

# AGEING WORKFORCES IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION

*Recommendations for Social  
Partners and Policy-Makers*

The ageing of workforce is a challenge which affects both individual organisations and the economy as a whole. The partners of the EU-funded “Best Agers Lighthouses” project have screened scientific and practical responses to this challenge, all of which are related to the concept of age management – i.e. the creation of working conditions which make it possible for every individual to be productive throughout and up until the end of their career path. Several of these tools and strategies were tested in the course of organisational interventions carried out in nine public and private organisations from the Baltic Sea Region.

Such concrete measures cannot be prescribed but must be carried out by and in the organisations themselves. However, policy-makers and social partners can play an important role in empowering and encouraging management and employees to jointly introduce age management measures at the workplace. The organisational interventions carried out in the “Best Agers Lighthouses” project may serve as good examples, and the following recommendations are based upon the experience gathered in the course of the project:

## CHANGE PERCEPTIONS ABOUT AGEING AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

### **Clarify and communicate the impact of demographic changes on society!**

It is evident that we will experience demographic changes in the coming decades and that these will have severe consequences on our society. Difficult decisions like pension system reforms, school closures or structural changes are unpopular but often unavoidable. Denying the challenge ahead is as inept a strategy as fear mongering. Stick to the facts and inform the society of the real situation, background for decisions and consequences of alternatives.

### **Implement more holistic strategies which take into account demographic issues and combine necessary public investments in a smart forward-looking way!**

Often demographic issues are not considered a top priority when strategic decisions are taken. But the consequences of a shrinking, more diverse and ageing population will be felt in many areas of society. Demographic change hits societies with different schedules and in different ways, and the wide range of interconnections and cross-cutting impacts should be the ground for decision-making that reaches beyond the next few years. Demographic change is a complex and long-term process and so should be the strategies addressing it.

### **Combat age stereotypes and promote a positive image of ageing!**

Older employees’ competences and experience are lauded and praised – yet it is nearly impossible for a 55+ unemployed to get back into the labour market. Companies have identified the increasing number of “silver surfers”

as a key target group, yet advertisements and media glorify youth. Today a 60-year old is nothing like a 60-year old thirty years ago, yet the image of age seems to have remained the same. Changing mind-sets is a lengthy and difficult task – and needs support from all levels.

## FIND AND PROMOTE GOOD PRACTICE

### **Raise awareness to demonstrate the positive influence of age management on the economy!**

Studies confirm the significant return on investment of workplace interventions on the respective organisation’s performance and in turn on the regional economy. Communicating and promoting this relationship convincingly should encourage all relevant stakeholders to engage in age management – employers and employees alike!

### **Promote work ability!**

Employees should be enabled to stay healthy, motivated and willing to work productively until they retire. The work environment should account for the fact that personal capacities and individual needs as well as work requirements (e.g. new tasks, new technologies, changes in the organisation and leadership) change over the course of a working career. Employers, works councils and employees all share the responsibility to adapt working conditions early enough to sustain the employee’s work ability and the organisation’s productivity.

**Facilitate pilot action programmes in companies to provide incentives for others!**

Many companies face a need to adjust their HR strategy to demographic changes, but executives and personnel managers often do not know how to implement changes in practice. Despite several successful initiatives, there is still a lack of visible examples – especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. Promote and finance campaigns and model development competitions to identify good practices or initiate pilot action programmes which offer targeted support and expertise for companies and public institutions willing to engage in age management.

**Tell success stories!**

People learn best from good examples they can relate to, especially if they hear first-hand experience reports. Identify persons or organisations in your region who have found a positive approach to ageing, and encourage them to tell their stories and give them opportunities to inspire others, e.g. at seminars, conferences and fairs!

**LEAD THE WAY AND SET EXAMPLES****Enhance cooperation between social partners and companies!**

The social partners are predestined to be champions of age-friendly labour markets and HR policies. They should see it as their duty to promote age management as an instrument that can enhance the economic performance of the company while simultaneously producing a positive and healthy atmosphere at the workplace. Working together can generate mutual trust which will be much needed when dealing with further demographic challenges.

**Include age management issues into collective agreements!**

While it should be commended that more and more companies begin to implement age management practices, each of them is only an individual case with limited repercussions outside the organisation. Collective agree



ments that anticipate and take into account demographic trends can make a difference within a whole industry sector and effect changes also in small and medium-sized enterprises that have little demographic literacy. Social dialogue should result in a consistent regulatory framework that allows for the required flexibility.

#### **Serve as role model for your member organisations!**

Public institutions and social partner organisations which seek to encourage others to include demographic issues in their HR policy need to be convincing. Therefore, they should incorporate good practices in their own strategy and seek to become role model organisations for both employers' and employees' interests.

#### **Enhance support for further education and training of older employees!**

Acquiring and retaining competence is a key requirement for employees to remain employable. It is therefore vital to increase the participation of older employees in further education and training as well as life-long learning.

## CHANGE LAWS AND REGULATIONS

#### **Focus on the life-cycle approach, from pre-school to retirement!**

Keep in mind that those who are young now will be old tomorrow. As people age, their preferences and desires change. Making policy for one age group at the expense of others might fetch votes in the short run, but could as well backfire in the long term. All policy decisions should take into account the current and future interests of all age groups – including those who are not capable of taking part in the political process yet – or anymore.

#### **Adjust the legal system to simplify working longer/after retirement age!**

If the working environment is appropriate and both employer and employee agree on continuing the employment also after the official retirement age, there are no losers and many winners – including the social security system. Therefore, there should be no laws or regulations that could prevent working after retirement age. Those who can and want to remain in employment should find incentives, not barriers.

#### **Make it easy for retired persons to operate as entrepreneurs!**

There are many factors that could motivate older employees to become entrepreneurs instead of working longer. For some it is attractive to define their own tasks and working hours, for others it is an option to avoid the difficult process of finding a new job as an older applicant. Simplify regulations and reduce the administrative burden that comes with starting and operating a business.

#### **Allow for flexibility and a smooth transitional phase to pension age!**

Each job and each employer is different – therefore, individual ways in the last years of employment should be made possible. Concepts and offers, e.g. to remain employed part-time, should be fostered at national policy level and widely communicated.

#### **Facilitate the compatibility of work and family!**

Due to several societal trends, employees increasingly try to bring in line their family life with their work. While in younger years, flexibility for children remains the main topic of employees, in older years the care for their own parents is most relevant. Facilitating the combination of family needs and working life will help the employees to stay motivated and value their employer's framework conditions.

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