

ZIVOT 90 contribution to the OEWG on Ageing second working session New York, 1 – 4th August, 2011.

Topic: Age and social exclusion.

People are excluded when they are not part of the networks which support most people in ordinary life - networks of family, friends, community and employment. Among many others, poor people, ex-prisoners, homeless people, people with AIDS, people with learning disabilities or psychiatric patients might all be said to be at risk of exclusion. This is a very broad concept: it includes not only deprivation, but problems of social relationships, including stigma, social isolation and failures in social protection .

In practice, the idea of exclusion is mainly used in three contexts: The first is **financial: exclusion** is identified with poverty, and its effect on a person's ability to participate in normal activities. The second is **exclusion from the labour market:** exclusion is strongly identified with long-term unemployment (though there is some research evidence to question whether long-term unemployed people are really excluded). Third, there is **exclusion in its social sense**, which identifies exclusion partly with alienation from social networks, and partly with the circumstances of stigmatized groups. The idea of social exclusion comes from France, where it was the basis for a policy of 'insertion' or social inclusion, combining benefits with plans and agreements to integrate people into society. This policy has been widely imitated, and the idea of exclusion has become one of the main concepts in the European Union.

To understand better social exclusion matters in European context and the problems older people in Europe face I would like to inform you about some actions and initiatives from last year when European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion was launched in European Union. Many separate actions have been organized on different European levels but NGOs wanted to do more. Taking into account that a combination of factors such as low income, poor health, age and/or gender-based discrimination, reduced physical or mental capacity, unemployment, isolation, abuse and limited access to services can all play a part in increasing the risk of poverty and social exclusion as people age civil society organizations associated in AGE Platform Europe prepared eight recommendations and called upon EU member states to respect them.

To prepare these recommendations AGE Platform members along with the AGE secretariat worked together so their national experiences were integrated into following articles, by the way still relevant:

1. **Guarantee an adequate minimum income in old age to fight poverty and prevent social exclusion** – the right to minimum income schemes, including minimum pension, should be recognized as a fundamental right to ensure everyone's dignity and independence.
2. **Develop minimum income standard for pensioners guaranteeing decent life and personal dignity** – meet older people's expectations including non-monetary aspects such as access to quality health and long-term services, decent housing and social or civic participation.
3. **Directly target older people in National Action Plans on social inclusion and involve those living in poverty in the policy-making process** – people aged 65 plus have the highest at-risk-of-poverty rate among all age population groups in 14 out of 27 EU Member States, while older women face the highest absolute poverty rate among all age and gender groups in the EU 27.
4. **Agree specific national targets for poverty reduction by age and gender** – in order to address important differences in old age poverty according to specific subgroups such as older women, single older persons, older people in urban/rural areas, ethnic minorities and older migrants etc.
5. **Enforce gender equality in employment to ensure adequate retirement income for women** – as the lack of adequate resources among older women is a direct result of the discrimination against them in employment, governments should also reflect deeply on existing social patterns and the traditional gender roles maintaining this disadvantageous situation.
6. **Provide adequate resources to live in dignity and support for social participation among the most vulnerable groups** – in particular older women, long-term unemployed older workers, workers on low wages or those forced to take early retirement, and older migrants.
7. **Facilitate a smooth transition towards retirement and strengthen a continued social inclusion in old age** – combat ageist attitudes of employers; ease older workers retirement through retained work connections; and support active ageing in their subsequent life stages.
8. **Promote individual well-being and quality of life at all ages through universal access to essential services** – quality standards for health and long-term care services should be introduced and adhered to by public authorities.

When looking for solutions to address older people's needs and expectations, we encounter very often **lack of civic participation** of older people's associations and older people themselves. To exchange knowledge and experiences of best practice on how to give a voice in policy debate on different levels to older people confronted with social exclusion. members of AGE Platform Social Inclusion Expert Group realized during last 3 years two European projects to enable older people's associations and another interested

actors to organize and run meetings with the aim that their voice be heard by decision-makers at local, national and European levels.

First project called **AGE / inclusion – give a voice to older people in poverty and social exclusion** – examined the development of the role of older people confronted with poverty and social exclusion in the implementation and further improvement of National Action Plans on Social Inclusion. In order to facilitate the participation of older people in this process, AGE / inc project developed a **workshop tool kit**, a methodology for organizing participatory meetings with older people. The underlying concept in producing this working instrument was that older people experiencing poverty and exclusion should be given the chance to be heard and, most of all, to be listened to with their voice and concerns being reflected in political planning, decision making and controlling at all levels. Apart from the participatory workshop tool kit, a range of recommendations aimed at all actors and at all levels of policy making were produced by the project, looking at further improvements in both the mechanism of the European social inclusion process and the work of AGE Platform in strengthening the direct involvement of older people. As an outcome you can find a **publication 'Give a voice to Older People in Poverty and Social Exclusion!'** on the AGE Platform web side (www.age-platform.eu) in six languages (Czech, German, English, Greece, French and Lithuanian).

Second project called **INCLUSage – debating older people’s needs** - sought to promote participatory debates at local and national level on the multiple aspects of poverty and social exclusion among older people. INCLUSage long-term goal was to set up in each partner country a durable consultation process or framework including older people’s organizations, policy-makers and other relevant stakeholders at all levels. The final stage of the project was focused on the development of a **‘Guide for Civil Dialogue on Promoting Older People’s Social Inclusion’**. The Guide presents national examples of good practice of civil dialogue on ageing issues, including also those that promote social inclusion in old age. The Guide also makes some proposals on how best to implement and participate in the civil dialogue process across all national policy-making levels: from governmental level down through to regional and local level strategies and initiatives which aim to improve the daily lives of older people. Again you can find this Guide on the Age Platform web side in the languages of participating countries from Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Italy, Poland and Slovakia.

To conclude I would like to use two quotations which I appreciate much:

“ Ageing is a fact of life, not the end of life “ and second quote “ We need to make a benefit of age – it should be a benefit, not a burden “.

Oldrich Stanek