



**EUROPEAN SENIORS'
SUMMER ACADEMY 2026
24 – 26 September 2026
Nicosia, Cyprus**

INTRODUCTION

Migration and demographic change are among the defining challenges facing Europe today. Ageing populations, declining birth rates, and growing labour shortages are putting increasing pressure on economies and social systems, particularly in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, construction, and care services. In this context, migration should neither be seen as a miracle solution nor as a threat by definition, but rather as a phenomenon that must be managed responsibly, balancing economic needs, social cohesion, security concerns, and democratic trust.

At the same time, migration has an important geopolitical dimension, especially in the Mediterranean region, where instability, inequality, and humanitarian crises continue to shape migration flows. This raises fundamental questions about the balance between European solidarity and national sovereignty, as well as about Europe's responsibility in managing migration effectively and humanely. Successful integration policies are equally essential, as they can strengthen social and intergenerational cohesion by fostering participation, mutual understanding, and shared responsibility within increasingly diverse European societies.

Topics include:

- The Global and European Framework :
 - The role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Europe's position;
 - European regulations: how can EU solidarity on irregular migration and asylum and national sovereignty be balanced?
- Frontline regions
 - Cyprus, Greece, Italy and other 'borderlands' serve as physical 'gateways' on irregular migration and asylum to Europe;
 - How do frontline states bear the burden of a shared European challenge when internal solidarity may be declining?
- Integration and social cohesion:
 - In all countries, good practices have been developed to integrate newcomers; we learn from inspiring examples;
 - Which can be the role of seniors in integrating processes (vb DUO for a job; co-housing....) ;
- Migration and the labor market:
 - How can migration provide an answer to shortages in the labor market?
 - Integration processes of migrant-workers in the healthcare sector

Loneliness and social isolation are increasingly recognised as major social challenges affecting all generations, although they are particularly visible among older persons. Factors such as living alone, smaller family structures, urbanisation, and the growing digitalisation of society can weaken social bonds and reduce opportunities for meaningful human interaction. Beyond its emotional impact, loneliness can also have significant consequences for mental and physical well-being, social participation, and overall quality of life.

In this context, civil society organisations — including senior associations — play a vital role in strengthening social cohesion and community engagement. By encouraging active participation, promoting volunteering, and developing intergenerational programmes, these organisations help create connections between people and generations. They also contribute to mental well-being by fostering inclusion, solidarity, and a sense of belonging within increasingly individualised societies.

1. **Background and Rationale**

“Ageing is living” states the World Health Organization. Increased longevity is one of Europe’s greatest achievements — the result of improved healthcare, welfare systems, and living standards. Yet demographic change presents structural challenges that require coordinated European and national responses.

The European Union is confronted simultaneously with:

- Rapid population ageing
- Declining fertility rates
- Labour market shortages
- Increased migration pressures
- Rising risks of loneliness and social isolation

Cyprus, as an EU border state in the Eastern Mediterranean, is particularly affected by migration dynamics while also experiencing demographic ageing similar to the rest of Europe.

The **European Seniors’ Summer Academy 2026** in Nicosia will address two core dimensions of demographic change, in line with the ESU Yearplan and Strategic Workplan 2030:

1. **Migration as part of the response to demographic and labour market challenges**
2. **Combatting loneliness and strengthening civil society engagement**

The Academy will combine European and Cypriot perspectives, ensuring a balanced representation of speakers and participants (approx. 40 international and 100 local participants, with English–Greek interpretation).

2. **Alignment with the ESU Strategic Workplan 2030**

The Summer Academy reflects the ESU priorities:

- Promoting **active and healthy ageing**
- Strengthening **intergenerational solidarity**
- Enhancing **social cohesion**
- Supporting **sustainable welfare systems**
- Encouraging **civic participation of seniors**
- Defending European values: solidarity, subsidiarity, responsibility

The Academy provides:

- Policy-oriented debate
- Exchange of best practices
- Strengthening of European senior networks
- Structured dialogue between academia, policymakers, and civil society

3. **Alignment with the Wilfried Martens Centre Criteria**

The programme meets Martens Centre standards by:

- Addressing EU-level policy challenges
- Promoting Christian Democratic and EPP values
- Encouraging evidence-based policy discussion
- Including presentation of a recent Martens Centre publication on Cyprus
- Ensuring academic quality and geopolitical perspective

A dedicated session will present the latest Martens Centre publication on Cyprus, linking geopolitical realities, migration management, and demographic sustainability.

4. **Key Themes**

A. Migration and Demographic Change

Migration is neither a miracle solution nor a threat by definition — it is a policy instrument that must be responsibly managed.

Topics include:

- Can migration help fill labour shortages in healthcare, agriculture, construction?
- How can EU solidarity and national sovereignty be balanced?
- What is the geopolitical dimension of migration in the Mediterranean?
- How can integration policies strengthen intergenerational cohesion?

Cyprus as a border country offers a concrete case study.

B. Loneliness and Social Participation

Loneliness affects all generations but is particularly visible among older persons. Causes include:

- Living alone
- Digitalisation
- Small family units
- Urbanisation

Civil society organisations, including senior associations, play a crucial role in:

- Encouraging participation
- Creating intergenerational programmes
- Strengthening volunteering
- Promoting mental well-being

ORGANISATIONAL ELEMENTS

- 35 international participants
- 15 local participants
- Plenary & panel format
- Academic-policy balance
- Similar European/Cypriot speaker representation

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

- Policy recommendations linking demography and migration
- Best practice exchange on combatting loneliness
- Strengthened European senior network
- Increased visibility of ESU and partners
- Enhanced cooperation with Cyprus stakeholders

FURTHER READING

- [World Migration Report 2026 | IOM Publications Platform](#)
- [Comments Papers | European Council on Refugees and Exiles \(ECRE\)](#)

NICOSIA, 24-26 SEPTEMBER 2026

Thursday, 24 September 2026

Official Opening

16.00 Opening Ceremony (Plenary) – Overall Moderator Patrick Penninckx, Secretary General ESU

Online Address

- **Nikos Christodoulides**, President of the Republic of Cyprus

Welcome Addresses

- **Antonios Demetriades**, President, OPREPO
- **Charis Georghiades**, President, Glafkos Clerides Institute
- **Michalis Hadjipantelas**, MEP
- **Stefaan Vercamer**, President, ESU
- **Clea Papaellina**, Deputy Minister of Social Welfare of the Republic of Cyprus
- **Anita Demetriou**, Leader, Democratic Rally (DESY)
- **Maria Molina**, Policy Director EPP

17.30 Introductory Plenary

“Ageing is Living: Demographic Change in Europe and Cyprus”

Introducer : **An Hermans**, Honorary President European Seniors Union

Objective: Frame the two thematic pillars of the Summer Academy

Keynote Speech: **Geertrui Mieke De Ketelaere**:

“Alone Together? Seniors, Loneliness and the Rise of AI Companions” » - an inspiring and thought-provoking session

19:00 Welcome Reception and Dinner

Friday, 25 September 2026

Subtheme 1: Migration and Demographic Sustainability

09.00 Opening Session – setting the scene

« *Geopolitical Context and Europe’s Demographic Challenges* »

Speaker : **Vit Novotny**, Wilfried Martens Center

“*The Global & European Framework: the international playing field according to the UN (IOM) and Europe’s role as a global actor*”.

Speaker : **Rob De Lobel**, International Organisation on Migration

Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe “*Frontline States: the role of the Council of Europe in implementing the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum*”

Speaker: **Ms Erotokritou Christiana**

« *50 Years Since the Turkish Invasion, 20 Years Since Accession to the EU* »

Speaker: **Antonis Klapsis**, Wilfried Martens Center, Assistant Professor of Diplomacy and International Organization at the Department of Political Science and International Relations of the University of the Peloponnese.

Focus :

- Cyprus in geopolitical context
- Migration pressure in Eastern Mediterranean
- Demography and EU solidarity

10.30 Coffee Break

11.00 High Level panel Migration: One Strategy to Cope with Demographic Change?

Key Note Speaker : **Mr Nikos Nouris**, Former Minister of the Interior, Cyprus

Panelists :

- **Victor Paul Dobre**, Former Minister of Administration, Romania, Executive Committee ESU
- **Peter Mach**, Vice-President ESU
- **Eija Alakangas**, Executive Committee ESU or Kari Kantalainen, Finnish Union of Seniors

Moderator: **Patrick Penninckx**, Secretary General ESU

Debate questions:

- Can migration offset labour shortages?
- How to protect external borders while ensuring humanitarian responsibility?
- What is fair burden-sharing?

13:00 Closing of the morning session – Lunch

14.30 Working groups and Workshop

1. *Labour market and ageing*

Panelists :

- **Stefaan Vercamer**, President ESU
- **Guy Modert**, Executive Committee ESU
- **Sarah Loriato**, Policy Officer on Employment and Social Inclusion, AGE Platform Europe

2. *Integration & intergenerational dialogue*

Panelists :

- **Gnanam Seminck**, Treasurer ESU
- **Kalliopi Marangaki**, Vice-President ESU, Greece
- **Sophie Michaelides**

3. *EU solidarity and border states*

Panelists :

- **Antonios Demetriades**, Vice-President ESU, Cyprus
- **Tatsiana Zelko**, Nasha Pakalenne, Belarus
- **Georg Männik**, Vice President ESU, Estonia

4. *Parallel Workshop :*

Active Steps towards Wellbeing, Movement for Connection and Belonging, as a method to fight loneliness. (English/German)

Workshop Leader : **Ms Gordana Matolek**

16.00 Reporting Back (Plenary)

17.00 Conclusion Day 2 by Overall Moderator Patrick Penninckx, Secretary General ESU

XX.XX Gala Dinner

Saturday 26 September 2026

Subtheme 2: Combatting Loneliness – The Role of Civil Society

09.00 Keynote Session

“Understanding and Preventing Loneliness in Ageing Societies”»

Dr. Jasper De Witte, KU Leuven

«A world perspective on health consequences »

Yongjie Yoni, World Health Organisation Europe (WHO)

Topics :

- Health consequences
- Social determinants
- Digitalisation
- Intergenerational solidarity

09.30 Round Table

Health and Civil Society Solutions

Panel:

- **Dr. Cor Spreeuwenberg**, Vice-President ESU – health perspective
- **Philippe Seidel**, AGE Platform Europe (tbc)
- **Prof. An Hermans**, Honorary President ESU – role of civil society
- **Dr. Marina Polycarpou**, Nicosia General Hospital

Focus:

- Volunteerism
- Health consequences
- Intergenerational mentoring
- Community-based initiatives

10.45 Coffee break

11:15 Interactive Session

Format: Structured participant exchange

Participants share best practices from their countries with Cypriot associations

- **Red Cross Cyprus**
- **Demos Antonio**, Cyprus Third Age Observatory

Moderator : **Kalliopi Marangaki**, Vice-President ESU

12.30 Closing Session

Conclusions by :

- **Stefaan Vercamer**, President ESU
- **Dr. Marina Polycarpou**, Nicosia General Hospital
- **Antonios Demetriades**, President, OPREPO

13.00 Lunch

Optional cultural visit, Guided Tour in Nicosia organised by OPREPO (walking shoes required)

Guide : **Ms Loizidou**

Evening : participants who have enrolled for the « Walk of Love » of the following day : free evening (at own expenses)

Sunday 27 September 2026

Walk of Love – Foini



Participants are invited to join the annual Walk of Love in Foini (Troodos region). A bus or minivan will collect participants at a central place in Nicosia (Hilton Park Hotel). Lunch provided by OPREPO. Return to Nicosia by 5 PM.

This symbolic activity reinforces:

- Active ageing
- Community spirit
- Intergenerational solidarity
- Health and well-being

Participation is optional.