The experience of the pandemic, although dramatic, has highlighted the limitations of the living environments of the frail population.

The Italian Pensioners' Union of the CGIL (SPI CGIL) calls on the relevant public institutions and private structures to urgently initiate a process of habitat adaptation that responds to emerging social needs, starting with those affecting the most vulnerable part of the population. This process demands that housing, neighbourhoods and cities be

designed with the aim of removing obstacles and achieving full social inclusion.

The SPI demands that the State and local authorities set up actions based on rigorous analyses of the needs of the elderly, from a gender perspective, starting with those of the dependent, aimed at guaranteeing the right of each person to be able to grow old at home among the affection of their loved ones, within the framework of a policy aimed at active ageing.

This policy takes the form of: a) the promotion of urban regeneration mechanisms and the reuse of the built heritage, implemented on the basis of local planning or programming and adequate design; b) new forms of solidarity-based co-housing at home for the elderly (senior cohousing) and c) intergenerational co-housing, in particular with young people in disadvantaged circumstances (intergenerational cohousing). These dwellings should be built, according to criteria of sustainable mobility and accessibility, within the framework of solidarity houses, family houses, family groups, flat groups and condominiums, open to family members, volunteers and external providers of supplementary health, social and sociomedical services.

The home plays a crucial role in the well-being of the elderly. The elderly spend a large part of their day at home alone; this can be traced back to their diminished physical and relational abilities, their precarious state of health and their increased vulnerability. The desire and the right of the elderly to grow old in their own home have a very special value in Italy considering that 80.3 per cent of them own the house they live in. In Italy, 54.9 per cent of elderly people's homes have an average age of more than 50 years and therefore have old rooms and systems, often not up to safety standards, with inadequate sanitary facilities, no lift, no heating and cooling systems (2.2 million households in energy poverty in 2016, 8.6 per cent of the total number of households).

Those present compound these elements of discomfort in the area of residence: usability of pavements and crossings; absence of basic services (toilets, parking); often-inadequate street lighting; rarefaction of local commerce; inadequate or absent transport; absence of information and assistance points; absence of health facilities for intermediate care.

The situation becomes particularly critical with regard to the approximately 4 million lonely elderly. Adding up the lonely elderly in peripheral areas and in small municipalities with less than 10,000 inhabitants, as many as 41.5 per cent not only live alone but also in sub-optimal urban conditions in terms of the provision of proximity and social health services.

The picture that emerges outlines a scenario in which housing conditions do not facilitate independent living for the elderly.

The SPI CGIL promotes a programme aimed at creating the conditions for elderly women and men to age in dignity and in their own homes, consistent with the guidelines suggested by the United Nations and the World Health Organisation with reference to Ageing in Place and age-friendly cities.