

RIASE

REVISTA IBERO-AMERICANA DE SAÚDE E ENVELHECIMENTO
REVISTA IBERO-AMERICANA DE SALUD Y ENVEJECIMIENTO

EDITORIAL

César João da Fonseca – Department of Nursing, University of Évora, Comprehensive Health Research Center (CHRC), Évora, Portugal. ORCID: 0000-0001-6975-612X

We celebrate longevity and aging populations, arguably the greatest achievement of the twentieth century. Worldwide, life expectancy at birth has increased by over 30 years in the last century. However, such a demographic transition imposes an epidemiological transition that confronts us with challenges that require innovative responses and/or that reconfigure traditional roles, particularly at the level of informal caregivers.

The perceived quality of life of informal caregivers is often described as lower compared to the general population, and is associated with a higher risk of poverty, isolation, physical and mental health problems and significant difficulties in remaining in the labor market. An estimated 32 million people care for an elderly or disabled family member. However, the total number of people providing some kind of care could amount to 125 million across Europe. In Portugal studies are diffuse and inconsistent, however, and according to OPSS (2015), it is estimated that in the 3,869,188 households in Portugal, there will be 110,355 people with self-care deficits in households, of which, 48,454 will be bedridden people. As a result of the proposal made under the Development Plan of the National Network of Continuous Integrated Care 2016-2019, of the 21st Government of Portugal, the development of the Informal Caregiver Status was proposed.

The percentage of long-term care (CLD) expenditure in relation to Gross Domestic Product is residual in Portugal (0.2%) when compared to Switzerland (2.30%), Denmark (2.6%), Finland. (2.6%), Norway (2.6%), Sweden (3.70%) and the Netherlands where this percentage is 4.1%. If we compare the percentage of public expenditure on CLD in relation to total expenditure on health care, it is in Portugal 1.7%, in Switzerland 20.1%, in Denmark 24.0%, in Norway 28.9%, Finland 29.6% and Sweden 40.3%. Therefore, it is necessary to increase investment in this area of care with a focus on home care, with the accompaniment of informal caregivers, ensuring conditions of adequacy and guarantee of resources to provide care in home environments.

In Portugal, according to article 252 of the Labor Code, the worker has the right to be absent from work up to 15 days a year to provide unavoidable and indispensable assistance, in case of illness or accident, to a spouse or partner or common economy with the worker, relative or the like on the rising straight line or on the 2nd degree of the collateral line. The period of absence provided for in the preceding paragraph shall be increased by 15 days per year in the case of unavoidable and indispensable assistance to a person with a disability or chronic illness who is a spouse or lives in a de facto union with the worker. Apart from this explicit support, nothing else is formally recognized for informal caregivers.

In international terms we note the various innovative supports such as:

- Caregiver allowance: Australia; Denmark; Finland; Hungary; Ireland; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Slovak Republic; Sweden; United Kingdom; Belgium; Canada.
- Reimbursement to the person in need of care: United States of America; Austria; Czech Republic; France; Germany; Italy; Luxembourg; Poland; Spain; Netherlands; New Zealand; Norway; Slovak Republic; Sweden; United Kingdom; Belgium.
- Tax Benefits: United States of America ; France; Germany; Luxembourg; New Zealand; Switzerland; Ireland; Canada.
- Paid leave: France; Canada; Spain; Netherlands; Norway; Sweden; Poland; Belgium; Japan; Slovenia; Australia; Denmark; Finland.
- Unpaid leave: France; Canada; Spain; Netherlands; Belgium; Germany; Luxembourg; Ireland; Austria; Hungary; United States of America.
- Flexible working arrangements: France; Netherlands; Belgium; Germany; Austria; Hungary; United States of America; United Kingdom; Norway; Japan; Finland; Czech Republic; New Zealand.
- Education Training: United States of America; France; Netherlands; Belgium; Austria; United Kingdom; Japan; Czech Republic; New Zealand; Canada; Luxembourg; Slovenia; Denmark; Switzerland; Korea; Spain; Australia; Sweden; Mexico; Slovak Republic.
- Caregiver's Rest: United States of America; France; Netherlands; Belgium; Austria; United Kingdom; Czech Republic; New Zealand; Canada; Slovenia; Denmark; Switzerland; Spain; Australia; Sweden; Slovak Republic; Germany; Ireland.
- Counseling: United States of America; France; Netherlands; Belgium; Austria; United Kingdom; Czech Republic; New Zealand; Canada; Slovenia; Switzerland; Spain; Australia; Sweden; Slovak Republic; Ireland; Luxembourg; Hungary; Finland.

Based on the national effort developed over the last four years, through the Assembly of the Republic's Labor and Social Security Commission, it recently approved the Informal Caregiver Statute, which regulates the rights and duties of the informal caregiver and the caregiver, and establishes the respective support measures, based on the Substitution Text of Law No. 186/XIII/4th (GOV) and Laws No. 801/XIII/3rd (BE), 804/XIII/3rd (PCP), 1126/XIII/4th (CDS-PP), 1132/XIII/4th (PSD) and 1135/XIII/4th (PAN) and very recent promulgation by the President of the Portuguese Republic.

In this document it is worth noting the integration of several proposals, as well as formal groups created by the government (with elements of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labor, Solidarity and Social Security), parliamentary initiatives and organized groups of citizens. In this way, the first legislative document that, in Portugal, complies with the dimension of Informal Caregivers, with amendments to the Contributory Regimes Code, established the Social Insertion Income, provides for the articulation between public services, continuity of care, creation of experimental pilot projects, and strengthening of labor protection.

Thus, notwithstanding the already enacted legal regime, we continue to see the need for greater political and social pressure to implement legislative measures within the international paradigms previously described, as referred to in the extension note to the Presidency of the Republic "hoping that it represents the beginning of a path and not its end".

Correspondence: cfonseca@uevora.pt