

Cyprus: Chapters 1 and 2

1. Definition of EME and General European practices

The key word in our project title is the “marginalization” of Elders. We believe that “Marginalization” is a social process where elders are becoming or being made marginal as a group within the society at large. That means that elders are less involved in social activities due to a variety of reasons. Marginalized elders could be excluded from important participation in social affairs or from services, programs, and policies; leaving the elders at the margins of the society.

The main causes are mainly socioeconomic and we briefly believe that those issues are the ones that can cause the marginalization of elders:

1. Geographical Location; living in rural areas
2. Economic status; low pensions
3. Health situation; access to healthcare
4. Educational background; low education
5. Living in Eldercare centers; less family care, low quality services

It should be noted that the EU pays particular attention to the issues of elder people and it dedicated 2012 as the European Year of Active Ageing. This has a twofold objective; to help elders to take an active role in society, while encouraging a healthy ageing and to help create better job opportunities and working conditions for the growing numbers of older people in Europe. We are witnessing that the EU is in a process of significant population ageing. From 2012, the European working-age population will start to shrink, while the over-60 population will continue to increase by about two million people a year. A concept that is gaining ground in Europe is the intergenerational learning, where young people and elders come together, learn and gain from each other.

In European member states, there are different national initiatives that provide care and services for elders. For example, there are Elder Day Centers and community based initiatives that provide support for elders and generate activities and social events that keep elders active in later life. The care for elders is also encouraged by the European Social Charter which states that “every elderly person has the right to social protection” which implies that EU member states must ensure a decent life for elderly people.

2. Country reports/ Brief reports on situation in partner countries

In Cyprus, there are groups of elders that face marginalization or isolation, mainly due to the five causes that we have mentioned above. Nowadays, with the economic crisis at its peak, elders are a segment of the society that faces its impact the most. The unemployment had an impact on people who are close to retirement age and have a difficulty to find a new job and adapt to labour market changes. Traditionally, Cypriot families support their elder parents at the later stage of their life. However, the financial incapacity of Cypriot households and the change of social trends are changing the attitude towards elders; especially within families with low incomes. On the other hand, there are several national and European initiatives that reach elders at local level, such as the development of Day Centres for elders.

Elder people in rural areas usually combine the 5 causes of marginalization that we have described above, since there are not many initiatives to provide sound support for elders in rural areas. However, there are general initiatives that provide a good opportunity for elder people to participate in educational and social activities. The ministry of education in Cyprus has general programs that seniors can participate although they are not specifically aimed at seniors. This programme is composed of afternoon courses on different topics at different levels at a very low cost that everyone can apply and participate in the area of his interest. The local authorities/municipalities in the rural areas are taking into consideration their general needs and requests. The focus of their needs, especially in those areas, is their health, the mobility to the big cities and other general social issues. The local authority deals with their needs and it organizes several activities that can keep them active in the society. In certain cases, there are small medical units to serve basic health needs, small Senior Citizens' Centres and certain areas where seniors can meet and socialize.