

Filling the gap in long-term professional care through systematic migration policies (Germany, 23-24 October 2013)

Migration policy as a tool to deal with the lack of skilled workers and experienced professionals in the field of care and nursing¹

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1. The present situation

The European Union is facing unprecedented demographic changes (an ageing population, low birth rates and changing family structures). In the light of these challenges it is important, both at EU and national level, to review and adapt existing policies. A significant sector that has to be adapted to the forthcoming challenges is long-term care, due to the fact that the old (aged 65 and over) and the very old (aged 80+) people will be the fastest growing age class of the population in the future.

In this context Greece is, also, a society where the ageing population continues to increase steadily as shown in the following table.

TABLE 1				
Old-age-dependency ratio for Greece				
Ratio between the total number of elderly persons of an age when they are generally economically inactive (aged 65 and over) and the number of persons of working age (from 15 to 64)				
1990	1995	2000	2005	2012
20.4	22.2	24.2	26.8	29.9

Source: Eurostat

Despite this fact, public home care services cover only 5.6% of the older population because elderly care has never risen as high as childcare on the Greek public policy agenda. However, since the mid-1990s, the availability of EU resources has funded the development of new community care services provided by the local authorities, such as the "Home Help" programmes and the Day Care Centres (KIFI).

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All these programmes were piecemeal solutions to the problem of providing long-term care for elderly people and they were unable to fill the void of a comprehensive policy of formal provisions to this category.

This low level of formal provisions 'compensated for' by a high involvement of family caregivers which means that the care for the elderly is provided, to a very large extent, on an informal basis. Greek society is a family-oriented one where husbands are expected to take care of their spouses, and brothers of their sisters, albeit in a second instance, i.e. if no other woman in the family is available. Additionally a no negligible proportion of the existing demand for long-term care is met by migration flows to our country namely hiring migrant, female, care workers, mostly from the Balkans and Eastern Europe that working in the irregular segment of the market.

However changes in family structures, higher labour force participation of women and increased geographical mobility, could reduce the availability of informal care by relatives. For countries like Greece, whose formal care systems are less developed, a projected increase in public spending on long-term care could not be an easy choice as it may exert excessive pressure on public finances, due to the likely need for increased formal care provision. What remains is to look at migration as a tool to fill the gap that will possibly emerge with respect to the needs of the elderly for integrated long-term care in the context of an ageing society

2. Migration as a tool to address the problem

The migrant-in-the-family type that characterises Greece as a manner to cover the potential needs of families for long-term care must be examined in the light of the legislative framework within which the aforementioned actors operate and interact. The Basic Law on migration issues is L. 3386/2005, as amended and set in force, and, depending on the issue at stake, specific legislative acts (Laws, Presidential Decrees, Ministerial Decisions).

The Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Welfare is responsible for determining the maximum number of third country nationals to enter Greece for work purposes annually. Under the provisions of Law 3386/2005, a third country national can be employed in Greece by a specific employer for a certain type of employment if he/she has been granted the appropriate visa (visa D). The labour market needs, job vacancies per specialty, country and duration of employment that can be covered by a third country national are recorded in a report drawn up at regional level in the last quarter of each year. On the basis of these reports the Ministry of Labour is drawing up, together with the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior, a Joint Ministerial Decision which defines the maximum number of residence permits for work allocated each year to nationals of third countries.

An employer, who wishes to employ a third-country national (as dependent employee), provided that the corresponding position is foreseen in the Joint Ministerial Decision, must submit an application to the territorially competent Service for Foreigners and Immigration of the Decentralised Administration. Regarding the impact of the economic crisis on the employment of foreign labour force, what is clear from the statistics is that in recent years there has been a steady decline of the requests submitted by the inviting employers to municipalities and the approved employment posts to be covered by third country nationals.

According to this, in 2006 59,008 requests were approved; in 2007 42,180; in 2008 38,278; in 2009 28,924; in 2010 26,209 and in 2011 24,083 requests. Regarding house workers and nurses, a significant reduction in the invitations submitted by



employers for foreign workers is, also, observed, as it is shown in the following table:

TABLE 2						
Requests submitted by employers for house workers and caregivers from countries outside European Union						
2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
1,471	465	756	810	889	464	112

The reduction of demand for foreign labour is, mainly, connected to the large supply of domestic workforce due to the increased unemployment among Greek nationals and third countries' nationals already legally residing in the country

Another process for attracting highly qualified workforce has been introduced recently by Law 4071/2012. By this, the Greek authorities transposed the provisions of Directive 2009/50/EK (Blue Card) on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for highly qualified employment into national law. The main aim of it is to improve our capacity to attract and retain highly qualified workers from third countries through: (a) adopting flexible admission conditions for highly skilled employees; (b) introducing swift and flexible admission procedure for applicants; (c) creation of attractive residence conditions for them and their family members, including facilitation for those who wish to move to another Member State for highly qualified employment (provisions on intra-EU mobility). Regarding long-term care professionals the results of the implementation of the above process were poor because in 2013 there were no requests from employers for highly skilled workforce in this area.

3. Conclusions - Prospects

Summarising, we can claim that the recipe of our country for long-term care combines three main ingredients: limited but free or very cheap public services that complement private supplies, selective cash allowances, and a large irregular market for migrant care workers. However, economic and social crisis affecting the way in which these three factors contribute to the provision of long-term care. As shown by the data in Table 2, there is a significant reduction in employers' requests (families with needs for domestic helpers) to invite foreign workforce as house workers or caregivers. Additionally, publicly subsidised provisions are unlikely to merge unscathed from the on-going process of fiscal consolidation in our country. It would, however, be a great loss of opportunity for the Greek economy if the prevalent response to the financial crisis were confined to rationalising provisions and putting pressure on the family to insource rather than outsource care. Rather, the challenge lies in reversing this perspective and turning a rapidly-expanding sector like long-term care into an employment growth engine.

