

Interview of Jean-Christophe COMBE

Minister of solidarities, independence and for persons with disabilities | France

With: Vincent OLIVIER, President, Recto Verso | France

Former CEO of the French Red Cross, Jean-Christophe Combe introduces himself as the “minister of all vulnerabilities”. His ambition is to change the way people look at these vulnerabilities which he describes as real assets for society.

A government committed to several solidarity issues

Work is ongoing on the facilitation of access to social benefits, with the implementation of an “outreach” system. By informing eligible people of their rights, the aim is to reduce the number of people not benefitting from them. The renewal of the anti-poverty plan which ends at the end of 2022 is also under review. It builds on its successes such as the fight against the reproduction of inequalities, but also integrates new elements. For instance, the fight against extreme poverty as well as energy insecurity are also included on the agenda. Finally, the fight against health inequalities represents an important issue for the Ministry which is currently implementing preventive measures for the most vulnerable populations. To tackle all these challenges, close collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Prevention is required.

A detailed action plan to support those concerned by this ministry

The Social Security Financing Act addresses issues relating to early childhood, such as the precariousness of single-parent families and the uneven distribution of the provision of nurseries across the country. It aims at integrating the reform on the childcare supplement to neutralise the price difference between opting for nurseries or for a nanny, as well as increasing by 50% the family support allowance.

Confronted with the issue of ageing well, the elderly face two challenges. The most urgent one is the response to the current crisis: an inspection program for nursing homes is to be deployed over the next two years. In the longer term, anticipating the demographic transition requires working on subjects such as loss of autonomy, modernization of nursing homes, homecare, social ties, empowerment of the elderly and the way they are viewed by society.

Some measures are also planned to strengthen support for disabled people. The deconjugating of the disabled adults’ allowance (Allocation aux Adultes Handicapés) is a major step forward but will take time to implement – especially since it creates losers. The question is therefore how can they be supported? At the same time, emphasis must be placed on the issue of accessibility, which must be addressed through territorial management.

The need to value the role of caregivers and health professionals

Today, there are around 9 million caregivers in France. Among them, 61% work and 44% acknowledge having difficulty reconciling their roles as caregivers with their professional lives. These figures illustrate the need to further develop the strategy implemented since 2020. As an example, the Validation of Acquired Experience (Valorisation des Acquis de l'Expérience - VAE) could enable caregivers to enhance their know-how and apply for jobs in medico-social structures.

As for health professionals, their profession is currently experiencing a lack of attractiveness that can be explained by several factors. There is a discrepancy between the social impact of these jobs and their wages. They are often considered to be restrictive and do not allow for a satisfactory work-life balance. Recent scandals have damaged the image of these professions: society’s perspective on these meaningful and high-impact professions must change.