

Editors' Note

Thanks to improving living conditions, growing access to medical services and growing healthcare awareness, life expectancy is continuing to rise not only among urban but also rural population. However, ageing is becoming an increasingly important social challenge from the point of view of the social welfare policy. The previous measures aimed at supporting the elderly have become insufficient and new ones must be developed to adjust to the changing needs. A dynamically growing elderly population in societies worldwide calls for broadening the range of healthcare, long-term care and social security services to effectively meet its needs. It is important to maintain physical and emotional wellness of the elderly, to keep them active and allow them to continue their careers, all of which means promoting good quality of life. The changing age structure of societies and growing costs of care of the elderly pose concerns as to whether various countries that have hitherto operated social security systems will be able to bear the strain. Because of ongoing social changes so vividly visible in contemporary communities, the hitherto family-based systems of care for the elderly (chiefly involving women) have largely become insufficient because multi-generation households are in retreat, an increasing number of women pursue careers and there is growing migration to urban areas, which leads to living far from home. A rapid increase in elderly single households, often headed by women, calls for the development of a new and efficient system of elderly care. This is the case i.e. in Vietnam and Ukraine, where family has traditionally played the crucial role in caring for its members, including seniors.

In Poland the ageing issue is of particular concern – we lead in the European Union ranking of the most rapidly ageing EU member states. Nearly 40% of the Polish population live in rural areas, which are very much non-homogenous in terms of demographic, social and economic characteristics. Certain rural areas, especially those neighbouring big cities, are developing dynamically and are inhabited largely by the working population. Other areas are struggling with depopulation and the resulting deficit of public services, including healthcare services, public transport and a lack of money in municipality budgets, which makes it impossible to maintain the municipal infrastructure. It often happens that old people live precisely in those areas, which creates a lot of challenges for the elderly themselves, for their families, as well as for governments of all levels, as

they are expected to develop appropriate support mechanisms to make life easier for all these people.

Aware of the problem of ageing, which appears to be increasingly important worldwide, we have decided to focus this edition of our quarterly on the challenges faced by the elderly living in rural areas. Selected articles present demographic trends, ageing study results, factors which influence the security and well-being of the elderly as well as analyses of government policies and the operations of institutions whose goal is to improve the quality of life of the senior community in rural areas. This time, apart from our own academics, we asked researchers from the Institute for Family and Gender Studies of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences and Technology and the Institute of Regional Research named after M.I. Dolishnyi of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine to share their opinions on the subject. Thus our readers can read about three different countries which share one common feature, namely that in the past their socio-economic development was largely based on agriculture, as a consequence of which a significant percentage of the countries' populations still live in rural areas. Sharing experience shows that although ageing of rural populations has a global dimension, measures to tackle the issue should not extend beyond the local dimension – largely due to cultural, demographic and economic conditions. Despite the differences, one can also see certain universal mechanisms, the analysis and adaptation of which may bring some benefits also in other countries.

The special edition of our quarterly starts with an article by Tran Thi Minh Thi, *Institutional and Cultural Perspectives in Elder Care in Rural Vietnam*. Vietnamese authorities (in collaboration with social organisations and dedicated institutions) have been developing a home-based community care system for the elderly and private services to provide alternative care options for their elderly population. The author of the article, however, emphasises that according to the traditional Confucian-influenced family structure, the responsibility for care for the elderly is still a family matter and the local community plays a key role in providing support to its senior members. The author provides a detailed analysis of the family role in care for the elderly and the role of state, local and private facilities offering elderly care services.

Innovative organisational solutions to support elderly rural inhabitants, promote their activities and ensure good quality of life are presented by Sylwia Michalska, Anna Rosa and Ryszard Kamiński in the article *Innovative Forms of Care for Seniors in Rural Areas of Poland*. The authors present two non-standard solutions that are implemented in rural areas of Poland. Social farms and hospices mentioned in this article are unconventional undertakings that provide therapeutic services, care and inclusion to the elderly and are oriented especially on this group.

The following three articles discuss selected issues concerning elderly rural inhabitants of Vietnam. Tran Quy Long – the author of the article *Access to Social Security for the Rural Elderly in Vietnam* – emphasises that ageing is a challenge and requires a new approach to retirement pensions, healthcare and social institutions for the elderly. According to the results of the author's study the elderly in Vietnam must overcome many administrative difficulties in order to benefit from social welfare schemes, the only real beneficiaries of the system being those who are over 80 years old and who do not receive any pension or other benefits. The enjoyment of social welfare differs between elderly groups with different personal and social characteristics.

In *Older People's Capacities and Intergenerational Mutual Support Provision in Vietnam*, Trinh Thai Quang and Vasontara Yiengprugsawan study intergenerational support between the elderly and their children. The analysis includes financial support, household chores, care of the elderly and help at work. The authors agree that intergenerational exchange is considered an empirical indicator of functional solidarity and a core constituent of intergenerational solidarity. The study results suggest that the elderly with more resources tend to be involved in mutual intergenerational support relationships, particularly financial support. Additionally, age, marital status, living arrangements, the number of children, and the health of older parents significantly contribute to encouraging mutual support.

The role of a family in daily care of the elderly was studied by Dang Thanh Nhan. In *The Role of the Family in Daily Care for the Elderly in Changing Rural Vietnam* the author identifies the forces that affect how each family member provides care for their elderly in the social and cultural context of Vietnam. Family economic condition, health status, illness, sex, age, and working status have significant impacts on the health of the elderly. The author concludes that families play a very important role in care for the elderly and that women still play crucial roles in caring for the elderly regardless of circumstances.

The last article in this edition of the quarterly, *The Ageing of Ukraine's Population: Demographic Trends, Social and Economic Implications*, by Roman Tesliuk and Vitaliy Krupin, present an analysis of key demographic trends within the last 30 years concerning ageing in Ukraine. Ukraine is one of a group of countries characterised by a high rate of ageing, as according to the proportion of the population aged 60 and older it is among the 30 "oldest" nations. In their study the authors take account of national trends as well as regional differences, while presenting key demographic indicators. They also point to specific conditions which influence negative trends in the Ukrainian demographics, such as lower income levels and deterioration of the standard of living, especially in rural areas, Russian annexation of the Crimean

peninsula and military intervention in the eastern part of the country (resulting in intensive migrations from these areas since 2014).

We hope that this edition of our quarterly will only start the discussion and will prompt sharing experience of academics who also study ageing in other countries. We are looking forward to researchers who would like to present their studies and analyses of ageing in rural areas.

Sylwia Michalska, Anna Rosa, Tran Thi Minh Thi
– Editors of the Special Issue