

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

RECOMMENDATION No. R (94) 9

OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS TO MEMBER STATES CONCERNING ELDERLY PEOPLE

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 10 October 1994
at the 518th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)*

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is the achievement of greater unity among its members, for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and of facilitating their economic and social progress;

Bearing in mind the right to respect for private and family life as defined in Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights;

Bearing in mind the declaration on equality between women and men, adopted by the Committee of Ministers at its 83rd Session (16 November 1988);

Welcoming the designation by the European Community of the year 1993 as "European Year of Older People and Solidarity between the Generations", and the Declaration of Principles of the Council of the European Union and the Ministers of Social Affairs in the framework of the Council, 6 December 1993 (OJ 93/C 343/01 of 21/12/93);

Taking account of the legal instruments of the United Nations entities concerning older persons;

Bearing in mind the wide range of legal instruments already prepared by the Council of Europe which take into account the social, economic, and cultural specificities of elderly people, and of the many legal instruments which take older people in the family context into consideration;

Considering the demographic changes in Europe and the ever-increasing number of elderly people in our societies;

Considering that the great increase in life expectancy which has taken place during this century, and which is structural, should be perceived not as a burden for society to bear but as a positive trend which opens up new perspectives for younger people;

Considering, nevertheless, the possibility that many people, already disadvantaged when younger, may become doubly disadvantaged as they enter old age;

Considering that differences in life-conditions between men and women, as a consequence of family patterns and status, may increase in older age and can contribute to the effects of social exclusion, especially for older women living alone;

Considering the importance of adequate financial resources for carrying out planned and proposed measures in the member states,

Recommends that the governments of member states adopt suitable measures for elderly people, in accordance with the guiding principles appended hereto.

Appendix to Recommendation No. R (94) 9
*Guiding principles to be taken into account when taking measures
concerning elderly people*

Ageing as a process

Ageing is a process: being old depends on the individual's circumstances and wider environment, and the functional handicaps related to ageing begin to show gradually. It is therefore useless to attempt to define exactly when old age begins. It is necessary, on the other hand, to prepare oneself to age well.

The majority of elderly people manage their own lives, in an autonomous manner, and are in principle not more dependent than the population is as a whole.

There will be a greater proportion of elderly and very old people in society which will have consequences for all sectors of government policies. Governments should take the appropriate measures in these fields, adapting finances if necessary.

The specific role of elderly people, and solidarity between generations

Elderly people form an important human, social and economic resource within society.

In a rapidly changing society, elderly people transmit timeless values to the younger generations.

Solidarity between generations is of great importance and should be encouraged, both in the family and on the individual level, as well as on the private and public institutional level.

Elderly people have a positive role to play in maintaining relationships between generations, both in the family and in the community, and in particular in the transmission of their experience, knowledge and know-how.

Prevention and the quality of life

Preventive policies aimed at enabling people to age well and to avoid as much as possible becoming dependent are necessary to start dealing with ageing at an early age.

Longer life should not mean diminished enjoyment of life: people should have the opportunity of maintaining enriching social and individual activities and occupations.

Society should enable elderly people, including those who live in institutions, to lead lives which are as autonomous as possible, taking into account their handicaps.

Elderly people should be able to live in security, wherever they are, free from fear of exploitation or of physical or mental abuse.

The necessary steps should be taken by society to ensure elderly people that care will be available in the future whenever they need it, promoting thereby a feeling of security and an improved quality of life.

Rights and duties

Elderly people have the same entitlement to human dignity as other members of society, and therefore to the same rights and duties: in particular, elderly people should retain their right to self-determination, and should exercise their choices appropriately, taking into account the different stages in their ageing.

Society owes it to itself to recognise the past and present active role and contribution of elderly people.

The human rights of increasingly vulnerable people must be particularly safeguarded.

Modern technology can make a substantial contribution to the maintenance of the autonomy of elderly people. Public authorities should promote this.

Participation

Elderly people should be entitled to equal participation at all levels and in all fields, whether social, cultural or political.

Elderly people should be able to participate in the establishment and the provision of services for themselves, including in their setting up, management and evaluation.

Society has a responsibility to help create arenas of participation, to prepare the conditions for self-help groups and thus contribute positively to prevent isolation.

Society should increase or facilitate activities for elderly people, especially those who live in institutions, by providing opportunities for social, cultural and individual activities in a manner that secures self-determination and freedom of choice for the people concerned.

It is important for every citizen to participate in society and to engage in meaningful paid or unpaid activities according to their age and possibilities. This will give them a meaningful life, help them to avoid loneliness, and add to their integration into society.

Fighting against and preventing social exclusion

The state, voluntary welfare organisations, the local community and the family should aim to promote the social integration of elderly people, in order to prevent their social exclusion in all its forms, whatever their ethnic or national origin, family status, language, religion, or social condition.

Adequate housing and social protection systems that take into consideration the needs of particularly vulnerable groups are an essential factor in preventing social exclusion.

Governments need to be aware of the specific problems of elderly migrants and refugees.

The role of information and education

The importance of information and education for elderly people themselves, for families, for professional and voluntary workers, and for the community as a whole, needs to be recognised.

Appropriate information and education can increase family and public sensitivity to the issues of relevance to elderly people, and in particular enhance positive perceptions of the role of elderly people in society.

In this respect the media have a crucial role to play in the dissemination of information and in the promotion of educational programmes.