



PERMANENT MISSION OF PORTUGAL TO THE UNITED NATIONS

Statement by

His Excellency João Salgueiro

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary

on the occasion of the

40th Session of the Commission on Population and
Development

Agenda Item 4

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Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to congratulate you on your election as Chairman of the 40th session of the Commission on Population and Development.

We align ourselves with the statement made by Germany on behalf of the EU on the theme "Changing age structure of policies and their implications for development" that we fully endorse.

We reaffirm our support for the entire agenda of the International Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo, in 1994, the Key Actions for the Further Implementation adopted at the ICPD + 5, approved in 1999 and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

We consider that it is important to raise awareness and knowledge of the multidimensional effects of changing age structures in the context of development.

Population age structures differ from region to region and from country to country. Portugal faces a continuously increasing population ageing, as is the case in many other European countries.

Population ageing in Portugal is a result of the interaction of the following demographic tendencies: increasing life expectancy; lower fertility rates and considerable emigration flows registered in the last century.

In Portugal, life expectancy at birth increased by 3 years for men (74.9) and 2 for women (81.4) from 1995 to 2005. In this context, the infant mortality rate is about 3.5 deaths per 1000 live births, one of the lowest in the European Union.

The fertility rate in Portugal is 1.4 children per woman, one of the lowest observed in the EU countries.

International migration has become an increasingly important component of population growth.

Mr. Chairman,

In terms of national age structures, the proportion of older persons (aged 65 and over) is higher (17.1%) than the proportion of the young population (15.6%). The share of the population of working age (15-64 years) is 67.3% and the potential support ratio is around four working age persons per one older person. It is already the case in Portugal that older persons outnumber young persons and that the elderly themselves are ageing.

Population projections compiled by National Statistical Institute suggest a decreasing of the population size after 2010. It is expected that the fertility rate will increase in the future, as has been the case in other EU countries, but it will remain below the replacement level. Coupled with increased life expectancy, these factors assure that population ageing in Portugal will continue until 2050, despite the positive trends in migration flows.

Mr. Chairman,

The regional and social implications of ageing will have massive repercussions and will cause new economic, social and ethical problems. Therefore, we need to work together in order to establish a holistic and constructive policy response to this demographic challenge.

At the national level, coordination among ministries, namely, the Ministries of Health, Education, Employment and Social Solidarity is of vital importance. In our view, national policies should focus on five domains:

- Favour demographic replacement;
- Value work: more jobs and for longer, with a higher quality active life;
- Encourage productivity and innovation;
- Encourage integration of migrants;
- Promote sound public finances sustainability: guarantee adequate social protection and equity among generations.

Strengthening solidarity among generations, and promoting the sharing of resources and experiences of older generations can be of great benefit for the economy and society.

In our ageing society, many social issues have come to be increasingly important. According to some figures, we estimate that about 300 000 older persons live in isolation. In this context, the Portuguese government has adopted a strategic framework with a view to:

- Strengthen social protection, giving priority to older persons;
- Give priority to fight poverty and social exclusion;
- Apply positive discriminatory principle social security contributions according to beneficiary's social and economic status;

To implement this framework, we have, inter alia, developed several measures:

- Give access to older persons to the labour force and give them the opportunity to remain active;
- Establish a lifelong learning system to promote active ageing with the view to promoting social and economic integration;
- Adapt responses and social protection schemes to social and demographic changes;
- Promote a more independent and higher quality of life;
- Promote active participation of older persons in society;
- Establish a wide range of social equipment nets and support services and community integration;

Another relevant measure to approach the challenges and opportunities of population ageing includes the promotion of flexible retirement practices, as well as reducing incentives and pressures for early retirement. In this regard, the “New Opportunities Initiative” of lifelong learning is not only key in raising the overall levels of basic education of the adult population but also to ensure their adaptability in this changing world. In this context, it is essential for governments to co-operate with social partners and have the support of the business community to promote the employment of older persons.

Older persons can also offer new market potential for products and services, namely health and day care centres which are geared to meet their needs. This new demand can have positive effects on the labour market.

Mr. Chairman,

The Government of Portugal, as has already been stated, has a political commitment to addressing the needs of the changing age structures in our country. In this regard, we are also committed to collecting data, analysis and research regarding population issues, including age and gender perspectives while promoting cooperation with academia in order to better formulate the national policies.

We congratulate the United Nations in launching this important debate. It is up to each one of us to contribute positively to this reflexion.

Thank you Mr Chairman.