



Mayor Gianni Fostiropoulos
Municipality of Palaio Faliro

EMPOWERING AGEING POPULATIONS: BRIDGING GAPS IN DEMENTIA, DISABILITY, AND CO-MORBIDITY CARE

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1. Introduction: progress highlights & international meeting insights

by Anthony Polychronakis, City of Rotterdam, project coordinator

Project progress & highlights from the 2nd Transnational Partner Meeting where do we stand and where are we going?

The SACRED project, led by the City of Rotterdam, brings together a dynamic network of universities, public institutions, and care organisations from across Europe – including partners from Italy, Spain, Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Greece.

Our shared mission? To develop a cutting-edge e-learning platform tailored for students and healthcare professionals. This platform will focus on enhancing care for older adults living with dementia, disabilities, or multiple chronic conditions. By harnessing digital tools and evidence-based practices, SACRED is paving the way for a more skilled, better-prepared caregiving workforce across Europe.

In this second edition, we take you inside the **2nd Transnational Partner Meeting** – exploring the key outcomes, collaborative efforts, and next steps that are shaping the future of older adults care training.

From **May 25 to 31**, the SACRED consortium gathered in **Greece** for an enriching field experience hosted by our Greek partner **Alterra Vita**, with visits to both **Palaio Faliro (Athens)** and **Syros Island**. These study visits were a powerful showcase of how community-based and faith-based initiatives can offer holistic, person-centered care for older adults. These visits highlighted the vital role of local governments in fostering healthy, active ageing.

Palaio Faliro: community at the heart of care

In the seaside municipality of **Palaio Faliro**, we were warmly welcomed by **Mayor Giannis Fostiropoulos** and **Vice-Mayor Giannis Arkoumanis**. The group visited:

- **The new municipal library**, a beautifully repurposed space combating social isolation among older adults.
- **KAPI (Centre for Open Protection of Older Adults)**, a vibrant hub where seniors engage in activities, receive care, and build meaningful connections within the local community.



Visit to KAPI, Palaio Faliro, May 26 2025



Visit to Municipal Library, Palaio Faliro, May 26 2025

Syros: Blending Tradition, Compassion, and Innovation

On **Syros Island**, the team experienced both traditional and advanced models of care:

- At the **“Panagia tis Elpidas” Rest Home**, hosted by the **Sisters of Mercy Monastery**, we observed a serene yet dynamic elder care environment. Our hosts, **Sister Melani, Speranza**, and **Leonidas**, guided us through the elegant facilities — including the chapel, gym, and communal areas — where spiritual and physical care go hand in hand.
- At the **General Hospital of Syros**, the consortium was introduced to **OPPSY**, the **Integrated Psychogeriatric Support Intervention**. This program, under the leadership of **Professor Antonios Politis** and coordinated by **Mr. Efkarpidis** and his team, uses digital platforms to connect patients in remote areas with psychiatric support and pharmaceutical care — bridging urban-rural care gaps across Greece.

Consortium Days in Syros: Reflecting, Refining, and Planning Ahead

The study visits were followed by 2.5 days of intensive collaboration at Altera Vita’s office in Manna, Syros — providing space for project partners to reflect on achievements and map out next steps:

- **Day 1** focused on updates from Needs Assessment, Evidence-Based Interventions and Communication & Dissemination
- **Day 2** featured **working group sessions** on:
 - The launch of the **GAP Analysis**, led by **Polibienestar Research Institute of Valencia**
 - A **Needs study** for SACRED’s future **E-Learning Database**.
 - Strategic alignment of communication plans.
- **Day 3** was looking ahead with **planning issues**, including confirming the next in-person consortium meeting: **Valencia, Spain | November 25-27, 2025**.



SACRED project Team in Palaio Faliro, May 26 2025

2. Editorial: research insights: needs and context analysis, good practice database

Experts contribution:

- *Dr. Julie Vanderlinden, PhD - Odisee University of Applied Sciences, Belgium;*
- *Dr. Canan Ziylan & PhD & Judith van Zwienen, MSc - Rotterdam University of Applied Sciences.*

Bridging the gaps in the care for older adults with dementia and multi-morbidity: Insights from the SACRED needs assessment

By Julie Vanderlinden

In a rapidly ageing Europe, the SACRED project has taken a bold step forward. Through a meticulous needs assessment across six diverse pilot sites—**Rotterdam (Netherlands), Syros (Greece), Flanders (Belgium), Treviso (Italy), Tenerife and Valencia (Spain)**—the project has unearthed the real-world challenges and aspirations of professionals, students and older adults navigating the complex terrain of integrated care for older adults with dementia and multi-morbidity.

A triangular perspective of professionals, students, and older adults

The assessment engaged 57 professionals, 34 students, and 31 older adults across all **six pilot sites**, each offering a unique lens on care delivery. **Professionals**, while generally well-versed in integrated care, highlighted gaps in psychiatric knowledge and emotional support strategies. **Students**, though enthusiastic, often felt underprepared for the emotional and behavioral complexities of dementia care. **Older adults**, voiced appreciation for personalized care but called for better coordination and communication among health providers.

Integrated care is more than a buzzword

Across all sites, integrated care was defined as a holistic, multidisciplinary approach—one that respects the medical, psychological, social, and emotional dimensions of ageing. Yet, implementation in practice varied. In Syros (Greece), professionals cited geographic isolation as a barrier. In Treviso (Italy), cultural stigma complicated care. In Rotterdam (The Netherlands), the STIP method—a structured, interdisciplinary care model—emerged as a beacon of best practice.



At home

The role of informal caregivers

A recurring theme was the **critical yet under-supported role of informal caregivers**. Many feel overwhelmed, under-informed, and emotionally drained. Professionals and students alike called for better training and systemic support to engage caregivers as true partners in care.

Learning to care, caring to learn

When it comes to education, both professionals and students crave **interactive, practical learning**. E-learning is welcomed—if it's engaging, with methods like simulations, case studies, and real-world scenarios bringing concepts to life. The upcoming SACRED e-learning platform aims to deliver just that: a dynamic, evidence-based toolkit for building competence in integrated care.

What's Next?

The SACRED needs assessment serves not just as a report, but as a strategic roadmap and practical guide for the next phases of the SACRED Project specifically, the gap analysis and the creation of the e-learning platform.

It calls on **policy makers, educators, and care organisations** to invest in training, to support interdisciplinary collaboration and to prioritize the voices of older adults and their caregivers. Because integrated care isn't just a model, it's a mindset.



Visiting a nursing home in Belgium

Research Insights from the SACRED Project

By Judith van Zwielen & Canan Ziylan

A valuable step in the project has been the development of an extensive **evidence-based practice database**, which brings together:

- 21 interdisciplinary guidelines
- 11 interdisciplinary methods
- 15 interdisciplinary interventions

These resources were collected across **six European regions** and selected for their relevance, effectiveness, and adaptability. They reflect a wide variety of promising approaches in areas such as psychosocial interventions, caregiver support, and dementia-friendly environments.

Examples include:

- Guidelines such as the **ESPEN** on “Nutrition in Dementia”, the Flemish Dementia Plan, and national diagnostic care pathways for dementia.
- Interdisciplinary methods like the **STIP**-method “Personalized Integrated Stepped-Care Method to Prevent and Treat Neuropsychiatric Symptoms in Persons With Dementia”. Multidisciplinary models for supporting home-dwelling older adults and their caregivers.
- Interventions such as *cognitive behavioral therapy*, *behavioral therapy* and *system therapy*.



Research team work

Why context matters

It is essential to understand how health and social care systems operate in each country. Structures, funding models, referral pathways, and professional roles vary greatly.

Cultural values, such as the role of the family and attitudes toward ageing, also shape care delivery. Resource availability (e.g., home care, dementia services) differs significantly. Tailoring learning content to these local realities ensures that learners receive relevant, practical, and realistic guidance.

For these reasons, each SACRED partner conducted a **context analysis**, examining how care for older adults is organised in their region. This included demographic trends, legal frameworks, funding systems, care structures, and cultural norms. The results were synthesised into a **comparative report on ageing, frailty, and care systems across Europe**.

Mapping local good practices

In parallel with the development of the evidence-based practice database and the comparative context analysis, the SACRED project partners also collected and mapped local good practices from their regions. These include community-based initiatives, innovative care models, and practical tools that are being used in real-world settings.

From evidence to competencies

Drawing on both the evidence-based practice database and the comparative context analysis, the SACRED team formulated **ten key competencies**. These reflect the core knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to support older adults with dementia, disabilities, and complex needs.

They guide the development of SACRED's international learning activities:

1. Promote functioning by supporting autonomy and habituation, shaping the environment to fit individual needs and optimising quality of life.
2. Collaborate with others through multi-, inter-, or trans- disciplinary teamwork.
3. Apply psychiatric expertise, this is currently the most significant knowledge gap.
4. Work methodically, using structured and evidence-based approaches.
5. Integrate care by connecting physical, mental, and social dimensions.
6. Monitor implementation and the degree to which approaches are applied.
7. Know the person, their biography and relationships.
8. Use and measure indicators to evaluate outcomes and progress.
9. Explain life course principles at every level, past experiences shape current and future health and wellbeing.
10. Organise access to knowledge so that information is available when needed.

These insights and competencies form the basis for the next phase of SACRED: **the co-creation and pilot testing of international e-learning modules tailored to diverse care contexts across Europe**.



From left to right: Our host from the Municipal Library, Mayor Giannis Fostiropoulos - Municipality of Palaio Faliro, Willem Philipsen - City of Rotterdam, Vice Mayor Giannis Arkoumanis - Municipality of Palaio Faliro, May 26 2025

3. Stakeholder Reactions: Building Communities Through Integrated Care

Reflections from Otto Trienekens and Andrea Fitskie, Field Academy Rotterdam

The convergence of an ageing population, a general shortage of suitable housing, and a lack of staff in the care sector will pose a complex challenge for European cities in the coming decade. The challenge requires an **integrated approach to care, welfare, housing and living environment**. The policy of 'longer independent living at home' or 'ageing in place' is widely supported, but practice is obstinate. The interests of municipal government, care insurance companies, care providers, welfare providers, housing corporations, private investors and residents do not always match.

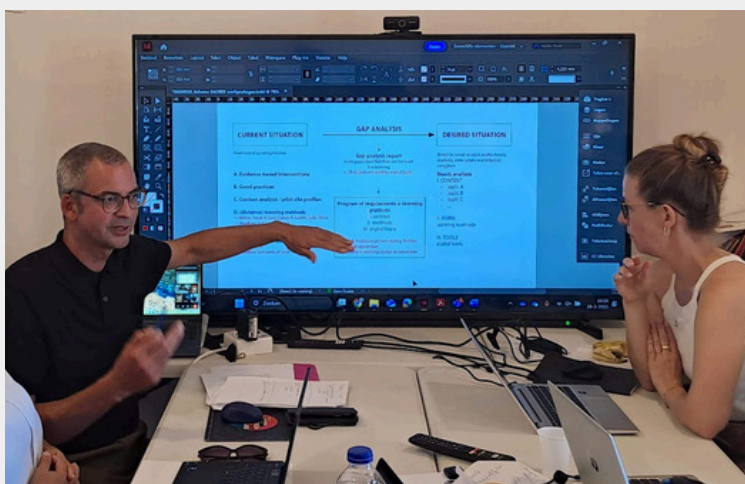
The SACRED Project: Practical and People-Centered Innovation

The SACRED project is at the forefront of this integrated care movement, with a special focus on the needs of people living with dementia. As demographic shifts continue to swell the number of older adults with complex needs, SACRED partners are working on two fronts: developing digital tools for caregiver education and mapping out real-world community care practices.

Field visits to Greece offered valuable insights into how community-oriented approaches can be both inclusive and effective. In particular, the cities of Palaio Faliro and Ermoupoli demonstrated how thoughtful public infrastructure and grassroots initiatives can work hand in hand to support older adults.

Community as Care: The Power of Reciprocity

One of the most striking takeaways from the field visits was the power of **community reciprocity**. Older adults were not treated solely as care recipients—they also actively contributed to community life. Facilities like the KAPI centers (Centres for Open Protection of Older Adults) embodied this philosophy. Far from being passive care settings, these centers foster a sense of mutual support. Older adults prepare meals, mentor others, and offer companionship. In some cases, even professional caregivers volunteer their time, blurring the line between formal and informal care and enhancing the richness of support available.



Otto Trienekens and Andrea Fitskie, Field Academy Rotterdam, SACRED TPM Syros

Designing Public Space for Connection and Mobility

In both Athens and Ermopouli, the design of public space emerged as a critical enabler of ageing in place. Investments in shaded walkways, well-placed public benches, and accessible transport options do more than improve comfort—they create daily opportunities for movement, interaction, and social engagement. Urban design became a tool not just for accessibility, but for building connected, caring communities.

Libraries, community centers, and older adults care facilities became more reachable and inviting thanks to simple but effective measures: planting trees for shade, improving sidewalks, and integrating transport networks. These investments were not just about infrastructure—they were about inclusion, dignity, and autonomy.

Creative Caregiving: Theatre, Role Play, and Dance

Innovative training methods also emerged from the field visits. In Ermoupoli, techniques like theatre, role play, and dance were used to engage individuals with dementia. These approaches not only provided meaningful activity for participants but also helped caregivers build empathy and emotional intelligence, key ingredients for high-quality, person-centered care.

Towards a Broader Vision for Ageing Well

The lessons from Greece underscore a critical truth: sustainable **older adults care is not just about clinical services. It is about place-making, education, community involvement, and aligned policy.** As SACRED continues its work, these experiences will inform the development of its e-learning platform and its wider vision for enabling ageing with dignity and purpose across Europe.



Creating connections

4. Advisory Board Dialogue

"On the Needs Analysis" – insights by Karel Haga, chair of the SACRED Advisory Board, Board Member of OSO, the foundation for Senior Citizens' Organisations in Rotterdam.

The aim of the SACRED project is to develop an e-learning platform and e-learning modules for students and professionals in the field of dementia and multimorbidity/disabilities. There are several steps in this project. The Needs Analysis is a part of the project in the direction of the GAP-Analysis. The Gap between what is and what should be available for these two groups. The Need-Analyses is an important base for the development of the e-learning platform and the e-learning modules.

The Advisory Board was asked to comment on the Needs Analysis of the SACRED project. We studied the concept and discussed the Needs Analysis.

An important point is that the Needs Analysis of the pilots should be analyzed in the context of the present and the future in Europe, for example:

- The trend towards much more community care for older adults with dementia, disabilities and multimorbidity. With a large role for informal care and support from the society/neighborhood too. What will be the focus of the e-learning?
- The increasing role of technology in care for the older adults. Which development can be expected in the nearby future and what are the implications of these developments for the e-learning of students and professionals?

The definition of integrated care is crucial and should be examined. Integrated care in community or neighborhood care is very different from nursing homes. With implications in terms of focus and content for the modules. Furthermore, there is an opportunity to strengthen the project by more centrally integrating the perspectives of patients and informal caregivers. How do you want to incorporate their wishes in the e-learning modules?

Our general conclusion is that we expected a more clear storyline towards the modules of the e-learning platform.

The Advisory Board sees its role as a 'critical friend' of the SACRED project. Our aim is to improve the project with our advices. The members are from different countries and are both professionals and experts by experience.



Karel Haga, chair of the SACRED Advisory Board

5. SACRED Going Local: Greece

Innovation in mental and cognitive healthcare for ageing population: the INTRINSIC project. Prof. A.M Politis MD, PHD, Professor, 1st Department of Psychiatry Division of Geriatric Psychiatry, Eginition Hospital, NKUA

Prof. Antonios Politis



Communities in low-resource areas in Greece are ageing and older adults mental and cognitive health services are not easily accessible in such communities. The Ministry of Health and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (Division of Geriatric Psychiatry) in collaboration with Patras University and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki have been working to link public primary health services with the tertiary psychogeriatric services aiming to integrate old age mental health and public health and to increase awareness for old age mental health in remote areas.

INTEgRATED InterVeNtion of pSychoGeriatric Care (INTRINSIC) services is a network of collaborating primary healthcare centers and geriatric psychiatry units of University Hospitals in order to facilitate early detection, monitoring and management of mental (old age depression, anxiety) and cognitive health (MCI and dementia) among older adults.

INTRINSIC, established in 2022, is structured around an ecosystem of innovative and easy to use information systems. This technological pillar of the program aims at the electronic interconnection of benefiting populations in remote areas with specialised scientists in psychogeriatric with the important mediation of local health providers.

The technological pillar is a digital platform that integrates:

- (i) Old Age Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System a comprehensive digital surveillance system for cognitive, behavioral, and mental health “risk factors” in older adults;
 - (ii) an innovative System of Telehealth,
 - (iii) SENSE-cog Greece, an auditory and vision assessment,
 - (iv) M-PATH, a pragmatic psychotherapeutic and psychosocial intervention based on problem adaptation therapy,
 - (v) a sophisticated e-training system for the members of the program offering self-paced learning courses and webinars in state of the art psychogeriatric topics
 - (vi) a community involvement, according to the standards of "patient and public Involvement", in designing and adjusting the services to local community needs.
- In the period 2022-2025 more than 1200 people has been assessed in 11 primary healthcare centers and communities through HE.R.M.E.S. digital Platform.



SACRED Project team at “General Hospital” of Syros, May 30 2025

INTRINSIC in the Island of Syros

Syros is part of the Cyclades Island group in the Aegean Sea with 6,642 residents aged 60years or older and lacking of old age mental health services. The INTRINSIC in the Island of Syros runs The Center for Interconnected Psychiatric Support (CIPSY) based at the General Hospital of Syros. The CIPSY focuses on the assessment, treatment, and monitoring of older adults’ mental and cognitive health through the CIPSY’s memory clinic. The CIPSY’s memory clinic is run by three registered nurses and collaborates with the geriatric psychiatry unit of the 1st Department of Psychiatry of the NKUA of Athens, which is based at the Eginition University Hospital. 232 individuals have undergone psychogeriatric assessment, and additional interventions are implemented, such as Problem Adaptation Therapy (PATH):

A non-pharmacological psychotherapeutic intervention targeted at older adults experiencing depression and anxiety disorders, many of whom are caregivers of people with dementia, individuals with mild cognitive impairment or subjective memory complaints.

- Memory Enhancement Groups: these groups are designed for older adults with mild memory impairment. Based on the severity of their condition, participants are assigned to one of three groups, engaging in structured activities to improve attention, critical thinking, verbal expression, and executive functioning.
- Caregiver Schools: these are interactive, three-week seminars held three times per year, targeting both formal and informal caregivers. The sessions aim to enhance caregivers’ knowledge of day-to-day patient care while also fostering their mental well-being through self-care strategies. Awareness-raising campaigns and community screening to detect early cognitive decline

In conclusion, the INTRINSIC program represents an innovative, person-centered model of care that bridges the gap between remote communities and specialised psychogeriatric services. By leveraging digital technologies and encouraging the active involvement of both patients and caregivers, the program promotes equitable access to mental health care for the older adults, ultimately improving quality of life and social cohesion.

The highly positive evaluation of the collaboration between primary, secondary, and participating tertiary health care services highlights a pathway toward a holistic, sustainable, and meaningful care model for all, regardless of geographic location.



Code	Red flags	Date	Recording from
HU106-0186	4 0 1 0 0 0	Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at 9:58 a.m.	Christina Katsapi
HU106-0185	4 0 0 0 0 0	Tuesday, May 13, 2025 at 1:36 p.m.	Nun Maria
HU106-0184	4 0 0 0 0 0	Tuesday, May 13, 2025 at 6:42 a.m.	Christina Katsapi
HU106-0183	0 0 0 0 0 0	Friday, May 9, 2025 at 9:59 a.m.	Christina Katsapi
HU106-0182	0 0 0 0 0 0	Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 3:07 p.m.	Angeliki Elefthera
HU106-0181	0 0 0 0 0 0	Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 2:32 p.m.	Angeliki Elefthera
HU106-0180	4 0 0 0 0 0	Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 1:56 p.m.	Christina Katsapi
HU106-0179	0 0 0 0 0 0	Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 1:32 p.m.	Christina Katsapi
HU106-0178	4 0 0 0 0 0	Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 1:02 p.m.	Angeliki Elefthera
HU106-0177	0 0 0 0 0 0	Wednesday, May 7, 2025 at 12:11 p.m.	Angeliki Elefthera

SACRED Project team at “General Hospital” of Syros, May 30 2025

The KAPI of the Municipality of Syros, Ermoupolis

An example of good practice in Integrated Care for older adults

On Thursday, May 29, 2025, the Open Protection Center for older adults (KAPI) of the Municipality of Syros Ermoupolis had the special honor to host the team of the European program SACRED that was in Syros at that time under the hospitality of the Cyclades KOINSEP "Altera Vita".

The visit took place in the context of the training seminar on Integrated Care for older adults, which is implemented under the responsibility of the "Gennimatas" Vocational Training Center of the South Aegean Region and under the supervision of Mr. Haris Vekris, Member of the Board. The training seminar lasted from December 2024 to May 2025, for a total of 130 hours and was attended by 25 caregivers of patients with dementia living in Syros.

The visiting friends actively followed the training process, showing keen interest and recognising the added value of the program.



Study visit to KAPI, Syros, May 29 2025

The structure of the seminar consisted of three main sections:

1st Module – Introduction to Geriatric Care (33 hours): This module aimed to introduce the trainees to the basic principles of older adults care, the normal changes of ageing, the most common diseases, and the management of chronic diseases, aiming at safety, independence, and active ageing.

2nd Module – First Aid and Accident Prevention (30 hours): This module focused on fall prevention, safe home layout, and immediate first aid in emergencies, enhancing the protection of older adults in the home environment.

3rd Module – Care of Patients with Dementia and Caregiver Support (66 hours): In this section, the nursing and psychosocial care of dementia patients, the strategies for managing neuropsychiatric symptoms, and the psychological empowerment of caregivers were analysed. At the same time, training was provided in memory enhancement techniques and creative activities aimed at older people with or without dementia.

It is worth noting that the approach of the educational program was interdisciplinary as the team of trainers consisted of specialist doctors, nurses, social workers, psychologists, and health visitors, precisely to analyze the issue of Integrated Care for the older adults through the perspective of the sciences that primarily participate in their care.

The presence of the SACRED consortium at the KAPI of Ermoupolis was an important opportunity to exchange views and experiences in the field of older adults care.



SACRED Project consortium at the KAPI of Syros, May 29 2025



Visit to the KAPI: SACRED Project team, May 29 2025

Hermitage: Retirement homes of the "Sisters of Mercy"



Retirement homes of the "Sisters of Mercy"

In the framework of local good practice in Syros, we had the opportunity to visit the Hermitage "Panagia tis Elpidas" of the Holy Monastery of the Sisters of Mercy, which is one of the oldest care institutions for older adults in Syros. We visited the Hermitage at our request to Abbess Sister Melani, which was kindly and promptly approved by her and the Board of Directors, for which we are truly grateful!

During our visit, we had the opportunity to meet the staff, learn about the institution's operating methods, its beneficiaries, and the wide range of activities it offers. We were also given a tour of the gym and other facilities.

The excellent organisation, the beauty of the space, with its beautiful and welcoming courtyard and the view of the sea, the Monastery Chapel for the care of the spiritual life of the beneficiaries, but also the infrastructure with living areas and kitchen, with all the employees welcoming us with a warm smile, excited us and entered our hearts!



SACRED Project team at the Retirement home of the "Sisters of Mercy"



Retirement home of the "Sisters of mercy" May 30 2025

What truly sets the Hermitage in Syros apart is the deeply human-centered care offered to its residents.

Special thanks to the Sisters, to all the staff and especially to Speranza and Leonidas for the hospitality in the event hall, with a video presentation and an extensive report on the operation of the older adults care unit "Hermitage "Panagia tis Elpidas"!



Retirement home of the "Sisters of mercy" May 30 2025

6. Focus-groups key findings: *Thinking global, going local:*

The Treviso pilot (Italy)

In February 2025, **ISRAA**, that manages the Treviso pilot site, organized 2 focus groups with social and health professionals and students and 5 interviews with older people. These activities were part of SACRED project and aimed at collecting information and opinions on different topics: integrated care, challenges facing health care and past experiences.

Furthermore, professionals and students were asked to focus on how they would like the e-learning platform to be.

In total were involved:

- 6 nursing, speech, physiotherapy and medicine students from the University of Padua
- 10 professionals (psychologists, speech therapists and physiotherapists) working at ISRAA's Specialist Centre for Dementia
- 5 older people who are residents of ISRAA and Borgo Mazzini Smart Co-housing



ISRAA focus group, Treviso, February 2025

The focus groups of **students and professionals** showed that the topic of integrated care is familiar to them, even if applying it in the hospital is not always easy. With respect to the main challenges students and professionals face in caring older people, it emerged that there are relational difficulties with informal caregivers, inadequate resources and high workloads, and a lack of preparation on how to manage and communicate with people with dementia.

From the e-learning platform, these 2 target groups expect not only theoretical but also practical knowledge, watching videos, but also studying and analysing some clinical cases. Both professionals and students expect the platform to be user-friendly and accessible.

Older people reported being satisfied with the care they receive and said they have no difficulty accessing it. They hope to maintain their independence, to be able to make decisions about their health and to be able to manage their emotions in case of difficult times.



ISRAA focus group, Treviso, February 2025

In conclusion, these activities were interesting and valuable for the SACRED project as they highlighted the needs and what matters and has value for the 3 target groups: healthcare professionals, healthcare students and Informal carers. Despite, **older people** will not be the direct users of the e-learning platform listening to their opinion was valuable to better guide the consortium partners on what kind of care they expect to receive.

In the coming months, the consortium will work hard to develop the platform and its content. The pilot phase of the project, which will be coordinated by ISRAA, will start in spring 2026!

The Valencia pilot (Spain)

Led by the **Polibienestar** Institute – University of Valencia, the Valencia pilot site of the SACRED project carried out interviews and focus groups in early 2025 to better understand current challenges in integrated care for older adults with dementia or multimorbidity and to co-design more effective training tools.

Healthcare and social professionals highlighted that integrated care should address not only medical, but also psychological, social, and environmental needs.

However, limited resources, lack of coordination between services, and time pressures often prevent this holistic approach from being implemented. They identified clear training needs in communication, emotional care, and interdisciplinary collaboration, and suggested e-learning formats that are modular, flexible, and include real case discussions.

Students in psychology and social work shared their frustration with a curriculum that is too theoretical and disconnected from real-world care. They often feel underprepared when facing complex cases during internships.

What they need most? Hands-on tools, simulations, and better preparation to deal with emotional and behavioural challenges in dementia care. They also emphasised the importance of learning how to support informal caregivers.

Older adults, interviewed individually, brought a deeply personal perspective. While most felt respected and medically well cared for, they reported fragmented services, emotional needs left unmet, and challenges in being actively involved in decisions about their care. Above all, they value independence, daily routines, and being listened to. Their message to future caregivers: improve communication, coordination, and personalised attention.

The input from all three groups will directly shape SACRED's upcoming e-learning platform for professionals and students and informal carers. **The goal is clear: more practical, human-centred training that reflects real-life needs and empowers future caregivers to deliver better, more compassionate care. While older adults won't be direct users of the platform, their voices remain essential—they remind us what matters most.**

What's next? The Polibienestar team continues working with SACRED partners across Europe to translate these findings into an innovative, co-designed learning experience. The platform will be piloted in 2026.



interview with health and social care professionals, Valencia
February 2025



interview with health and social care professionals,
Valencia February 2025

The Syros pilot (Greece)

Students' Perspectives

The focus group discussions with five postgraduate and graduate students in occupational therapy and related fields highlighted key insights into their understanding, experiences, and challenges regarding integrated care for older adults with dementia or multi-morbidity. Conducted in Athens, from Angeliki Sakellariou as part of the SACRED project, these sessions revealed a consistent perception that **integrated, person-centered care is largely missing in Greece's current system**. Participants described it as fragmented, outdated, and lacking structures to support vulnerable populations.

Students expressed a strong desire for holistic, personalised approaches that go beyond basic nursing care to include meaningful daily activities and functional engagement. Despite some isolated examples of good practice, they reported that care remains generalised, often dictated by resource shortages, time constraints, and a dominant medical model. Communication with informal caregivers was identified as a major challenge, with many caregivers either absent or resistant to change. Additionally, emotional and behavioral challenges in older adults are often inadequately addressed, with overreliance on medication instead of tailored psychosocial interventions.

Participants emphasised significant gaps between theory and practice, citing superficial theoretical knowledge, lack of materials, and high patient-to-therapist ratios as barriers. They also acknowledged personal competence gaps, particularly in communication and managing complex behavioural situations.



Students in Athens



*Aggeliki from
ALTERA VITA*

When it comes to learning, students strongly preferred experiential, interactive, and group-based methods. They valued e-learning when designed interactively and flexibly, especially through hybrid models combining live and self-paced content. **Key recommendations for the SACRED e-learning platform included case studies, video demonstrations, AI simulations, collaborative tools, and real-world applications** that integrate community involvement and caregiver engagement.

Overall, students called for more practical training opportunities, accessible digital resources, and systemic improvements to ensure truly integrated, compassionate care for older adults in Greece. The students highlighted significant gaps in the current care system for older adults in Greece, particularly in terms of integrated, person-centered care. They expressed a strong desire for more experiential and interactive educational tools, especially e-learning modules that incorporate real-world scenarios, case studies, and collaborative elements. Their insights will be instrumental in shaping the SACRED project's e-learning resources to better equip future practitioners and caregivers in delivering comprehensive, compassionate care.

Older Adults and Caregivers' Experiences

The focus groups and interviews conducted in Syros with older adults and an informal caregiver provided valuable insights into the lived experiences of individuals navigating dementia, multi-morbidity, and caregiving in Greece. These perspectives highlight both the strengths and significant gaps in current care systems, emphasizing the **urgent need for integrated, person-centered approaches**.

Older adults receiving care at the **INTRINSIC** unit in Syros generally expressed satisfaction with the treatment they received. They described their care as respectful, empathetic, and personalized, with healthcare professionals actively involving them in decision-making. Emotional well-being was closely linked to meaningful engagement through family time, hobbies, and community interactions. While some communication challenges arose due to memory issues or fatigue, these were minor and managed with patience. Participants suggested improvements such as better nurse training in dementia care and clearer signage for independence but overall felt supported, primarily by family.

In contrast, Litsa Pappa, an informal caregiver for her mother-in-law Rita and late sister-in-law Mimika—both diagnosed with dementia—shared a more complex reality. She emphasized the importance of holistic care that integrates physical, emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions. Despite her dedication and use of evidence-based strategies like sensory stimulation, memory exercises, and emotional connection, she faced significant systemic barriers. These included high financial costs (~€15,000 annually), lack of respite care, limited accessibility in public spaces, and societal stigma around dementia.

Litsa highlighted Rita's retained emotional memory and responsiveness to familiar stimuli, despite advanced cognitive decline. Non-verbal communication and observational skills were crucial in managing pain and discomfort. She praised compassionate healthcare providers, particularly the family doctor and home hospitalization services, but noted a lack of coordination among specialists and institutional support.



Litsa Pappa with her mother-in-law Rita, her aunt Mimika and her husband. Nikos walking with both of them in Syros

Both older adults and caregivers stressed the importance of dignity, empathy, and emotional connection in care delivery. Litsa offered practical advice for future healthcare workers, including the use of touch, humor, non-verbal communication, and multisensory engagement. She also advocated for specialized daycare centers, home modifications, financial aid, and caregiver education programs.

Together, these voices reveal a shared vision: a more integrated, community-based, and emotionally supportive care model that values both the individual and the caregiver. Their insights are instrumental in shaping the SACRED project's e-learning resources to better prepare students and caregivers for delivering compassionate, effective, and inclusive care.

Healthcare Professionals' Insights.

The focus group with six healthcare professionals—nurses, a rehabilitation nurse, and a social worker—working in dementia care at the General Hospital of Syros provided key insights into their understanding, experiences, and challenges related to integrated care for older adults with dementia or multi-morbidity. The participants emphasized that while integrated care is understood as a holistic, multidisciplinary approach addressing medical, psychological, social, and spiritual needs, its full implementation remains limited due to systemic barriers.

Professionals described integrated care as essential for ensuring personalized, coordinated support involving doctors, nurses, therapists, and caregivers. However, they noted that Greece lacks sufficient infrastructure, trained personnel, and resources to fully implement such models, especially on islands like Syros where access to specialists is limited. Despite this, some good practices were reported, such as the use of the PATH program for caregiver support and daily communication sessions involving patients and families in hospital settings.

Key challenges identified included:

- **Resource shortages:** Inadequate staffing, equipment, and funding.
- **Time constraints:** High patient-to-staff ratios limiting individualized care.
- **Knowledge gaps:** Limited training in psychogeriatrics, non-pharmaceutical interventions, and polypharmacy management.
- **Caregiver stress:** Emotional exhaustion, denial of illness, and lack of formal support systems.



*Apostolos and Eleftheria from
team OPSY-General Hospital
of Syros*

Communication with older adults was often hindered by sensory impairments, cognitive decline, and language barriers. Professionals stressed the importance of empathy, simplified language, body language, and creating calm environments. They also highlighted the need for better education and awareness to reduce stigma around dementia.

When addressing emotional and behavioral challenges, participants preferred non-pharmaceutical approaches such as PATH therapy, structured routines, and understanding underlying causes like pain or medication side effects. Empathy and understanding cognitive changes were seen as central to effective interventions.

Involving informal caregivers was recognized as both crucial and challenging. Caregivers often lacked knowledge, faced emotional burnout, and had financial burdens. Solutions proposed included caregiver training programs, support groups, respite care, and better institutional support.

Participants acknowledged competency gaps in areas such as non-pharmaceutical interventions, psycho-emotional support, and ethical/legal aspects of dementia care. They expressed a strong interest in continuous education through seminars, online courses, peer discussions, and experiential learning methods such as role-playing and simulations.

They recommended that the SACRED e-learning platform include:

- **Theory on dementia, disability, and multi-morbidity.**
- **Non-pharmaceutical interventions and caregiver training modules.**
- **Ethical and legal guidance.**
- **Interdisciplinary case studies.**
- **Interactive, multilingual content with live Q&A and community forums.**

Preferred formats were interactive, mobile-friendly, and accessible offline, with practical integration and expert supervision. Participants emphasized that e-learning should complement hands-on practice and be designed using plain language to ensure accessibility across educational levels.

In conclusion, professionals in Syros recognize the value of integrated, person-centered care but face significant systemic and practical barriers. Their insights highlight the urgent need for accessible, experiential, and interdisciplinary training tools to enhance skills and improve outcomes for older adults and their caregivers.



Apostolos and Eleftheria from team OPSY-General Hospital of Syros

The Rotterdam pilot (The Netherlands)

1. Older Adults: Balancing Care and Independence

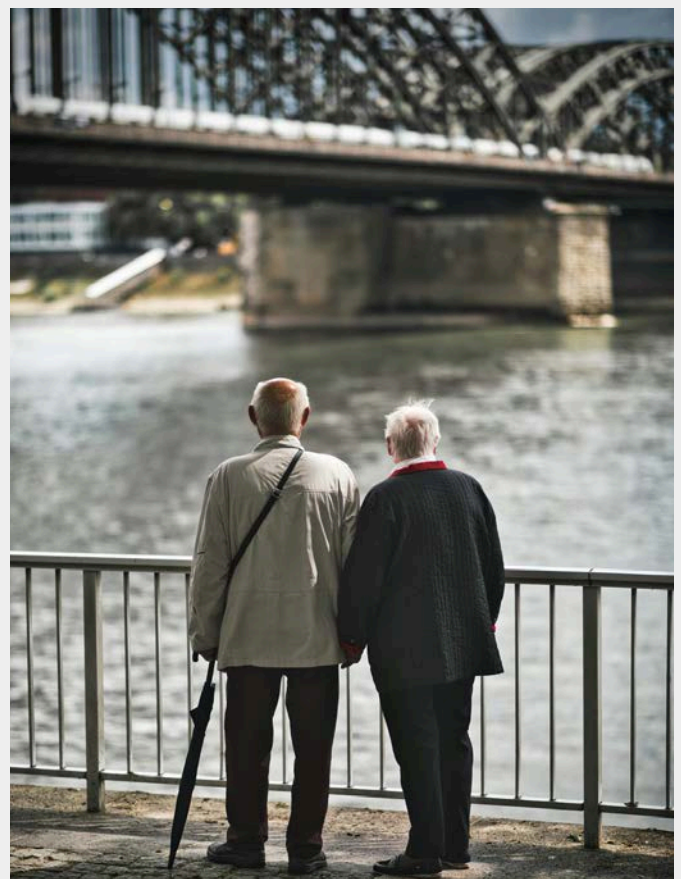
On the 12th of February 2025 interviews with five older adults with a dementia diagnosis were conducted at a nursing meeting place in Delft. All the people who attended this meeting centre had a dementia diagnosis, some in further stages than others. They were still living independently at home, often assisted by either their spouse or their children. All the participants in the research visit this centre at least one once week. They are provided with lunch, and they undertake activities, like taking a walk, puzzling and listening to music. All interviewees are between 81 and 92 years old. All interviews lasted between 15 to 35 minutes. The subjects that were discussed in the interviews are integrated care, the challenges participants experience, their daily activities, communication, care preferences and their care network. At the end the participant were free to give some general advice for health care professionals.

Despite their diagnosis, the older adults interviewed shared a clear and unanimous commitment to independence. They described themselves as “still healthy” and expressed limited reliance on medical professionals. Most contact their GP only when strictly necessary, and tend to avoid formal care unless the situation becomes critical. This self-reliant attitude is deeply linked to their identity and dignity.

Their accounts reveal mixed experiences with the healthcare system. While many appreciated the respectful and friendly attitude of doctors and staff, there were frustrations around lack of thoroughness or follow-up, particularly in cases involving chronic pain or complex needs.

Daily routines played a central role in preserving their sense of purpose. The meeting centre was not just a place for care, but also a hub for social engagement. Faith-based communities and neighbourhood connections further reinforced their emotional well-being. Most were not troubled by spending time alone, having developed personal strategies to cope.

The role of informal caregivers—primarily children—was crucial, although geographic distance sometimes limited availability. Some relied on alarm systems or meal delivery services to extend their independence. In their view, healthcare professionals should prioritize clear explanations, genuine listening, and timely responses. Above all, older adults want to be partners in their care, not passive recipients.



Quality of life and independence in old age

2. Students: Bridging the Gap Between Theory and Practice

On the 17th of February 2025 a focus group was conducted with five students from the University of Applied Sciences Rotterdam and the Erasmus University Rotterdam. The group consisted of students pursuing various healthcare fields, including nursing, physiotherapy, and medicine. Additionally, the group consisted of a good mix of gender, varying levels of study, and diverse forms of practical experience. The results are presented in four different sections: part one is dedicated to the students' view of integrated care, the second part consists of the challenges that students experience, the third part discusses their knowledge and experiences, and the last part is about their ideas for a future e-learning platform and their previous experience with working with e-learning modules.

The students described integrated care as a concept well-presented in theory, but inconsistently applied in clinical practice. They observed a fragmented reality where professionals work in silos, and key aspects of patient care—especially for older adults with dementia—are overlooked. In their view, truly integrated care must account not just for physical needs, but also for mental health and social participation.

Communication with patients and informal caregivers was highlighted as a weak point. While some training was offered, it was often generic and not tailored to the challenges of dementia. One physiotherapy student had to seek out additional training on his own initiative. The nursing curriculum appeared more balanced, combining clinical care with communication, though even that required experience to be effective.



Example of students working together

Preventive care emerged as another educational gap. Students noted that while lifestyle and diet are increasingly linked to cognitive decline, their programs rarely covered these topics in depth. They advocated for mandatory training on prevention and health promotion, particularly to counter the conflicting and unverified information found on social media.

As for e-learning, students were open to it—provided it was well-designed. They recommended a blended structure: a shared foundational module for all students, followed by discipline-specific content. Practical tools, interactive scenarios, and real patient narratives were considered essential to engagement. Rewards such as academic credit or professional points could further motivate participation.

3. Professionals: Managing Complexity, Seeking Coherence

On March 4th 2025, a focus group was held at the care organization Amarijn with the following participants: psychologist, nurse, video coach, nurse (level 3 certified caregiver), behavioural coach, physician, and well-being coach.

Professionals working in the field expressed a dual reality: internally, care teams function with reasonable cohesion, supported by frameworks like the STIP method (Personalized Integrated Stepped Care Method). However, external coordination—particularly with general practitioners or prior care settings—is often weak. This lack of information continuity makes it difficult to build accurate and timely treatment plans, especially when behavioural issues are involved.

Participants emphasized the growing complexity of client needs, combined with acute workforce shortages and high workload. Many new hires are underqualified, and few receive adequate training on emotional or behavioural care. This results in an overly task-driven approach, where relational and person-centered care is deprioritized.

Communication with families is another complex area. While family involvement is encouraged, it often clashes with differing expectations or emotional fatigue. Professionals noted the need for early and structured involvement of caregivers, supported by clear information and guidance on how they can contribute meaningfully to the care process.

Regarding training, in-person formats were strongly preferred, especially those that encourage discussion and practical engagement. E-learning, on the other hand, was accepted if interactive, concise, and grounded in real-life application. Topics such as trauma, abuse prevention, sensory processing, and reflective practice were seen as urgent learning priorities. Professionals also called for better strategies to translate knowledge into lasting practice change across the organization.



example of practical engagement

7. EU and Partners Updates

The SACRED consortium is welcoming a new Associated partner:

*The Elisabetta Germani Foundation- Interview with **Ivan Scaratti**, General Director*

The SACRED Consortium is pleased to welcome the **Elisabetta Germani Foundation** as an Associated Partner in the project.

The Foundation is a multiservice organization that provides a wide range of care for Older adults and people with disabilities, including residential, semi-residential, and outpatient services.

Key figures:

- 300 staff members
- 2,800 hours of training
- 350 individuals assisted in RSA and Alzheimer's Unit
- 90 patients in intermediate rehabilitation
- 4,900 private physiotherapy sessions
- 5,150 home care services provided to 150 individuals
- 340 private specialist visits, including 131 geriatric consultations

Why did the Foundation decide to shift from a traditional nursing home to a community-based hub?

In recent years, the Foundation has strategically repositioned itself, evolving from a traditional nursing home into a community-based hub and proactive point of reference for local citizens. The goal is to offer a complete range of territorial, residential, outpatient, and home-based services, with a strong emphasis on person- and family-centered care and integrated social and health support.

Particular attention has been given to supporting people living with cognitive disorders and their families, a transformation led by Dr. Isabella Salimbeni, Medical Director and Head of the Alzheimer's Unit.

How is the Foundation embracing innovation?

The Foundation now sees itself as a center for cultural, organizational, and technological innovation. Thanks to a young and motivated coordination team, it has implemented tools such as a pharmaceutical cabinet and an artificial intelligence system in several residential units, which save time, reduce errors, and allow staff to focus more on the human aspect of care.

Thanks to a young and motivated coordination team, it has implemented tools like AI-powered pharmaceutical cabinets, which save time, reduce errors, and allow staff to focus more on the human side of care.

Does the Foundation also play an educational role?

Yes. Inspired by the "teaching nursing home" model, the Foundation actively promotes geriatric culture and professional development.

It collaborates with universities and secondary schools, organizes conferences, participates in scientific research, and offers internships and student exchanges. It also runs public meetings to educate families on early Alzheimer's detection and services available in the health and social care system.

What does “Total Quality” mean for the Foundation?

The Foundation’s daily work is guided by a commitment to Total Quality, which means not only delivering high-quality care to older adults, people with disabilities, and frail individuals, but also ensuring the well-being of employees, volunteers, families, and caregivers.

The goal is to transform care environments into true places of living, not just medical facilities.

What is the Value-Based Healthcare (VBHC) model, and how has it been implemented?

The Foundation is undergoing a cultural transformation by adopting the Value-Based Healthcare (VBHC) model. This approach aims to maximize value for residents/patients, starting from the question:

“What is important to you?”

It focuses on identifying and measuring health and quality-of-life outcomes, placing the resident’s experience at the center.

Implementation steps:

- Staff training on the VBHC model
- Identifying key clinical, functional, and relational areas
- Defining shared health outcomes
- Introducing new multidimensional assessment scales
- Creating data collection systems and analyzing results with staff and families

This has increased staff motivation, improved care focus, and helped shift to measurable quality goals.

What are the next steps for the implementation of the VBHC model at the Foundation?

In October, the VBHC model will be extended to two more RSA units (34 beds each). The final goal by the end of 2026 is to implement VBHC as the operating standard in all RSA / RSD service units of the Foundation.

This will ensure a strong alignment with the Foundation’s mission: to improve quality of life through relevant, measurable outcomes and transparent communication with all stakeholders.

Ivan Scaratti
General Director
Fondazione Elisabetta Germani
Onlus



Field Academy in the SACRED Project: driving research for inclusive urban living

Veldacademie ('Field Academy') is a practice-oriented research laboratory focused on **socio-spatial urban development**. Established in 2008 as a collaborative initiative between the **Municipality of Rotterdam** and **Delft University of Technology** (TU Delft), Veldacademie has since grown into a dynamic platform that **bridges academic insight and municipal practice**. It initiates, organizes, and carries out action-oriented research, interdisciplinary educational activities, and professional training programs aimed at addressing complex urban challenges.

At the heart of Veldacademie's mission is the ambition to contribute to **sustainable, inclusive, and future-proof urban environments**. This is achieved through in-depth research into the lived experiences and everyday practices of city users—ranging from citizens and local entrepreneurs to public institutions. By emphasizing the perspectives of these everyday actors, Veldacademie fosters a bottom-up approach to urban development that supports participatory policymaking and more responsive design processes.

Over the years, Veldacademie has built substantial expertise in the field of assisted living and the creation of inclusive urban environments for vulnerable populations, such as older adults, people with disabilities, and individuals requiring long-term support. These efforts are underpinned by a commitment to social equity and integrated care in the urban fabric.

In the context of the SACRED project, Veldacademie plays a central role focusing on conducting a comprehensive **needs assessment**. Based on this groundwork, the team also contributes to **translating the findings into a structured program of requirements** for the development of an **innovative e-learning platform**. This platform will support professionals working with vulnerable groups and foster knowledge exchange across sectors and disciplines.



Inclusive communities

SACRED Project takes center stage at national Dutch Erasmus+ presentation

In the most recent round of the Erasmus+ Programme for Cooperation Partnerships in Higher Education, over 50 grant proposals were submitted from across the Netherlands. Out of these, only 12 proposals were awarded funding—including the SACRED project, which stood out not only for its quality but also for its unique leadership. SACRED was the only selected project led by a municipality, while all other successful proposals came from higher education institutions.

It is a significant recognition for the SACRED project to have been chosen by the Dutch National Agency as a best-practice example of how to meaningfully integrate both a broad, cross-sector partnership and the active involvement of end users. This highlights SACRED's commitment to inclusion, co-creation, and real-world impact from the outset.

As a result of this recognition, on June 26, 2025, Anthony Polychronakis was invited to deliver a national presentation and workshop to showcase how these inclusive and participatory elements were embedded into the project's design. His contribution was well received and helped inspire further dialogue around collaborative approaches within Erasmus+ initiatives.

Mind Inclusion 3.0: Final Multiplier Event Held in Venice

On July 7, 2025, the Final Multiplier Event of the Erasmus+ project *Mind Inclusion 3.0* took place at Palazzo Grandi Stazioni in Venice, hosted by Margherita Società Cooperativa Sociale and supported by ENSA – European Network of Social Authorities.

The event brought together stakeholders from across Europe to:

- Present the project's key outcomes and introduce innovative digital and participatory tools supporting the inclusion of people with cognitive disabilities.
- Strengthen partnerships among European organizations working on disability, accessibility, and social inclusion.

A special highlight of the event was a keynote presentation on the SACRED Project, which explored its community-based approach to cognitive care for older adults. The presentation illustrated how SACRED's inclusive and value-driven model aligns closely with the goals of Mind Inclusion 3.0, offering insights into replicable practices for real-world impact.

The event fostered meaningful exchange, showcasing how collaborative, cross-sectoral approaches can drive systemic change toward a more inclusive Europe.

Invitation:

Invitation Cremona, Lombardia - September 15 to 17 2025, during Alzheimer Week.

This event, organized by the Foundation Elisabetta Germani in collaboration with Regione Lombardia and the ENSA Older Adults and Disability working groups, will focus on dementia and active ageing. It will feature the scientific conference "Life Beyond Diagnosis" and a study visit to Il Paese Ritrovato, a pioneering Alzheimer village that exemplifies person-centered and inclusive care.

The program of the events will include the SACRED Project, the STIP Practice (Personalized integrated Stepped Care Method), the Value Based Health Care Method and Inclusive community neighbourhood insights.

GREETINGS FROM THE PARTNERSHIP!



SACRED TPM Syros Social Cooperative Altera Vita, May 29 2025

"We must build inclusive societies where older people and persons with disabilities can live with dignity, independence, and equal opportunities. Ensuring access to care while promoting autonomy is essential to uphold their rights and improve quality of life."
 — Ursula von der Leyen

Editing: ELISAN NETWORK collaboration Elena Curtopassi, Enrico Cerchiaro;
 AFEDEMY Jonas Bernitt, Kelsang Khyabchog

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