

For debate in the Standing Committee — see Rule 15 of the Rules of Procedure

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The situation of elderly persons in Europe

Opinion¹
Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population
Rapporteur: Mrs Minodora CLIVETI, Romania, Socialist Group

I. Conclusions of the Committee

1. The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population draws attention to the particular risks of double or even triple discrimination faced by elderly migrants and to the difficulties they may encounter depending on whether they remain in the “host” country with low levels of integration, or they decide to return to the country of origin, or when elderly persons decide to emigrate in search of better living conditions in retirement.

II. Explanatory memorandum by the Rapporteur

2. The situation of elderly persons and population ageing is a growing concern for Europe and has been recurrently addressed by the Assembly over the last decade : from the angle of human rights (*Recommendation 1428(1999)*²) on the occasion of the “International year of Older Persons”; from the angle of social, health and pension policy reforms (*Recommendation 1591 (2003)*³ and *Recommendation 1254 (1994)*⁴); and from the angle of demography (*Resolution 1502 (2006)* and *Recommendation 1749(2006)*⁵).

3. While longer life expectancy is good news for individuals, it is a great challenge for society and policy makers who have to address demographic, social, financial and political implications of ageing.

4. The Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee is to be congratulated for highlighting some of these challenges and for proposing action with regard to social protection systems, employment of elderly persons, assistance and support to families, access to healthcare and particular needs of vulnerable groups including ageing immigrants, women and people with disabilities.

5. The Rapporteur for the Opinion took part and had the honour to Chair one of the working sessions at the Conference on the situation of elderly people in Europe which was organised by the

¹ See Doc. 11179 tabled by the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

² Recommendation 1428 (1999) « The future of senior citizens : protection, participation and promotion »

³ Recommendation 1591 (2003) « Challenges of social policy in Europe's ageing societies »

⁴ Recommendation 1254 (1994) « Medical and welfare rights of the elderly »

⁵ Resolution 1502 (2006) and Recommendation 1749(2006) “Demographic challenges for social cohesion”

Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee⁶ in preparation of the report. A number of issues were discussed : retirement age; combining retirement with employment; inclusion of elderly persons in economic, social and political life; financial implications of extended working life; solidarity and interaction between generations; financial impact of home support and residential care; qualifications and training of staff in institutions; needs for further research and possibility of establishing an observatory to deal with population ageing.

6. With regard to increasing mobility and the specific needs of ageing migrants in Europe, it would be necessary to distinguish particular needs and policy measures for elderly migrants who remain in the "host" country with low levels of integration, for those who decide to fully or partially return to the country of origin, and for elderly persons who decide to emigrate in search of better living conditions in retirement.

7. The circumstances of elderly migrants can be very diverse and are affected by time of immigration; culture; language; education; employment history; gender; geographical location; housing conditions; health status; and family context. However it can be said that elderly migrants belong to two groups who are often vulnerable to social exclusion : the elderly and migrants.

8. Immigrants who settled in western European countries in the 50s, 60s and early 70s often ended up in the lower ranks of the professional and societal hierarchy. Prior to retirement age, they generally run a higher risk of unemployment and it can be particularly difficult for them to find a new regular job with which they can contribute to pay their social security. They may have bad health conditions as a result of their work and more stressful life experience as migrants. In some cases elderly migrants do not apply for retirement in the host country due to lack of information and unfamiliarity with the local social security system. Broken careers, resulting from scattered and low paid jobs and unemployment, inevitably lead to weak pension rights.

9. Women elderly migrants are particularly exposed to poverty and may face triple discrimination : as women, as elderly and as migrants. Many do not qualify for pensions and rely exclusively on family support.

10. Certain elderly migrants consider it important to live with or close to their family or other people from their ethnic background. Otherwise they may feel socially isolated. The preference for living in extended families often means that they suffer from overcrowding. In terms of integration and self-reliance, better knowledge of the "host" language is crucial. Insufficient communication skills generally prevent elderly migrants enjoying the full benefits from care and assistance (services for elderly, day care, district nursing, recreational activities, institutional care, etc.) and they lack information regarding their rights.

11. Transfer of pension and social security rights is vital to elderly migrants. Some of them would like to return to their countries of origin, but find that they can not financially afford it because their pension rights can not be transferred. The situation is quite diverse throughout the Council of Europe member states and particularly affects non-EU citizens.

12. EU citizens, on the other hand, have the possibility to transfer their pension and social security rights to other EU countries, if they decide to emigrate - particularly to South European countries - while seeking better living conditions in retirement. This growing phenomenon will certainly require further consideration at the European, national and local policy level, in terms of changing population structures, specific infrastructures and services needed to respond to this demand, issues of integration, increasing housing costs, impacts on young households in the "host" country, etc.

13. In view of the preceding, the Rapporteur reiterates some of the issues which were put forward to the Committee of Ministers and the member states in *Recommendation 1619 (2003) on the rights of elderly migrants* :

⁶ Session 1 on "aspirations and rights of the elderly", Conference on the situation of elderly people in Europe, Paris, Senate, 13 September, 2006

- *Labour market*: efforts should be made to stimulate younger elderly migrants to (re)enter the labour market and appropriate vocational training should be provided to reconvert their skills and previous professional experience;

- *Social security and pension rights*: Council of Europe member States should be strongly encouraged to sign and ratify multilateral social security agreements, such as the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78), or otherwise to conclude bilateral social security agreements; otherwise, Council of Europe member states should make it possible under their legislation to pay pensions to migrants having returned to their country of origin or habitual residence and having worked legally on their territories, irrespective of the existence of a social security agreement to this effect;

- *Access to information*: information about the existing social welfare and public health care institutions should be improved and made accessible to elderly migrants. To this effect there is a need for an innovative, structural and continued interculturalisation of the existing institutions in the fields of public service, healthcare, and social welfare, and the ways they use to communicate with their 'customers'. Authorities should also provide practical information about receiving social benefits abroad;

- *Health care and assistance*: There is a strong need to adapt the existing structures and make them more 'culturally appropriate' also through the provision of special training to social workers and health professionals working with elderly migrants. The employment of qualified personnel from an immigrant background should be encouraged. Elderly migrants should be effectively consulted and involved in the development and provision of culturally sensitive services.

- *Access to citizenship*: Criteria such as the knowledge of the language of the host country or its way of life should be interpreted with flexibility by the authorities considering applications for citizenship from elderly migrants; access or reacquisition of nationality should be facilitated for people returning to their countries of origin and who never had or had lost their nationality;

- *Links with country of origin* : elderly migrants who decide not to come back to their countries of origin should be given the opportunity of maintaining close contacts with their "home" countries and the political, social, and cultural developments which occur in such countries.

14. Finally, there is also a need for more research on the situation of elderly migrants in Council of Europe member states.

III. Amendments proposed by the Committee

The Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population proposes the following amendments to the report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee (Doc. 11179):

Amendment 1

In the draft Recommendation, at the end of paragraph 10, add the following:

"Elderly migrants face a particular risk of double or even triple discrimination and require specific policies and culturally sensitive services as outlined in *Recommendation 1619 (2003)* on rights of elderly migrants. Moreover, the governments should recognise the significant contribution that elderly migrants have made to the economic growth in the past and the important role they can still play in helping new generations of migrants to integrate in the host country."

Amendment 2

In the draft Recommendation, at the end of sub-paragraph 11.1.4, add the following sub-paragraph:

“sign and ratify multilateral social security agreements, namely the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No.78);”

Amendment 3

In the draft Recommendation, at the end of sub-paragraph 11.4.3, add the following sub-paragraph:

“adapt the existing structures for the provision of health care and assistance to the elderly in order to make them culturally appropriate to the needs of elderly migrants;”

Amendment 4

In the draft Recommendation, at the end of sub-paragraph 11.5.3, add the following sub-paragraph:

“provide specially adapted language courses and other activities fostering inclusion and participation of elderly migrants and support non governmental organisations in their activities and assistance programmes in this regard;”

Amendment 5

In the draft Recommendation, at the end of sub-paragraph 11.5.3, add the following sub-paragraph:

“provide practical information to elderly migrants about receiving social welfare, pensions and health care in the host country and the country of origin, which is available at public institutions, community centres, immigrant organisations, cultural centres and religious institutions;”

Amendment 6

In the draft Recommendation, at the end of sub-paragraph 11.5.3, add the following sub-paragraph:

“facilitate links between elderly migrants and their countries of origin.”

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Reporting Committee: Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee

Committee for opinion: Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population

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Secretaries of the Committee: Mr Lervik, Mr Neville, Mrs Karanjac