Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1619 (2003)[1]

Rights of elderly migrants

Parliamentary Assembly

1. People over 55 years of age represent a noticeable proportion of the immigrant population of Council of Europe member states. Arriving in the 1950s and 1960s, following the economic boom in some western European countries, or as a result of decolonisation movements, they have settled, worked and lived most of their lives in Council of Europe member states. Some of them have a history of hard physical labour or bad working conditions; others come from countries with low life expectancy; others have experienced stress due to racism, discrimination or poverty. Due to their past experience and age, these migrants can be considered as elderly. Their number is due to increase in the next decades, given the ageing of the population, including the population of migrant origin, in traditional immigration countries. Council of Europe member states which are new immigration countries will soon experience the same phenomenon.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly recalls its previous texts in the fields of the ageing population and social care and social security, including Recommendations 761 (1975) on payments of pensions in cases of mixed careers and on the establishment of a European passport of social security, 1573 (2002) on the ratification of the European Code of Social Security, 1254 (1994) on medical and welfare rights of the elderly: ethics and politics, and Resolution 1008 (1993) on social policies for elderly persons and their self-reliance. The Assembly also recalls the the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78) and its Supplementary Agreement for the Application of the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No. 78A), and regrets that, to date, this convention has been ratified by only eight Council of Europe member states and signed by an additional five.

3. The Assembly is convinced that a coherent policy is needed to address the situation of elderly migrants in Council of Europe member states, whether they wish to remain in the host country or go back to their countries of origin. Comprehensive action should be conducted at political and legislative level to protect the rights of elderly migrants, ensure their social inclusion and well-being at a delicate stage of their life, and make sure that they are not subjected to a dual discrimination, both as elderly people and as migrants.

4. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

4.1. instruct its relevant committees to conduct research into the situation of elderly migrants in Council of Europe member states. Such research should embrace aspects such as demography, social inclusion, legal status, pension and other social rights;

4.2. call on member states to:

a. develop coherent and comprehensive policies to address the situation of elderly migrants, through an inter-departmental approach involving the ministries of labour, immigration, health and social affairs and in consultation with the voluntary sector, community organisations and elderly migrants themselves;

b. promote partnerships with non-governmental organisations and support voluntary initiatives, particularly by earmarking budgetary and other resources and by granting voluntary workers legal status and adequate social protection;

c. sign and ratify the European Convention on Social Security;

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1. (see Doc. 9884, report of the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography, rapporteur: Mr Nessa). Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 8 September 2003

d. ensure the transferability of full pension rights for migrant workers, wherever they decide to take up residence;

e. ensure that criteria such as knowledge of the language or the way of life of the host country are interpreted with flexibility when considering naturalisation applications from elderly migrants;

f. adapt the existing structures for the provision of health care and assistance to the elderly to make them culturally appropriate to the needs of elderly migrants, also through the provision of special training to social workers and health professionals;

g. encourage the employment of qualified personnel from an immigrant background in health care and assistance structures;

h. facilitate the access to health care and assistance services through the provision of interpretation upon demand for elderly migrants who are not able to communicate effectively in the language of the host country. This service should be available free of charge for destitute elderly migrants;

i. ensure that council and state housing be made available to meet the requirements of elderly migrants, bearing in mind the needs of homeless families and the particular facilities necessary for them;

j. provide clear information about access to social welfare, pension and health care in the host country and the country of origin and make it accessible to elderly migrants through public institutions as well as community centres, immigrant organisations, cultural centres and religious institutions frequented by immigrants;

k. encourage less elderly migrants to (re-)enter the labour market, if necessary granting access to vocational courses to reconvert skills and competences acquired during their previous work experience;

l. encourage the maintenance of links between elderly immigrants and their countries of origin, among other things through the organisation of cultural events, exhibitions and performing arts events and the support of language courses;

m. encourage cultural and educational activities involving elderly migrants;

n. promote socio-gerontological research for the better understanding of the situation of elderly migrants.