

Autonomy and Independence of Older Persons

The elderly belong to one of the exceptionally vulnerable groups in Georgia. While a certain part of this group is trying to live independently and get involved in social life, the rest are facing the risks of homelessness, poverty and isolation due to the absence of adequate services and protection mechanisms. The facts of discrimination against elderly people are based on different characteristics, including gender, socio-economic status, ethnic origin and even health status.

Existing mechanisms for the protection of rights of the elderly fail to respond to modern day challenges and international requirements. State programs and services are insufficient and inadequate. The elderly are often subjected to violence while existing state programs do not provide alternative care services for this category.

During the last couple of years certain changes have been observed in terms of strengthening the State's policy and vision of protecting the rights of elderly persons in Georgia.

In 2013, the government of Georgia, together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) designed a roadmap for mainstreaming population ageing issues in Georgia in accordance with the Madrid International Plan of Action. This Roadmap on Mainstreaming Ageing and its recommendations served as a basis for the 'State Policy Concept on the Ageing Issue in Georgia', adopted by the Parliament in May, 2016. In the State Policy Concept reference is made to the National Action Plan (2017-2018) which proposes 13 priority areas: mainstreaming ageing; integration of older persons in the society; perception and image of older persons and media reporting; social protection; labor markets and employment; life-long learning; health and well-being; mainstreaming of gender approach; intergenerational solidarity; migration; integration in to the international processes; research and data collection; monitoring and evaluation.

The Action Plan for 2017-2018 was approved only in November, 2017, therefore, the responsible state agencies have only one year to fulfil their obligations under the Action Plan and the process of the State Policy Concept implementation is hampered. Also, there is no regular and stable mechanism ensuring cooperation between the state agencies on the given issue.¹

The social support exclusively associated with the age is – old-age pension. Currently, Georgia has a universal old-age pension system that serves as poverty alleviation function in old age. It is a non-contributory pension scheme, which provides a flat rate benefit to all persons of eligible age. The state guarantees the pension to all Georgian citizens who have reached the official retirement age – 60 years for women and 65 years for men. The amount of the old age pension was increased on 1 July 2016 and now totals 180 GEL per month. Pensionaries residing in high mountainous zones have their pensions increased by 20% (216 GEL). However, in light of the country's current economic standing, this measure is far from being sufficient to meet the needs of the elderly. The pension amount is not enough to ensure a life of dignity and good health or allow for full participation in society.

There is an evident lack of housing to ensure adequate living for older persons. Quantifying the actual need is difficult, as disaggregated statistical information regarding living conditions for different groups (e.g. different age groups, older persons with IDP status, with disability, below poverty line etc.) cannot be found

¹ See the 2016 Annual Report of the Public Defender of Georgia "The Situation of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia" pp. 433-437. Available at: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/uploads/other/4/4882.pdf>

in official sources. Most of the elderly live in multi-generational family settings. The 2014 General Population Census² showed that only one third of the persons aged 65 and over lived independently either together with their spouse, or alone.

One of the challenges in ensuring the independent living of older persons is related to the age discrimination in the area of employment – during hiring, promotion and training of employees.

On the other hand, as reflected in the 2014 census figures, many people in Georgia remain active in the old age. The Census recorded for the total old-age population of 65 and over a labor force participation rate of 48.4 percent, implying that almost half of the older persons were either working or actively seeking a job. However, Census shows, that large majority of working old – 85.1 percent, are employed in the agriculture sector and a similar 84.8 percent have an occupation as farmers, almost all of whom are subsistence farmers. The fact that agriculture is one of the least productive sectors in the country implies that mostly older workers are stuck in marginal, low productivity employment.³

Ensuring the age-friendly environment in the country is also problematic. Access to means of transport for people with special needs, and connectivity in remote and rural areas are important issues of concern, in particular when it comes to reaching hospitals or other care facilities.

Long-Term and Palliative Care for Older Persons

Long-term care can be both medical and non-medical and comprises the availability of a continuum of care services, including primary, secondary, tertiary care, public health services and emergency services. Increasingly, there has been an understanding that older persons should have the right to choose between different forms of long-term care, depending on their individually felt needs.

The recently developed National Health Care Strategy⁴ of Georgia does not mention the long-term care. While some elements of long-term care are provided by the state, others need to be introduced.

State programs includes boarding services for older persons, which is provided through daily specialized institutions (state's large Residential Institutions/boarding houses⁵ and so called "Community Organizations"⁶).

Daily specialized institutions for older people are available for men after 65 and women after 60. Exceptions are aged persons with psycho-social needs and mental health problems. The latter are placed in the Shelter for persons with mental health problems. Until recently, there had been only one such Shelter, where older persons live in an extremely poor and even inhuman and degrading conditions.

² "Ageing and Older Persons in Georgia" - An Overview Based on the 2014 General Population Census, available at:

http://census.ge/files/results/publication/en/2.%20Ageing-Engl_Print_F.pdf

³ "Ageing and Older Persons in Georgia" - An Overview Based on the 2014 General Population Census, p. 13; available at:

http://census.ge/files/results/publication/en/2.%20Ageing-Engl_Print_F.pdf

⁴ "Universal Health Care and Quality Control for the Protection of Patients' Rights", available at:

<https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/2657250>

⁵ Two boarding houses for older people in Tbilisi and Kutaisi, subordinated to the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of Statutory Victims of Human Trafficking.

⁶ Service providers under the Subprogram of the State Program on Social Rehabilitations and State Care annually approved by the Government. It aims to create conditions approximated to the family environment.

The monitoring⁷ carried out by the Public Defender of Georgia in April 2015 revealed numbers of challenges faced by older persons in daily specialized institutions. Despite existing legislative regulations on daily specialized institutions⁸, the state lacks systematized approach of overseeing their enforcement. The relevant state agencies do not conduct systemic monitoring and thus fail to adequately react to existing violations.

Ill-treatment of beneficiaries, absence of the mechanism for overseeing the compliance with established standards, shortcomings in maintaining documentation, lack and low qualification of personnel, poor feedback mechanism and low awareness of beneficiaries about their rights, non-adapted physical environment and poor infrastructure, social passivity and threat of being isolated from society, problems with the access to timely and adequate medical services, problems of infrastructure and sanitary-hygienic conditions are among challenges identified in the process of delivering long term care service for older people in daily specialized institutions. Scarce financing of institutions is one of the main factors leading to existing problems.

Existing long-term care services do not correspond to the needs of all older persons in the country. In 2017, 130 beneficiaries received “community organizations” service, while 80 older persons were registered in the waiting list. Tbilisi boarding house has also announced moratorium on the admission of new beneficiaries due to overload of the institution. Local self-governments mostly do not provide long term care services for older people. Rarely do they provide home care services for those in need as well.

The service received by beneficiaries in the long-term care institutions is not tailored to their special needs. The requirements of the standard concerning an individual service approach are not fulfilled in the majority of boarding houses.

According to Georgian legislation, Palliative Care is provided for persons with incurable illnesses in the terminal stage. Each person is entitled to express consent on palliative care in case of detention of such illness. Palliative care is offered under the state program Service of palliative care of the incurable patients. The program includes outpatient palliative care for incurable patients and inpatient palliative care for incurable oncologic patients as well as patients with HIV/AIDS. Outpatient palliative care for incurable patients of all ages is provided by the state in full (i.e. no co-payments required from the patients), while for inpatient palliative care patients aged above 18 years have to contribute with 30 per cent of the costs and patients below this age limit with 20 per cent).⁹

Palliative Care service provided by the state is not enough to cover needs of all older persons in need of such care. There is no properly developed network of home care. Insufficient number of the beds in palliative hospices as well as number of hospices themselves cannot meet needs of older persons in need of palliative services.

⁷ Public Defender of Georgia “State of Rights of Older Persons in Daily Specialized Institutions”, Available at: <http://www.ombudsman.ge/en/reports/specialuri-angarishebi/state-of-rights-of-older-persons-in-daily-specialized-institutions.page>

⁸ Order of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia on the Minimal Standards of Twenty-four Hours Services Provided for Older Persons in Specialized Institutions N01-54/6, July 23, 2014; Order of the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia on the Approval of the Terms and Conditions of placement and discharge of the person in specialized institution and other legal acts N52/6, February 26, 2010.

⁹ Available at: http://ssa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=822