

A good place to grow older

Irene Christodoulou

Social Welfare Services, Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance

I. Changing demographic pressures has serious impact in all aspects of the socioeconomic activities specially in the field of social services, social insurance, finance, employment, health, housing etc.

A significant reason for prompt action is our nation's ageing population. According to the official data the percentage of older persons 65+ was 12.7% in 2008, is expected to rise to 15% by 2020 and until 2050 to exceed 23%. Demographic trends show increasing longevity (79 for men and 81 for women) and reduced fertility.

As a government and society our priority is to protect all citizens including the elderly population and secure a decent standard of living, accessibility and availability of services such as health, social care, employment, services to meet their different and changing needs.

The aim of government policies is to promote respect and inclusion, social and civic participation, employment (active ageing) and to optimise quality of life through supportive and age-friendly communities.

II. National strategies to deal with the challenges of ageing population:

- The programmes, schemes and services offered by the Social Welfare Services for the elderly population is one of the basic pillars of government Social policy which aim to social cohesion, social protection, social inclusion, promotion of equal opportunities for all citizens and compact poverty. Through the Public Assistance Law the elderly people are assisted to have dignified standard of living and through services (such as home-care, day-care) to maintain their autonomy and support their stay in their homes as long as possible. Benefits such as the Scheme for Self-employed elderly are granted to encourage their activation, creative work and social integration; through the Grands-in-Aid Scheme Social.

Welfare Services support the communities to become good places where everyone can grow up and grow older. Voluntary and local organisations are subsidised to cater for the needs of the family and its elderly members.

In order to promote adequate and quality care services for the elderly the Department is reviewing its legislation to adapt to the increasing needs. It is proposing the development of a Long-Care Scheme which gives emphasis to community care. The new Scheme for subsidising Local Authorities will provide technical and financial assistance in order to develop actions in communities including programmes and services for the elderly (care support, integration programmes, safety and security, environments that are considerate of senior's needs, transportation).

- The Ministry of Health, in its plan of action relating to the elderly population aims in establishing more health centres, development of home nursing-care services, rehabilitation

services and training for geriatric and primary health care. The measures for the prevention of illness encompass a net work of programmes which include timely diagnosis and prevention of chronic illnesses, as well as promotion of healthy life style.

- Intergenerational solidarity is encouraged in school activities so that there will be a continuous interaction between the students and senior citizens.
- The target of the Ministry of Communication is the safe secure and transportation for the elderly, on the roads, in buildings and public places.

III. The overarching objective

is promoting good governance, transparency and involvement of state-holders and social partners. Transparency in decision – making and democratic procedures are expressed through the active participation of social partners, non - governmental organisations, civil associations. Representatives of all relevant sectors of the population are involved in the decision – making through a form of public negotiations /dialogue. This is a structured form within the scope of 'Better Regulation'.