Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: The question of immigration as a tool to slow down the ageing process of societies.

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Introduction

The question of immigration as a tool to slow down the ageing process of societies is of extreme relevance in today's societies since the population aged above 65 is growing faster than all other age groups. 2018 was the first year when this issue was raised by it was the first time in history when there were less children under 5 years old than adults of age greater than 65. Indeed, in 2019, 1 in every 11 people was 65 years old or more and it is predicted that by 2050, this ratio will increase to 1 in every 6 people.

It is important to discuss the issue at hand because it impacts almost every sector of societal life. As there is a shift in the age of the population, there is also a shift of the interests and demands, which will impact the goods, services, financial and labour markets. Indeed, a smaller young working class will lead to tax receipts. Transportation, housing, social protection, pensions, health care (which will have more costs) and other services will also be impacted, which will call for a complete restructuring of modern societies. Nevertheless, the importance of the older generations cannot be overlooked because their knowledge contributes to development and provides guidance to the shaping of national and international policies.

Ageing societies are a result of several factors. First, the life expectancy rises year after year, as a result of more advanced and innovative health systems, better living conditions, safer food supplies, among other developments. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the fastest increase in human life expectancy occurred between 2000 and 2016, when it rose by 5.5 years worldwide and 10.3 years in the African continent. On the contrary, fertility keeps decreasing. For instance, around 1950, women living in developing countries would have about 6 children each, but this fertility rate was decreased to 3 children in today’s societies, which is similar to how it was about 50 years ago. Despite
these two factors, the global population is still on the rise, going from 2.5 billion in 1950, to 6.6 billion in 2019 to the expected 9.1 billion by 2050. As the population increases but birth rates lower, the percentage of older persons will increase exponentially.

This debate should focus on the third factor that can influence the age trends of a population: migration. It has been shows that countries experiencing large flows of immigrants tend to have a slower ageing process because immigrants usually encompass the young working class. Unfortunately, there is a negative side which is that these migrants can then contribute to an excessively large older population if they remain in the country they migrated to. Therefore, solutions to balance this flux of migrants and their global distribution should be the main focus.

Definition of Key Terms

Migration

According to the United Nations (UN), a migrant is a person who has either moved or is moving away from their usual place of residence, including crossing international borders. This definition is independent of the person’s legal status, motive for moving, whether this translation is voluntary or not, and of how long they will be away from their hometown. The number of migrants worldwide is on the rise, going from 221 million in 2010 to 272 million in 2019 (which is 3.5% of the global population).

First-generation migrants

Migrants who move from their home country to another state (as stated by the definition above).

Second-generation migrants

The children of first-generation migrants, who are already born in the country the parents migrated to.

Older persons

“Older persons” is the proper name used to refer to someone who is 65 years old or older. Within this group of people, there are two distinctions made: “early elder” which encompasses those from 65-74 and “late elderly” which includes those with 75 or more years. Nevertheless, for the purpose of this debate, these two distinctions should not be made, and the target population should be referred to as “older persons".
Youth

The age range associated with the youth changes geographically because some countries consider the age transition between being a child and an adult to be done at 15, others at 16, 18 and finally 21. Nevertheless, in order to reach an international consensus, the United Nations has agreed that anyone up until 25 years old is encompassed by the term “youth”.

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are especially relevant on this issue because the theme of the agenda is “no one will be left behind”. In this debate, the group that should not be left behind are the older persons. Specific SDGs which are relevant to the topic at hand are the promotion of health (SDG 3), employment and economic growth (SDG 8), reducing inequality inside and between countries (10), as well as promoting sustainable human settlements and inclusive societies (SDG 11).

Background Information

Ageing population statistics

Geography-related data

Figure 1 displays two maps indicating the size of the national population of age 60 or above in 2015 and the predictions for 2050. As it can be seen, the continent with the slowest ageing process is Africa, while the Americas and Europe are those with the fastest growth. While most of Africa’s population is expected to age between 0-9%, the other continents should expect a rise between 25 and more than 30%.

Individually, Switzerland has the highest expected rise citizens over 60 (from 23.6% in 2015...
to 34.5% in 2050), while Afghanistan has the lowest (from 4.0% in 2015 to 9.0% in 2050).

Note that these numbers can be deceiving because developing regions are home to about two third of the world’s older persons. Indeed, it is predicted that by 2050 about 8 in every 10 older persons will live in developing regions, which means that the number of older persons rises faster in developing regions and not in developed. The reason why this rise doesn’t affect the overall percentages is because developing regions are also those with the highest fertility. This is to say that this is an international issue and that it affects different regions differently.

Gender-related data

Generally, women are more likely to live alone after they reach 65 years than men area. In fact, both in Europe and Africa, this chance for women to live alone is twice that of men.

Problems with Ageing Population

Economic problems

The first problem that can arise from an ageing population is the decrease of the working-age population. If there is a decline in the working-age population, there is a shortage of apt workers which can lead to a decline in productivity, slower business expansion, increased labor costs and less international competitiveness. Other than these more obvious consequences, there are others that can be indirectly triggered, such as the rise of wages which can lead to inflation.

The second problem (which has already been mentioned) is the elevated health costs. In order to invest more in the health care, money will have to be removed from other public sectors which can lead to their deterioration. Therefore, the older population will be benefit at the expanse of the youth’s living conditions. Indeed, every sector of the economy will be affected because of the higher demand for health and retirement facilities instead of schools and educational institutions. This will lead the government to lower investments in sectors that benefit the youth in order to reinvest in the sectors with the most demand on behalf of the older population.

Another problem is that there will be an increase of the “dependency ratio”. In this context, this dependency refers to the government being depended on a narrow group of workers to pay taxes and complete their work. Therefore, there is a larger group living from fixed retirement pensions that has less taxes to pay than the smaller group whose work sustains these pensions. For instance, in Mauritius, this dependence was of 3 older persons per 100 working adults in 1950, but in 2017 this ratio has risen to 14 older persons per 100 working adults.
Social problem

Another is that with more older persons to be taken care of and less young adults to take care, there are more cases of social isolation. For example, in Japan, the number of older persons living with their families has halved during the last 50 years. Likewise, in the Netherlands, 93.4% of older persons live either lone or with their spouse. Nevertheless, there are exceptions such as the Afghanistan, where only 2.3% of older persons live alone or with only their spouse.

Reasons for migration and the additional costs that arise as a result

Economic interests

Even though this issue isn’t directly focused on the promotion of migration, the reasons that drive people to migrate must be understood in order to encourage them to do so and, consequently, balance age groups worldwide. When young adults finish their education, their first objective is to find a source of income, so they migrate and are disposed to work in worse conditions and for a lower salary than most national adult workers. Consequently, there is an influx of younger workers, which lowers the mean age of the national population. However, what is often overlooked is that the aged population doesn’t diminish just because the average age lowers. Instead, a greater portion of older citizens are left unemployed and engage in recreational activities that increase lifespan.

Note that this can also work the other way because some countries need qualified labour force (such as EU countries who are facing a scarcity of doctors), so medical experts from other continents are encouraged to migrate to Europe. However, expertise takes time, so these professionals belong to an older age group and, consequently, increase the mean age. This means that efforts need to be made to only promote the migration of younger classes and ensure that qualified labour force can be carried out by national workers.

Life-saving situations

Despite the focus of this issue being measures to utilize migration to slow down ageing, it must be remembered that once borders are opened for working migrants, there will be a tendency for other migrants to seek refuge either from persecution, war or catastrophes. Independently of the age of these migrants and their contribution to slowing down ageing within the country of migration, this will bring additional costs to the host government, such as in the health sector. In fact, this is a consequence of any migration (independently of the motive). The higher the influx of migrants is, the higher the government’s investment on living conditions. Therefore, the tool of migration to slow down ageing
should be used carefully and by Member States whose economy can sustain it. The truth is that countries with a “no-migration” policy as the ones with the fastest ageing population.

**Major Countries and Organizations Involved**

**The International Organization for Migration (IOM)**

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) was an inter-governmental organization established in 1951 that aims to promote a proper and human management of migration, as well as international cooperation. It also helps by coming up with solutions to migration issues and by providing humanitarian assistance migrants. Note that this organization doesn’t only focus on refugees and internally displaced people, so it can be a valuable resource to help distribute and regulate migration by age groups.

**Open Ended Working Group on Ageing (OEWG)**

This group is responsible for considering how to protect internationally the human right of older persons, as well as coordinating measures by the UN to address the lack of these rights. The solutions on the table include establishing a new binding resolution, reviewing the Madrid Action Plan on Ageing and creating a Special Rapporteurs composed of experts that closely monitor the human rights granted to this societal group.

**Refugees Welcome International**

This is an initiative began by a German group who wants to facilitate the integration of migrants in hosting countries by providing a service similar to Airbnb, which helps migrants find a house for a cheaper price and faster. This can be important to speed up the influx of young workers in countries with a fast ageing population.

**Timeline of Events**

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Description of event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Adoption of the Principles for Older Persons.</td>
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1992 Proclamation of Ageing by the General Assembly
2002 Drafting of Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPPA).
2010 Creation of the United Nations’ OEWG
2016 UN adopts the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants
2018 Less children under 5 years old than adults of age greater than 65 worldwide.
2018 Signing of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration

Relevant UN Treaties and Events

- New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (A/RES/71/1)
- Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration
- 62-point “Vienna International Plan of Action on Ageing.”
- United Nations Principles for Older Persons
- Second World Assembly on Ageing of 2002 where it was adopted the Political Declaration and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (A/CONF.197/L.2)

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

European controversy on border management and refugee intake

Regarding a previous point about migrants who flee their home-country to save their lives, refugees are a big factor to consider regarding this issue. Indeed, in 2015, when European countries such as Greece, Italy and Hungary (which are three of the countries with the highest influx of migrants) proposed a compulsory quota system to relocate around 16,000 refugees, there was controversy. On one side, the Finance Minister of the Czech Republic suggested closing European borders to distribute the migrants. On the other, countries such as Lithuania, Germany, Finland and Sweden opposed this suggestion because they wanted to combat their increasing ageing populations. Indeed, the German Chancellor opened the borders to 500,000 migrants yearly. Likewise, the Finance Minister of Sweden noted that opening border to refugees doesn’t only slow the population ageing, but also alleviates the economic strains of the dependency ratio and would promote the creation of new jobs. Even though
these measures have had positive impacts, the next steps should include spreading them to countries with “closed-border” policies.

**Using technology as a tool to aid migration of the youth and older persons**

Even though there haven’t been any technical solutions that focus on both factors simultaneously, the following examples can be combined in order to aid the issue at hand. Regarding the migrants, the International Rescue Committee has developed a project called “What’s in my bag?” which records the possessions brought by migrants and allows them to share their status with organizations and their families. It also provides a GPS. Regarding the issue at hand, Member States could use this GPS to guide migrants to the areas where there is a greater demand for young workers. Likewise, the Red Cross has set up a program called “Trace the Face” which helps migrants upload their picture, so that they can be recognized. This could also come in useful in the topic being discussed because it could help distribute working migrants based on age and condition, so that there is a balance between health care costs and age groups across a nation.

Regarding older persons, the United States has developed an app which grants immediate access to hospitals and doctors, so that there is a better management of hospitals and the emergencies aren’t crowded. This allows the patients to receive immediate advice and spares them a trip to the health facility. This is important regarding the issue of migration to slow ageing because it helps grant proper health standards to both age groups. This app could be made broader to also focus on youth workers and provide them direct assistance, as a bonus of migrating.

**Possible Solutions**

Other than the solutions suggested below, delegates are encouraged to consider all the sectors affected and that influence the issue being discussed. This includes the integration of the migrants, treatment of older persons, and different forms of discrimination faced by both groups.

**Short-term solutions**

**Restricting migration**

The first and most straight-forward step should be to predefine a number of migrants that will be encouraged in the country seeking to lower the population’s ageing. Experts call this initial step the “Rejuvenation” period because it aims to attract the youth to unbalance the age groups in the country. It is also important to treat these young migrants as permanent residents and not temporary workers, so
nations should consider facilitating their access to working permits and residency cards. Otherwise, the temporary workers only provide a temporary solution because they will leave back to their home country once their job is complete.

Other ways to promote the influx of young workers are to encourage international marriages and offer the foreign partners easier access to legal documentation. Benefits should also be given to second generation migrants, so that these stay in the country they are born in instead of migrating to the country of their other parents. These benefits can range from food discounts, to free toiletries and education, among others.

**Long-term Solutions**

Even though short-term solutions need to be carried forth to start and drive change, they will only redistribute the young population, which will slow ageing in the host country of the migrants but speed up ageing in the country of origin of these migrants. Therefore, Member States also need to consider involving the older persons in this action plan.

**Retirement**

As it has been discussed, promoting the migration of the youth isn’t enough because it doesn’t decrease the size of the older persons’ population. Instead, the older person’s population has to be simultaneously dispersed and given opportunities to contribute to the proper functioning of the society and the strengthening of the economy. A possible solution is for Member States to rise the retirement age but make it optional to work these extra years. This will allow older persons who wish to work to do so and, consequently, will lower the dependency ratio. So far, the countries who rise the retirement age make it compulsory, which not only angers the population but also increases the rate of unemployment among the youth (as is the example of Portugal).

The age of retirement shouldn’t be the only aspect analysed in this category, but also the nature of the retirement. In other words, retirements that are justified due to health reasons should be prioritized, but those which are based on age despite the worker’s good health conditions shouldn’t be promoted and the benefits lessened to the retired person.

**Working Opportunities**

Even though increasing the retirement age is a good first step, it doesn’t ensure that older persons will comply and work. Therefore, incentives for them to do so must be found and not only at a national but also at an international level, so that older persons also undergo migration. Examples of
possible encouragements are lowering the taxes for those who decide to work, offering them a specialized and cheaper health care plan, designing special travelling packs and prices for families who migrate with at least one older person and one young adult (so that youth migration continues and is balanced with that of older persons).

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