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Challenges related to the ageing of the population ten years after MIPAA: public policies in Argentina from the point of view of the rights of older persons.

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Public policies in Argentina in the setting of the Regional Strategy for Latin America and the Caribbean of the Plan of the Madrid International Action on Ageing.

I would like to tell you some things about my country, Argentina. It is situated in the far south of South America. We are a nation with 40 million inhabitants from which almost 6 million (14,03%) are old adults who live mainly in urban areas. During the last years of the previous century and the first of the present one, we suffered an economic crisis which had enormous political and social consequences. In its worst moment half the population were poor, with an unemployment rate of 34% in the main urban centres of the country. Since then there has been a gradual recovery and nowadays the poverty and unemployment rates reach 10% of the population.

During the crisis the older persons were a great support to the younger ones not only because they contributed to the family budget with money from their old age pensions but also because they provided accommodation to their children and grandchildren who were unemployed. The old-age organizations played an essential role in the provision of social support and in the identification of older persons and children who were in a situation of nutritional or health risk.

Social policies regarding the ageing population in Argentina

Generally speaking, in 2008 the country's social investment in millions of constant pesos was twice bigger than the one at the worst moment of the crisis in 2001. The economic recovery of the expenditure in social security, mainly destined to older persons, doubled that of the year 2002. The same thing happened with the expenditure in health.

Older persons and their right to economic security

Focusing on the rights of the older persons, the proposal is to obtain an active participation of the older adults and their families in order to maintain the highest possible autonomy of the older persons. Pension coverage and its amount are clear indicators of autonomy. The great qualitative leap has happened from 2003 onwards with a political decision oriented towards obtaining the universalization of the pension coverage for older persons. Work was carried out in three stages. On the one hand, liberating the access to non-contributory pensions for those people older than 70 who had neither coverage nor resources. In this first stage, part of the population between 60/65 and 70 years old could not have access to a non-contributory pension because of their age and could not retire yet due to the fact that they had not contributed the required years. As a result, the access conditions to the ordinary contributory pension

were made more flexible for those persons who had reached retirement age but had not contributed for the required years or had not contributed at all (such is the case of housewives). Two million older persons were incorporated to the social security coverage reaching an unprecedented 96% in the whole country. Finally, there was an increase in the pensions, especially the minimum ones.

In the contexts of poverty, the redistributory effect of the ordinary pensions and of the non-contributory pensions is very important as they are the only regular family income in many homes and the older adults transfer their earnings to the rest of the family.

It is fundamental to open up new options for the economic inclusion of older adults by means of micro-ventures, work cooperatives, bartering strategies, crafts training, which allow new incomes but also the transference of their salaries to the other age groups. In order to do this, it is necessary to acknowledge the rights of older persons to contribute economically in their own communities and incorporate to the economic evaluation (calculation of the gross product) the informal services and exchanges that older adults provide their families (housework, looking after children, going to the bank, etc)

Experience counts is a plan of action which proposes the transference of traditional knowledge, such as crafts, from older persons to other generations. These practices empower the older persons and, at the same time, the younger and middle aged people acquire new tools to improve their opportunities of inclusion in the labour market. About 760 older persons have trained 15,000 young people and middle-aged adults in this way.

Regarding the access to education throughout their lives, less than 3% of older persons attend school (138,177 in all the country) and 6% of the older population is illiterate (283,529). This lack of education is more obvious among women and it varies according to different areas in the country. Even if there are non-formal educational alternatives for older adults in big cities (University Programmes for Older Adults), many of them are not free of charge and not sufficiently institutionalized in state universities.

Every effort must be made to reduce the gender and generation gaps: adult literacy campaigns, completion of primary and secondary education, implementation of courses on the use of new computing and communication technologies (Tics). In Argentina, while 53% of the population use computers, only 18% of older persons do so. (Indec, 2010)

Older persons and their right to health and well-being

The integral system to promote active ageing is one of the cornerstones of public policies, as it is comprised of a set of supports and services from the public sector which work with common principles, values and strategies. In Argentina, health coverage is guaranteed by medical attention in public hospitals. There is a combined system made up of the public and private health care. The inclusion of almost two million new beneficiaries in the state social security system will provide public health coverage to the above mentioned people. At the same time, due to an increase in demand, public health attention has become considerably slow in this first stage.

35% of the older population has some type of disability. That is to say that one in three of them potentially needs some kind of support to integrate into society. Nine out of ten disabled old persons are helped by their families (mainly women) to perform daily life

activities. The National Programme for Home Care, which has been developed with a few interruptions since 1996, is a fundamental tool to guarantee the right to 'grow old at home' for older persons. 2000 caregivers had been trained before 2003 and from then on other 18,000 have been trained, which adds up to 20,000 caregivers.

14, 200 older persons were treated free of charge during this period.

There is a need for debate on issues such as women as trained caregivers, the shortage of men performing these tasks and the social gap between the carer and the old person being looked after and of carers and old persons in situations of poverty.

Only 2.3% of older persons live in collective institutions (70,003 live in nursing homes), the rest live in private homes.

A lot has been done in the last years to improve the quality of care in long-stay residences and day centres in an effort to change the traditional concept of old-people's homes. Managers of day centres and long- stay residences have been trained in administrative gerontological techniques with the paradigm of rights. Improved buildings and equipment have contributed to a better quality of life for institutionalized older persons.

However, there is still a long way to go to meet the needs in the care of older adults with cognitive impairment and severe mental pathology. Issues concerning the preservation of the human rights of older persons who live in long-stay residences must be addressed as well as providing adequate specialized services. It is necessary to bridge the gaps concerning the limited development of the regulations that govern these institutions, as well as the supervision of the respect for the rights of the persons who live in them. The following issues must be especially mentioned: topics related to bioethics, assisted survival practices, the limitations and consents to the implementation of treatments and the use of life prolonging medical technology; the respect for the older persons' own decisions, even those with cognitive impairment or dementia.

Older persons and their right to participate and contribute to the community.

The concept of empowerment highlights the important role of older persons in development as an economic notion, bearing in mind human rights and as a source of strategies aimed at strengthening the older persons' independence.

Older Adults Social Volunteer Work is of significant importance for it puts into practice actions to support and strengthen the various forms of solidarity frameworks in which older adults and their organizations participate. Promotion of the strengthening of the existing capacities related to the older adult volunteers which contribute to create and/or consolidate actions in favour of the community and, in this way, coming in contact with other generations. It is along these lines that 6,200 older adults have been trained in the last few years.

Approximately 5,500 centres, 147 federations and 6 confederations form movement of old-adults associations which involves about two million older adults. The Federal Council of the Elderly created in 1997, has been working continuously since 2003. It is in this area where most of the work of all the different sectors involved in the issue of older persons takes place. 61% of the members belong to older adult organizations from all over the country. Its objective is to institutionalize the participation and collaboration of older persons, their organizations and the government in order to define, apply and follow those public policies related to this age group.

The Programme of Prevention of Discrimination, Abuse and Maltreatment of Older Adults has a holistic approach to the problem with the objective of preventing any situation of discrimination, abuse and maltreatment towards the older adults from the perspective of their rights. It ranges from awareness and prevention to counselling and case assistance. 12,400 members of technical teams and of the community in general have been trained in the subject.

The training of technicians and government officials who work on the subject in different areas, both in non profit and state organizations, has reached levels of coverage and depth unknown in Argentina before. The postgraduate course of studies 'Specialization in Communal and Institutional Gerontology' is public, free and federal. It has been implemented as a result of agreements between the Ministry of Social Development and National Universities. This is a two year postgraduate course and it is aimed at professionals and teachers who work on the subject of older adults in order to deepen their knowledge on institutional and community gerontology from the point of view of the paradigm of rights. 500 professionals have already graduated and are now working with older persons all over the country.

Final thoughts

Even if we cannot imagine the old age of those generations who have not yet been born, we can envisage the future cohorts of older persons. That is to say, those who have been able to have access to the highest educational offer in our history, to which women have had increased. Different family structures will become more frequent. Women, who have received higher education and are more involved in public activities, will be able to delegate their roles as informal caregivers more often.

The issue of disaffiliation from flexible forms of employment, the non-inclusion in the social security system, the crisis in such systems due to a drop in the number of contributors and the longer lives after retirement, still constitute unsolved problems in a context of uncertainty and of recovery of the credibility in the State. The proposed solution would be a shift in retirement ages and savings as an alternative to balance. Apart from these difficulties, the inequities of a complex territorial and jurisdictional map and the coexistence of paradigms should be considered.

A lot has been done as far as the recovery of rights is concerned, but the short-term challenges at a national level are related to the institutionalization of State policies regarding the elaboration of a Gerontological Plan, which is already underway, to go deeper into the associative strategies and the articulation of existing resources.

At an international level there remains the drafting, approval and implementation of a Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, sponsored by Argentina, which also presided over the work group in the UN Convention. The main objective of the Convention is the promotion and inclusion in the agenda of national and regional courses of action for the improvement of the quality of life of older persons as an inexorable duty of the World States and societies.