

NGO Submission for the Initial Universal Periodic Review of the Republic of Tajikistan

Submitted by HelpAge International, March 2011

Key Words

Older people, social security, seasonal poverty, migration

Introduction

1. This submission highlights the importance of pensions and the right to social security on the enjoyment of a range of rights by older people and the children in their care, including the right to an adequate standard of living, to food and to health. It makes two recommendations for government action.

Inadequate pensions and the right to social security

2. By the end of 2009, 47 % of the population lived in poverty, 14 % of whom lived in extreme poverty¹. A national survey² on ageing showed that high poverty rates and accordingly low household income, is mainly found in those households with older people.

3. For many older people whose children have migrated to Russia or a third country, their pension is the only source of income for them and dependents in their care. The number of older people (above 60) in Tajikistan in early 2010 consisted of 386,500, which is 5% of the total population (an increase of 14.6 % since 2000). The number of old-age pensioners registered by social security authorities in 2009 was 319,000³.

4. Whilst improvements have been made by the Government in delivering pensions more efficiently, their value remains extremely low and does not allow for an adequate standard of living and security in old age. The average pension in February 2010 was only 91 somoni, which was approximately 90 percent of the extreme poverty line. In 2010 the minimum pension was raised from 60 to 80 somoni, which is approximately US\$18. 70% of respondents to the above-mentioned survey on ageing received this minimal pension, which is inadequate for them and their dependants. In February 2010 a sack of flour, which is not enough for a family for one month, costs 120-130 somoni (US\$27 - 29) at the local market.

Looking ahead – the right to social security for migrant workers

5. Large-scale migration in Tajikistan started in 1996, accelerated in 2000s and has developed into a powerful internal dynamic since then. In 2008 the number of labour migrants consisted of 800,000 to 1 million people⁴.

¹ Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Poverty statistics in Tajikistan (based on research conducted in 2009), available at <http://www.stat.tj/en/img/> (visited March 02, 2011).

² This survey had been supported by UNDESA and conducted by several local NGOs headed by Central Asian Gerontology Center in Tajikistan in 2010, the report is not published yet.

³ Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Tajikistan in figures, 2010, July 2010, available at <http://www.stat.tj/en/img/> (visited March 02, 2011).

⁴ Umarov Kh. Research presentation on "Tajik labour migration in the context of global financial crises: reasons and impact", July 2010, available at <http://www.iom.tj/pubs/globalcrisis.pdf>, (visited March 02, 2011).

6. Most migrants work in the informal sector and do not contribute to any social security system. As a result the number of vulnerable people reaching retirement age with no access to social security in Tajikistan is increasing rapidly.

Migration – not a poverty reduction mechanism for all

7. Migrant workers from deprived and rural families often lack vocational and language skills and therefore have to work in low paid manual jobs like street cleaners, luggage carriers, construction or agricultural workers. Most of their salaries go towards living costs in the country of destination. As a result many older people receive no remittances from their migrant children and when they do, they are often irregular or of insufficient value.

Extreme cold and the right to an adequate standard of living

8. Older people, like young children, are particularly vulnerable to extreme weather conditions due to weaker immune systems with a subsequent higher risk of increased ill health. Winters lasts for several months in major mountainous areas and weather gets very cold. At the same time shortages of coal, electricity and unstable gas supply, which is mainly imported from Uzbekistan, severely affect older people's ability to heat their homes. The electricity supply in the major cities is more stable, however, the prices for consumption remains high in comparison to the average salary and pension. During these months older people often cope by staying in bed, only leaving their homes in the most urgent circumstances and only heating them when cooking the evening meal.

Poor nutrition and the right to food

9. Increased seasonal food prices due to global markets and local seasonality, insufficient pensions and infrequent or no remittances severely impact on older people and their household's access to adequate nutrition and enjoyment of the right to food. The cost of consumer's basket, at actual consumption in 2009 amounted to 105 somoni (approximately US\$24) per one household member. In September 2010, the cost of the food basket had doubled to 205 somoni (approx. US\$46)⁵. As a result older people on inadequate pensions are unable to afford to buy the food they need for adequate nutrition for themselves and those in their care.

Medical costs and the right to health

10. Poor nutrition and cold weather severely impact on the health of older people. The initial findings of the recent national survey presented on January 27th, 2011 showed that 48% of respondents suffered from high blood pressure, and older people in rural areas mainly suffered from stomach diseases, which most probably relates to the presence of campylobacter pylori due to limited access to clean water.

11. Health care is unaffordable for many poor older people. Despite the state remaining the main public funder and provider of health care services in Tajikistan, private out-of-pocket payments account for an estimated 76% of total health care expenditure in 2007, one of the highest percentages in the WHO European Region⁶. High costs of medicine, informal fees and inadequate income through pensions or remittances are major barriers to older people's enjoyment of their right to health.

Recommendation 1

⁵ Statistical Agency under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Food security and poverty, No3, 2010, available at http://stat.tj/en/img/2a4169a75aa18b7987598fe7a555ba5c_1293204041.pdf, (visited, March 02, 2011).

⁶ European observatory on health system and policies, "Health care system in transition, Tajikistan, WHO/Europe, 2010", available at <http://www.euro.who.int/en/where-we-work/member-states/tajikistan/publications3>, (visited March 02, 2011).

12. The Government should increase the value of the existing contributory pension so that it provides an adequate standard of living for older people and those in their care.

Recommendation 2

13. The Government should consider wider policy options for a universal non-contributory pension to ensure the increasing number of population working in informal sector, including labour migrants, have access to social security in old age.

For further information, contact:

Abdusaloh Rasulov
Country Programme Coordinator
HelpAge International
137 Rudaki Avenue, 5th Floor
734003 Dushanbe
Republic of Tajikistan

Tel: +992 (44) 6007017
Email: arasulov@helpageinternational.org
www.helpage.org