The impact of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic on social care provision for older people

The example of live-in migrant carers in the Austrian LTC system

Kai Leichsenring
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Number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Austria, March 2020 – December 2021

Total number of infections:
• By Jan 2021 (second wave): 43% of deaths in care homes (3,245 residents)
• Vaccination started in Jan 2021

Current situation of infections in care homes (fourth wave, Nov 2021):
• 835 staff (1-2%)
• 504 residents (<1%)
• BUT: Regionally concentrated clusters

Source: Johns Hopkins University CSSE COVID-19 Data
Live-in migrant carers in Austria

How it started

• Exceptional growth of migrant live-in carers over the past two decades
  • Slovak Republic, Romania, Hungary ..., mainly women
  • More than 66,000, more than 30,000 clients (families)

• Public regulations have contributed to a ‘fragile balance’ of rights, precarious working conditions and quality of care
  • ‘White-washing’ (Personal Care Act, 2007): subsidies for clients, regulations regarding competencies, competences and working conditions (unique in Europe)
  • The status as self-employed personal carers
  • Bi-weekly or 3-monthly shifts – working time issues?
  • The role of brokering agencies
How it developed

• COVID-19 revealed the fragility of the live-in carer model
  • Travel restrictions
  • Isolation in private homes
  • Activation of emergency transport during lockdown periods
  • Self-employed (registered with the Chamber of Commerce) but no or only restricted entitlements and access to support measures

• Some public attention, but no substantial debate or reform
  • Voluntary quality certificate for brokering agencies
  • Possibilities for political action restricted
  • Lack of data
How it is proceeding

• Back to normal?
  • Increase in subsidies claimed by Chamber of Commerce

• European context and future perspectives
  • German Federal Labour Court sentenced that 24-hour care means an entitlement for 24 hours of minimum wage ...
  • Exceptional pay rise in health care and nursing professions (e.g. CZ, SK)
  • Development of LTC systems also in Eastern European Member States

Trends in the remuneration of hospital nurses, nominal terms, 2010-17 (Index 2010 =100)

Conclusions

Learning from the pandemic?

- Better coordination of social and health care
- Joint efforts to improve working conditions, education, training and retention of workforce (autonomy, wages, working-times, less bureaucracy ...)
- More cooperation of sending and receiving countries
- Ethical recruitment
- Supporting the development of LTC systems in Eastern Europe
References


Leichsenring K, Staflinger H, Bauer A (2020a). The situation of ‘24-hour care’ From the perspective of migrant caregivers in Austria. Article in LTCcovid.org, International Long-Term Care Policy Network, CPEC-LSE.

Further information

European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research
Berggasse 17, 1090 Vienna, Austria
www.euro.centre.org
+43-1-319 4505-49
leichsenring@euro.centre.org