Parliamentary Assembly
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Resolution 1793 (2011)[1]

Promoting active ageing – capitalising on older people's working potential

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Age discrimination is often unconscious, but it undermines older people's dignity, their human rights and self-esteem and is a huge waste of talent. The Parliamentary Assembly considers that, although ageism is less acknowledged than racism or sexism, it is a harmful prejudice that results in widespread lack of respect for older people, whether through the media, which promote stereotypical and degrading images of older people, within society, where they are the victims of physical and financial abuse, in the workplace, where they are subject to unequal treatment, or in the health sector where they do not always receive appropriate medical care and services.

2. The Assembly has recalled on several occasions that there is a pressing need to change the approach to population ageing and to adjust policies accordingly. Therefore, it welcomes the stance taken by the Committee of Ministers, in particular in its reply to Recommendation 1796 (2007) on the situation of elderly persons in Europe.

3. The Assembly notes that many working-age individuals, who could work and actively contribute to society, are either unemployed or "inactive", in particular in the 50 plus age group. Globalisation and increased competition are having an impact on the work environment and on the quality of work available to older workers, who also face a number of obstacles to remaining in or re-entering the employment market, including pressures to balance their working lives with family and care responsibilities, a problem in particular for older women.

4. The Assembly believes that, by increasing the number of healthy and active older persons, governments can provide more generous assistance to those in need of health care and long-term care and make public funding available for education, training and welfare services. However, it stresses that encouraging people to be more active and lead healthier lifestyles is not a substitute for social security systems based on solidarity, with an adequate safety net for those for whom employment is an unrealistic option.

5. The Assembly also acknowledges that, after retirement age, older people continue to contribute to society in a voluntary capacity, as citizens, carers and consumers. The lack of accurate information on their economic contribution to society reinforces the stereotypical ideas of older people being unproductive and dependent.

1. Assembly debate on 28 January 2011 (9th Sitting) (see Doc. 12431, report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Jacquat). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 January 2011 (9th Sitting).

6. The Assembly considers that policies which are designed to promote active ageing require action in a variety of policy areas, in addition to labour market policies. To this end, the Assembly encourages the member states of the Council of Europe to give consideration, as appropriate, to the following policy guidelines:

6.1. regarding age discrimination:

6.1.1. adopting legislation to prohibit age discrimination and removing labour market barriers, and empowering older persons to enter, remain in or return to the labour market, in accordance with their capabilities and willingness to work;

6.1.2. implementing programmes that redirect both employees' and employers' attitudes towards a more positive assessment of active ageing and facilitating an efficient information and co-ordination process among employer organisations and trade unions, with regard to employment initiatives for an ageing workforce;

6.2. regarding social protection measures:

6.2.1. analysing the impact of globalisation and economic downturns, and proposing ad hoc measures to prevent older workers who lose their jobs from falling into long-term unemployment;

6.2.2. supporting the provision of a social safety net for older people who have no pensions or meagre retirement incomes because they have worked all or most of their lives in the home or in an unpaid capacity;

6.3. regarding flexible work arrangements:

6.3.1. promoting policies that aim at improving the quality of flexible work arrangements for older workers, enabling them to move to less demanding jobs and opting for part-time work, teamwork, job-sharing, task rotation and redefinition of tasks between team members;

6.3.2. facilitating phased retirement and encouraging initiatives such as voluntary or community work to ease such transition;

6.3.3. developing new approaches to care of the elderly and supporting informal carers, such as extending parental leave provisions to enable all unpaid carers responsible for dependent relatives to enjoy an adequate protection of their social rights, including pension rights;

6.4. regarding training, reskilling and lifelong learning:

6.4.1. adopting a life-course approach and taking preventive measures aimed at enhancing the employability of the workforce as it ages, such as occupational health-care measures, reskilling programmes at mid-career and initiatives to minimise the risk of persons resorting to invalidity schemes;

6.4.2. raising awareness among the younger generation of the importance of lifelong learning and encouraging young adults to prepare for old age in their health, training, and social and financial practices;

6.4.3. tapping into the potential of information and communication technologies to open up employment and training possibilities for older people, including those with disabilities;

6.5. regarding health promotion:

6.5.1. developing proactive health-care policies by focusing on health promotion, disease prevention and the treatment of chronic diseases, and promoting health literacy programmes in the workplace aimed at older workers;

6.5.2. carrying out research on the changes needed to encourage older workers to remain active, shedding light on the best ways to foster lifelong learning for older workers and on the work arrangements and financial incentives that are best suited to them;

6.6. regarding volunteering: encouraging the development of voluntary activities for all age groups by reinforcing intergenerational solidarity and removing legal and administrative obstacles which prevent older people from active participation and engagement;

6.7. regarding institutional commitments:

6.7.1. encouraging ratification and full implementation of the European Social Charter (ETS No. 35) and the revised European Social Charter (ETS No. 163), whose provisions would improve the protection of older people and older workers;

6.7.2. encouraging ratification of the European Code of Social Security and its Protocol (ETS Nos. 48 and 48A), as well as the revised European Code of Social Security (ETS No. 139), which set standards in the social security field on the basis of minimum harmonisation of the level of social security.