



THE EU'S HIDDEN AGEING POPULATION: IMPROVING POLICIES FOR OLDER ETHNIC MINORITIES AND MIGRANTS

GEORGINA SIKLOSSY
ENAR, EUROPEAN NETWORK AGAINST AISBL

Europe has long been a destination for many migrants and for the first time, Europe's ageing population includes significant numbers of ethnic minority people and migrants from a diversity of backgrounds. These numbers will continue to grow within the EU in line with projected demographic trends towards an ageing population, as migration is increasingly needed to sustain EU Member States' welfare schemes, and mobility will further increase between EU Member States and third countries.

Migration dynamics have changed enormously since the arrival of the first generation of migrants in the 1960s as a labour force. Since this evolved to situations of long-term residence and citizenship, a whole range of issues need to be addressed concerning not only 1st generation migrants (many of whom are now elderly), but also the 2nd and 3rd generations, who were born or raised in host countries and who are now approaching mid-life.

Moreover, the current economic crisis exacerbates the various difficulties faced by these groups in terms of accessing and claiming their rights and, in a broader context, with regard to their societal and local community integration. Growing populist rhetoric and blaming migrants for economic difficulties makes the need to empower migrant communities of all ages even more urgent.

Policy context

Both at European and national levels, policies and strategies address either ageing or racism or poverty, but not the combination of issues facing older ethnic minorities. Another problem is that governments still tend to consider migration as a temporary phenomenon.

Moreover, older migrants have specific concerns and needs that are not always effectively met through the infrastructures in the countries in which they live.

The most challenging or vulnerable situations include: 1st generation migrants from 3rd countries, 2nd and 3rd generations in mid-life, older people from 3rd countries who have joined their younger family members working in the EU under family reunification measures and who may be at particular risk of isolation, as well as older people from ethnic minorities such as older Roma, who face many similar problems.

Additionally, the current EU approach to migration focuses on the economic necessity of highly skilled migration, but lacks recognition of the broader contribution that migrants have made and continue to make to European society. Those migrants not defined as 'highly skilled' are not recognised as having an economic value and their economic, social and cultural importance to European society is often negated.

Key challenges

Social inclusion

The extent to which older migrants and minorities are able to participate in economic and social life is relatively small. There is a clear tendency for them to be more excluded from participation in civic, social and cultural life than older people of non-ethnic or from non-migrant backgrounds.

Some migrants are in a disadvantageous situation due to a lack of knowledge about the society in which they live or national social security schemes and how they can use these to acquire eligible benefits. Voting rights, for example, are ex-

tremely limited for migrants in most Member States. Equal participation in society for young and old, migrant and nationals, should thus be addressed for a more inclusive society.

Employment

Older migrant and ethnic minority workers face the same problems of lack of access and opportunity in the labour market as any other older worker, but this can often be compounded by racism, obsolete skills, lack of access to training and life-long learning and history of working in the grey economy, non-recognition of qualifications obtained in their home country, as well as de-skilling and segregation in industries that pay lower wages.

In cases when members of ethnic minorities did manage to find jobs, these often did not reflect their qualifications, as stated in ENAR's Shadow Reports on racism from the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany and Malta. This reflects a number of issues, including difficulties in getting qualifications recognised, the need to take any jobs available, and a reluctance by some entities and companies to have ethnic minorities represented within better ranked positions.

Older ethnic minorities face discrimination and other problems, such as precarious or dangerous working conditions, lack of compliance with minimum standards set out in national legislation, lower wages, exploitation, as well as the 'glass ceiling effect' for older women migrants. Retired migrants face particular difficulties due to substandard living conditions

and insufficient pension / national insurance contributions due to undocumented or incomplete employment records in the EU. Rights to social security are highly variable and dependent on the label under which the older migrant initially entered the country and has since acquired over time. These rights may be limited if the older migrant has arrived in the recent

being excluded from the housing market than older non-ethnic native groups. They experience this exclusion in relation to discrimination in the allocation of housing, poor quality housing, and the high cost of housing relative to income. This situation poses challenges for their effective integration into their local communities and cre-



past, if qualifications were not recognised, if the individual was denied access to the labour market, and was underpaid or exploited.

Housing

In the EU older ethnic minorities and migrants are generally at a greater risk of

ates broader societal problems that are damaging to social cohesion.

Poor and sometimes harsh housing conditions compound problems related to ageing for some older people in ethnic communities. Beyond poverty, the fact that long-term care facilities are not always adapted to the diverse cultural, reli-

gious or linguistic needs of older minorities and migrants, requires that local assessment be carried out to determine how best to accommodate the needs of these older residents.

Healthcare

Again, older migrants and ethnic minorities share the same difficulties that any ageing person may encounter in accessing healthcare and long term care, but with additional factors, including premature ageing due to harsh working and housing conditions, as well as a loss of command of their host country language, particularly if they suffer from dementia/Alzheimer. Other challenges include insufficient knowledge of the host country's language, reluctance to talk about certain symptoms, and lack of knowledge of existing services and healthcare systems. In addition, long term care facilities are often not adapted to the cultural, religious or linguistic needs of older migrants and ethnic minorities.

The challenge in terms of access to health and long-term care of older migrants in the EU will be to find an integrated approach where all residents' rights and human rights are addressed so that health inequalities are reduced. It is therefore necessary to look for ways and means to better inform older migrants about these services.

Intergenerational solidarity in diverse societies

Older migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe are often no longer being cared for by the younger generations. While family

structures are evolving rapidly, social services and family assistance programmes are often focused on majority populations and can be insensitive to the cultural diversity of families in need of help or the importance of intergenerational solidarity among different communities.

On the other hand, engaging migrant and ethnic minority communities in intergenerational solidarity initiatives together with majority communities is crucial and provides a means of breaking down harmful stereotypes by bringing communities closer together and creating a framework for dialogue.

Consequently, it is essential that local authorities support initiatives between older generations of ethnic and religious minorities and migrants and younger generations. The contact and interaction between them is known to lessen intergenerational misunderstanding and help combat marginalisation and vulnerability among older age groups.

Recommendations

When devising migration, integration and social policies and laws, EU and national policy makers need to take adequate consideration of this vulnerable and diverse societal groups' needs and take specific steps to facilitate their social and economic inclusion.

Social inclusion

- Formulate policy guidelines at national level to ensure that older migrants and

ethnic and religious minorities can age with dignity;

- Mainstream the objectives of inclusion, non-discrimination and anti-racism in all relevant EU strategies and policies, including in health, housing, and education;
- Use the renewed social Open Method of Coordination to address the social integration and inclusion of older migrants who face difficulties in accessing employment and training or lifelong learning.

Employment

- Ensure that the EU Employment Equality Directive (2000/78/EC) is adequately implemented;
- Ratify the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families (ICRMW);
- Tackle the multiple discrimination faced by older ethnic and religious minority and migrant workers in employment;
- Guarantee an adequate minimum pension to prevent poverty among the most vulnerable older people, including older minorities who for justified reasons are unable to contribute to social protection schemes. Social protection, provided by the state, should be a necessary safety net for all.

Healthcare

- Develop a clear policy framework for health services that are equally accessible to ethnic and religious minorities and migrant older people;
- Tackle the persistent healthcare inequalities between different ethnic groups including through cultural sensitisation of health workers
- Use the renewed social OMC to address the health care needs of older migrants and older people from ethnic and religious minorities who face additional difficulties in accessing affordable health care services and eligibility to social protection systems;
- Develop and apply appropriate policies and strategies for dealing with specific health and healthcare problems faced by older ethnic minorities and migrants.

