



Foundation Findings

Intergenerational solidarity



More information on the European Union is available on the Internet (<http://europa.eu>).

Cataloguing data can be found at the end of this publication.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012

ISBN 978-92-897-1073-2

doi:10.2806/35558

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Printed in Belgium

PRINTED ON ELEMENTAL CHLORINE-FREE BLEACHED PAPER (ECF)



The policy context



Impact of demographic change

Population ageing is often viewed as an impending threat to the economic and social stability of post-industrial societies. Forecasters expect people aged 65 and over to make up 30% of the European Union population by 2060 – almost double today's figure of 17%. At the same time, the working age population (aged 15–64 years) peaked in 2010 at 67% and is predicted to decline steadily to 59% by 2060. The upshot of the demographic shift is that social protection systems may become unsustainable as the demands upon them intensify while the number of net contributors declines. The European Commission's *2012 Ageing report* projects that, on the basis of current policies, most of the increase in public spending between 2010 and 2060 will unavoidably be age-related – on pensions, healthcare and long-term care – rising by 4.1 percentage points to around 29% of GDP.¹ The impact is expected to be greatest between 2015 and 2035 when the baby-boom generation (those born between 1946 and 1965) retires. Fears about the ability of public finances to support social protection systems have been exacerbated by the ongoing poor performance of the European economy.

Squeezing the working generation through taxation to meet escalating welfare and health costs or slashing the pensions and benefits of retirees are equally undesirable solutions: either could weaken social cohesion by sparking conflict between the generations. How can the living standards of all age groups be maintained in the future demographic landscape? Intergenerational solidarity, where each generation recognises its responsibilities towards the others, is seen as essential to plotting the way out of the predicament. It assumes a consensus between the generations on how the resources of society, both financial and non-financial, are shared for the benefit of all.

There is a broad consensus at political level that the key to relieving financial pressure on social protection systems and averting social fragmentation is, in the words of László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion: 'longer working lives – or a better balance between years spent working and years spent in retirement'. Achieving this goal will involve intergenerational solidarity expressed through acceptance of changed expectations among workers about when and how they leave the labour market.

¹ *The 2012 ageing report: Economic and budgetary projections for the EU27 Member States (2010–2060)*, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1326&furtherNews=yes>.

Supporting older people to remain healthy, active and autonomous for longer after retirement is another dimension of this endeavour. It will also involve facilitating young workers to enter the labour market.

Intergenerational approach

Demographic ageing is an issue for all generations. The challenge for future growth in the EU requires a perspective that spans the life course of individuals and that addresses their labour market needs throughout their working lives. At the same time as the EU seeks to prolong working lives, young workers are struggling to gain a foothold into work, as the sluggish economy is conspiring with structural labour market problems to impede their entry. In September 2012, the youth unemployment rate across the 27 EU Member States reached 23%. The policy focus should be on ensuring access and opportunities for all throughout the lifecycle. A number of Europe 2020 flagship initiatives are paving the way. The 'Agenda for new skills and jobs' sets out actions to achieve a target of 75% employment in the working-age population by 2020.² Tackling youth unemployment is addressed in the 'Youth on the move' initiative, which comprises a package of policy initiatives on education and employment of young people³, while the 'European platform against poverty and exclusion' includes actions to improve access to work specifically aimed at reducing poverty and social exclusion.⁴ Most recently, the 2012 employment package – 'Towards a job-rich recovery' – outlines how the EU budget, in particular the European Social Fund (ESF), can be mobilised in support of labour market reform and help deliver youth opportunities.

EU policy on solidarity

Promoting solidarity between generations was first mentioned as an EU objective in Article 2.3 of the Lisbon Treaty. The Europe 2020 strategy subsequently identified demographic ageing as a structural weakness that might impede

growth within the EU. It fitted with the theme of intergenerational solidarity by emphasising the importance of promoting a healthy and actively ageing population in the interest of social cohesion and higher productivity.

Solidarity has a wider scope than labour market participation. It encompasses the significant contribution that older people make to society and the potential to nurture that contribution further. The transfer of knowledge between generations, for example, preserves the valuable labour market skills and experience of older workers; it also equips young workers with the practical knowledge they need for the job, the type of knowledge that employers often complain young people lack. Mentoring schemes would provide a structure for such knowledge transfers to take place.

Solidarity is also about active participation in society and independent living. Volunteering in particular can be promoted as a means of building social capital across the generations. Recent Eurofound and Eurobarometer research shows that active participation in voluntary activities following retirement strengthens social networks and reduces isolation among older people.

Discussions around the dependency costs of older people very often neglect transfers in the other direction. Older people make a significant social contribution in providing informal support for family and friends, and helping with childcare and household responsibilities. Older people very often use their pay and pensions to provide essential financial support to their families; this sharing of resources is enabling many families to keep their heads above water in the present stressful economic environment.

The European Year of Active Ageing and Solidarity between the Generations 2012 provides an opportunity to focus attention on the challenge of demographic ageing. It aims to encourage policymakers and stakeholders at all lev-

² More information is available at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=958>.

³ See the 'Youth on the move' website at <http://ec.europa.eu/youthonthemove/>.

⁴ More information at <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=961>.



els to promote active ageing, thereby helping to create better job opportunities and working conditions for older people to enable them continue in work longer. The year also emphasises the contribution that older people make to society and affords opportunities to foster solidarity, cooperation and understanding between generations.

Public opinion

Research on attitudes to older people and ageing in Europe provides a degree of confidence that understanding and reciprocity between the generations is strong at present. According to Eurofound's third European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) 2011, only 13% of respondents across all EU Member States felt that there was 'a lot of tension' between old people and young people – a clear decrease from the 2007 figure of 18% – and considerably lower than the percentage reporting a lot of tension between most other social groups.

Two-thirds of respondents to a 2009 Eurobarometer survey on intergenerational solidarity rejected the suggestion that older people

are a burden on society; in fact, they strongly acknowledged the contribution of older people to society by financially supporting their children and grandchildren and volunteering. Most also felt that their role as carers for family members was not sufficiently appreciated. The vast majority believed that governments must make more money available for pensions and care for the elderly.

The survey also showed positive attitudes towards older people working. More than two-thirds of respondents did not think that companies that employ mainly young people performed better than those employing people from different age groups. The same proportion supported the view that governments should make it easier for older people to continue working beyond the normal retirement age, if they so wish. Support was equally strong across all age groups. However, 56% also believed that working to a later age reduced the number of jobs available to younger people, and half felt that people in employment will be increasingly reluctant to pay taxes and social contributions to support older people.

Key findings

- The proportion of people aged 65 and over will rise from 17% to 30% of the EU population by 2060, while at the same time the working age population will decline. The European Commission estimates that most of the increase in public spending in the EU over the next 50 years will be on pensions, long-term care and healthcare.
- More demand on benefits systems alongside fewer people paying into those systems could give rise to intergenerational conflict if workers find their living standards squeezed from the rising burden of taxation or if retirees struggle with substantially reduced pensions.
- There is broad understanding that the key to lessening the dependency of the non-working population on the working population is extending working lives. The figures show that both younger and older workers are underrepresented in the workforce. Just 3 out of 10 workers aged 60–64 years are in work; the figure is similar for workers aged 15–24 years.
- The proportion of older people (aged 55–64 years) in the workforce is growing, from 37% in 2000 to 46% in 2010, and this increased even during the economic crisis. Policies adopted by public and private employers during the crisis tended to protect older workers from unemployment.
- Public policy in Europe is increasingly directed at discouraging early labour market exits by means of raising the statutory retirement age and pension reform. Incentives are being offered to remain in work and early withdrawal is penalised. Partial retirement is becoming more common in order to manage the transition out of work better.
- Youth unemployment is a longstanding problem that has been exacerbated by the economic crisis. Delayed entry into the labour market can have long-term effects on a person's career, economic status, health and well-being. It can also lead to social disengagement, eroding the basis on which democratic societies are built.
- The most successful measures for integrating young people in the labour market include providing tailored support, guaranteeing a job or an educational opportunity within a certain time period, providing young people with the specific skillset that employers need, and equipping them with transferable qualifications in the labour market.
- Improved working conditions are a precondition to working lives that are sustainable over a longer period. While the needs and experiences of workers vary depending on age, sex, occupation and sector, the evidence suggests that there is considerable scope for enhancing the quality of work for different groups of workers. Areas to concentrate on include job security, physical and psychosocial risks, working time flexibility and intrinsic rewards.
- Lifelong learning is a pillar of both a knowledge-based economy and longer working lives. Yet just one-third of workers had training paid for by their employer over the period of a year; the 50+ age group was shown to have the least amount of training.
- Issues around the interaction between employment and caring are coming more to the fore as the number of older people needing informal care is rising. Flexible working time arrangements are particularly important to working carers. The evidence from the case studies is that working carers can stay in work and fulfil their care responsibilities if employers are willing to support them.
- Intergenerational solidarity is also expressed through social participation and active citizenship. Volunteer activity by older people can strengthen communities and build social capital, while reducing the risk of social exclusion among this group.



Exploring the issue



Labour market participation

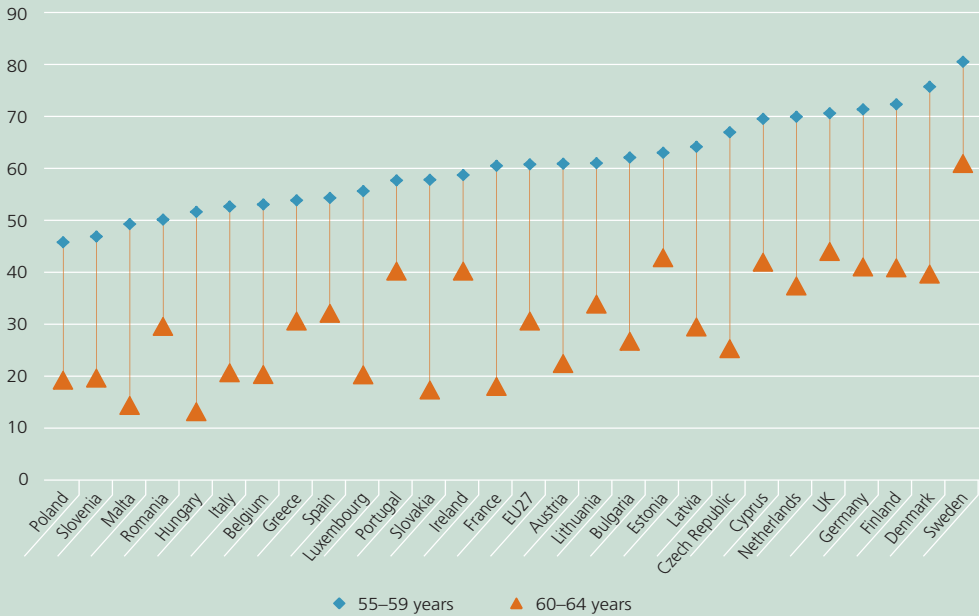
The experiences of young and older people at work and in the labour market contrast in many ways, but they share one thing in common: their relatively low rate of labour market participation. Just under half of older people (aged 55–64 years) were working in 2010, compared with 78% of workers in the core age group of 25–49 years. Only 3 out of 10 from the ‘pre-retirement’ cohort (aged 60–64 years) were working. The participation of younger workers (15–24 years), at 34% in 2011, is even lower than that of older workers. The underlying reasons for the low employment rates of each group differ. Nevertheless, to meet the Europe 2020 strategy objective of a 75% employment rate for the EU labour force by 2020 – necessary to secure the sustainability of the EU economy in the long term – an integrated approach to incorporating both groups more fully into the labour force will be needed. In the context of population ageing, it is hoped that policies to extend working lives, at beginning and end, will succeed in reducing the dependent population relative to the workforce, thereby averting the looming public finance crisis and the risk of associated social unrest.

Older workers on the rise

The labour market participation rate of older workers is rising steadily in the EU, with an increase from 37% in 2000 to 46% in 2010. The overall rate of participation, however, obscures considerable differences between Member States, which range from 30% participation in Malta to 70% in Sweden. Different statutory retirement ages in Member States contribute to this variability, but even for the 55–59 age group, participation ranges from 46% in Poland to 81% in Sweden, higher than the EU core-age participation rate (Figure 1).

The employment rate of older workers increased even during the 2008–2009 recession, when they benefited more than any other age group from employment growth in publicly funded services (especially in health, education and public administration). In addition, private sector employers typically responded to the fall-off in demand for labour by adjusting working time instead of resorting to dismissal and redundancy, a policy approach that favoured older workers.

Figure 1: Labour force participation of older workers in the EU, 2010 (%)



Source: EU Labour Force Survey, Eurostat; Eurofound calculation

Looking at the figures at the level of individual states again reveals a less favourable picture. In the countries worst affected by the recession, unemployment increased among older people; the rate rose by more than 5 percentage points in Estonia, Ireland, Latvia and Portugal between 2000 and 2010. Older people may also become more vulnerable to job loss if economic stagnation drags on and governments respond to public debt crises by implementing cuts in public sector numbers and spending.

Strikingly, a growing proportion of people aged 65 and over is working, rising from 9% in 2005 to 11% in 2011. While most of these are motivated by factors such as interest, desire for continued contact with people and involvement in society, one-fifth are working from out of financial need, often accepting low pay and insecure conditions.

Re-employment prospects for older workers

Where older workers are at a particular disadvantage is if they lose their jobs and find them-

selves back in the labour market. It is much more difficult for older workers to find employment: only one in seven finds employment within a year, compared to one in three for core-age workers. Age discrimination is prevalent among employers, despite legislation prohibiting it. The knowledge and experience of an older worker may be interpreted not as wealth of expertise but as inflexibility. Employers may reject an older worker on the assumption of a shorter payback time for the human capital investment they make, and companies with stronger seniority wage-setting are less likely to hire older workers because of the higher costs associated with them. Employment services tend not to make as much effort to find placements for older workers as they do for younger workers. Workers themselves may hinder their re-employment prospects by holding out for a wage equivalent to that of their last job. In light of such difficulties, opting for early retirement or disability benefits may be a more attractive path.



Young people keen to work

The situation for young workers in the labour market contrasts starkly with that of older workers. Just one-third of economically active young people are employed, the lowest rate ever recorded in the EU. Reflecting the differential impact of the recession, the level of youth participation varies substantially across Member States, from 18% in Hungary to 58% in Denmark. Unemployment has been rising since the recession and was at 23% across the EU in March 2012, equal to 5.5 million workers. It has reached 49% in Spain and 45% in Greece.

Youth unemployment is neither new nor a product of the recession, however. In 2007, youth unemployment stood at 16% in the EU, compared with an overall rate of 7%. The systemically higher level of unemployment among this group has been a cause of concern among public authorities and policymakers for some time, as has been the often precarious nature of their employment. Young workers profit less from economic growth and suffer disproportionately during economic crises. They are more exposed to fluctuations in demand for labour: employers shed these workers more easily because they are often employed on fixed-term and temporary agency contracts, and also because of their limited level of experience and lower skills level.

This vulnerability crystallised in the steep rise in youth unemployment from mid-2008. The employment collapse in construction and manufacturing exacerbated the situation as these sectors employed young people in significant numbers. Even well-educated young workers are no longer as protected against unemployment as before. Eurofound research has shown that the protection provided by education has decreased in all countries. In several countries – Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and Slovenia – having completed third-level education no longer lowers the risk of unemployment for young workers compared to having no qualifications.

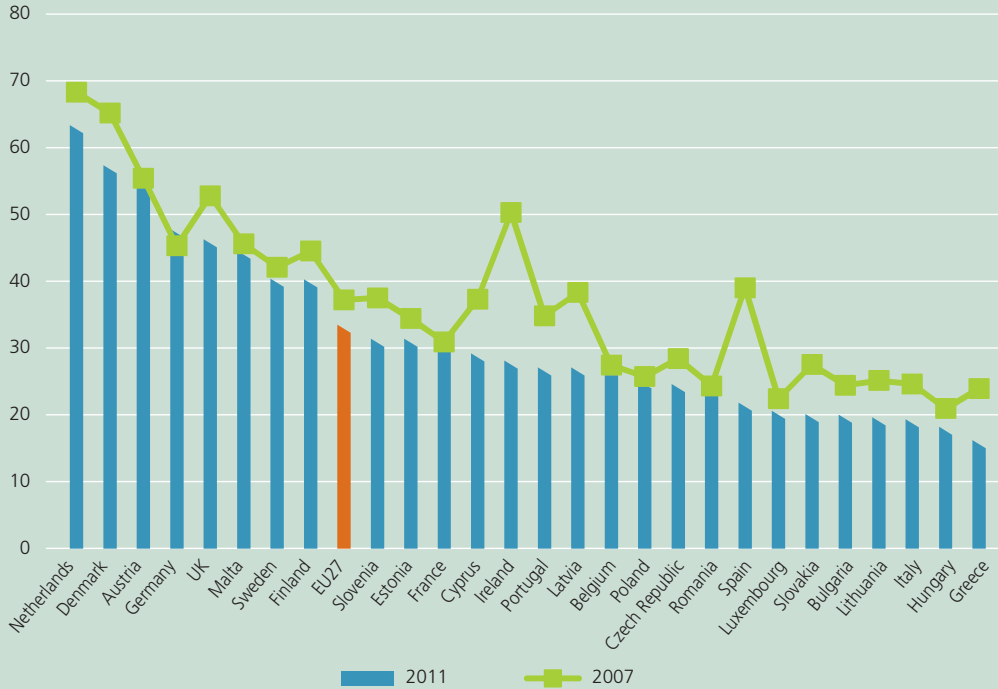
The situation for young people may be worse than the unemployment figures indicate because the figures fail to capture a whole cohort of young people who are disengaged from the labour market and who do not appear in labour force statistics. To take account of these, the concept of NEET ('not in employment, education or training') was formulated. The NEET category includes those actively seeking work (who are counted in unemployment figures), but also those not available for or not seeking work, the long-term sick, people with disabilities, and those responsible for care of children or relatives. Eurostat calculated in 2010 that NEETs constituted 13% of all 15–24-year-olds in the EU – around 7.5 million. Numbers vary greatly across Member States, from 4% in the Netherlands to 22% in Bulgaria. Different NEET subgroups have very different needs in terms of policy intervention and experiences, but all share a heightened risk of social exclusion.

Failure to integrate NEET group

The growing NEET cohort is not simply an economic concern – it has long-term social costs. Evidence from previous recessions indicates that the effects of extended periods of unemployment and unstable employment early in life put young workers at risk of poor career development arising from lack of training and lack of progression. This reduces their opportunity to establish financial autonomy and may have a negative impact throughout their adult life, with increased risk of reduced earnings, continued experience of unemployment and precarious work, poorer health, and even decreased life expectancy.

Failure to integrate into the workforce may cause young people to disengage from civil society more widely. Concerns have been raised about the social and political marginalisation of young people. Eurofound analysis of the 2008 European Values Survey found that compared with young people who are employed, NEETs were less interested in politics and less likely to vote. Levels of trust in institutions, which are low in general among young people, were lower among NEETs. And just a quarter of

Figure 2: Youth employment rate in the EU, 2007 and 2011 (%)



Source: Eurostat, July 2012

NEETs belonged to a social organisation, compared to 46% of young people in employment.

Tackling youth unemployment

A disquieting possibility is that a return to growth may not spell the end of the youth unemployment crisis. Employers across Europe have responded to the fall in demand by reducing working time among their workforces. What if they will simply increase the hours of existing workers when demand increases, without creating new jobs?

New and effective strategies are needed to support the creation of new jobs to absorb young workers. Current EU policy, as articulated in Europe 2020, focuses on education and skills. Goals include ensuring that young people do not leave school early and without qualifications, with targets to reduce school dropout

rates to below 10% and ensure at least 40% of young people reaching tertiary education. This is to be achieved by improving education and training systems, promoting greater mobility of young people across the EU for education and work, and equipping them for the jobs market.

Governments across Europe, to varying degrees, have pursued active labour market policies, with the aim of removing barriers to participation and integrating young people into the labour market. The more successful measures include youth guarantees, apprenticeship schemes and vocational programmes. A youth guarantee is a tailored development plan for young job-seekers that guarantees them a job or a learning opportunity (academic or vocational) within a specific timeframe. The guarantee shortens the length of time young workers spend outside the labour market, while spe-



cialised job-search assistance supports them in finding that first job. Apprenticeship and vocational schemes equip young people with transferable qualifications and address the problem of skills mismatches by concentrating on the specific skillsets employers are looking for. Governments have also offered financial incentives to encourage employers to hire and train young workers and reduced the cost of employing them through measures such as lower social security contributions. Controversially, some have lowered minimum wages for young people.

Both trade unions and employers' organisations agree on some policy measures to tackle youth unemployment, such as developing apprenticeships and reforming education systems. However, their responses are largely divergent. Employer organisations revisit the arguments for lowering employment protection and wages for young workers to remove hiring barriers, while trade unions stress the importance of assessing the quality of jobs offered to young people after completing their education or apprenticeship.

Policies and strategies at EU and national level, however, have not yet reversed the rising youth unemployment trend. While the need to implement measures to tackle the problem is urgent, it is important that effort should be spent, too, in evaluating measures to identify what actually works.

Perspective of longer working life

In most western European countries, the lower employment rates for older workers are an artefact of the use of early retirement in previous recessions to aid restructuring. This suited everyone: it was financially feasible for companies at the time and supported by the social partners; the retiring workers avoided redundancy, with once-off compensation, and received generous pensions in return for exiting. In the former Eastern Bloc states, early retirement was

used as a means of labour market adjustment during the transition to a market economy in the early 1990s.

However, Anne-Marie Guillemard, a sociologist who has researched the issue of work and ageing, applies a broader perspective to low participation rates among older workers and attributes the acceptance of, and indeed the presumption of, early labour market exits to the particular 'age culture' produced by the public policy of a country.⁵ The age cultures of countries such as France and Germany in 1980s and 1990s undervalued the contribution of older workers and pushed them out of the labour market, albeit with compensation. Sweden and Denmark, by contrast, strove to keep older workers in the labour market; welfare benefits, although high, were tied to the beneficiary's effort to find work. These countries continue to have strong active labour market policies to keep older workers in work and to reintegrate them if they become unemployed. For example, in 2006 Sweden implemented a set of measures focused directly on promoting employment in older age by increasing the working tax credit for older workers, reducing employer contributions for workers aged 65 and over, and seeking to reform the disability benefit to make it less attractive to leave the workforce. In addition, employers can avail of supplementary tax breaks for employing workers aged 55 and over who are unemployed.

Implications of pension reform

Demographic change is inexorably altering the economic landscape across Europe, and as governments analyse the implications, early retirement is increasingly falling into disfavour in all Member States. Some have come relatively late to the table, spurred to action as much by the need for cost-cutting in the aftermath of the economic crisis as by the necessity to forestall an approaching pension crisis. Since 2000 shifts in public policy have become increasingly evident as governments seek to extend working lives. The Belgian government, for instance, reformed

⁵ Keynote speech at the Eurofound seminar 'Improving working conditions: contribution to active ageing', Rome 30 May 2012. See <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/events/2012/fssrome/index.htm>

the pre-pension benefit, raising the age of entitlement from 58 to 60 years and the required years of economic activity from 20 to 30 years. In the Netherlands, the tax regime of early retirement payments has made early retirement schemes less attractive. Several Member States have increased retirement age or are planning to do so. The UK, for instance, has abolished the default retirement age of 65. Pension reform is changing the benefits pensioners receive and the contributions required from employees and employers. Some countries have linked benefit levels to life expectancy (Sweden) or pension age (Denmark). Staying in work is incentivised using measures such as offering benefits for pension deferral and applying penalties for early withdrawal. As governments emphasise transitions to retirement, efforts have been taken in some countries to ensure that partial retirement schemes no longer represent a de facto form of early retirement but offer a genuine part-time work model for older workers.

Policy changes have affected age management at company level. Employers are favouring downshifting measures, which provide a smoother transition to retirement, over early retirement. These include working time flexibility arrangements and gradual or phased retirement schemes. There is some evidence, however, that companies did revert to early retirement during the recent recession when headcount reductions became inescapable.

Public attitudes not favourable

In the discussion around extending working lives, policymakers should not lose sight of the likelihood that workers will not readily embrace the prospect of working longer. The public response to increases in retirement age and pension reform has been negative for the most part. Proposals for pension reform have led to demonstrations in several Member States – for example, Belgium, France, Poland and the UK – in recent years. Even workers who like their work (and most do) may still look forward to the

end of working life to concentrate on other pursuits and fulfil personal goals. They may fear that if they delay retirement, they risk no longer having the health and energy to pursue those interests. Some may feel increasingly unable to handle the demands and pressure of work as they age.

Over half of the people surveyed in a 2011 Eurobarometer study on active ageing said they did not want to continue working once they were entitled to a pension.⁶ Just a quarter of retirees responding to the European Social Survey (ESS) from 2010 said that at the time of their retirement they would have preferred to continue in paid work rather than retire.⁷ However, the same survey found that half of the people aged 65 and over who do not work would enjoy having a job even if they were not in need of money.

These ESS results suggest that a considerable proportion of retirees look forward to retirement, but once retired, find that it does not meet their expectations. As workers get older, many may be interested in continuing working – one-third of the Eurobarometer respondents expressed a wish to do so after pension age – but not in the same way as before. Eurofound research into work after retirement supports this opinion. Most retirees who work do so because they find it rewarding and not because they need the income. However, the majority work part time, suggesting that the option to reduce working hours is crucial to their ongoing participation.

Making work interesting

The type of work that retirees engage in is also critical. Many continue to work in the same field, but in a different role, and many take up training roles. Case studies carried out by Eurofound describe, for example, a Polish shipbuilding R&D company that retains retirees as consultants or mentors in order to secure the transfer of key competences from older to younger workers. Another case study tells of a

⁶ Special Eurobarometer 378, see http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_special_en.htm

⁷ ESS Round 5 – 2010, see <http://ess.nsd.uib.no/>



retired employee of a German research centre who has continued working after her retirement to ensure that the wealth of knowledge she has accumulated in her research area will not be lost and will be passed on to younger scientists. Not only are these workers working longer, but they are passing on knowledge to support the next generation of workers.

Just as changes to tax and benefit systems are important, so too is making the work itself a desirable pursuit for older workers. As was noted earlier, governments are increasingly introducing measures to discourage early exits from the labour market, often through use of quasi-punitive measures. But ideally people would stay in work because they wanted to, not because they had to. The work of Guillemard and other researchers underlines the need for governments and employers to actively implement age management policies – not to force older workers to stay in work but to transform existing age cultures so that older workers are valued. Changing the age culture is not simply a matter of workers continuing on in the job for longer, but achieving a new understanding of the job and the career shared by stakeholders. The first steps in this direction are being made by companies offering downshifting options to older workers, which offer reduced and more flexible working time. More far-reaching thinking, however, would see workers moving into new jobs and training in new areas as their needs change over time.

Sustainable work

At the launch of the European Year 2012 it was noted that encouraging older workers to stay in employment ‘requires notably the improvement of working conditions and their adaptation to the health status and needs of older workers, updating their skills by providing better access to lifelong learning’. The aim is to ensure that work is sustainable throughout the life course. It involves offering workers the following prospects:

- flexibility in working time in order to balance work and private life satisfactorily;
- safeguarding workers’ mental and physical health;

- adapting workplaces to their health status and needs;
- combating age and gender discrimination;
- making lifelong learning an integral part of work;
- improving the intrinsic rewards of work;
- reorganising career trajectories so that workers have prospects after the age of 50.

But as the goal must be to maintain fitness to work throughout working life, such options should be available to workers at every stage of their working lives, not just to older workers.

Changes in working conditions

Findings from the fifth European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) give a mixed picture on changes in quality of work over two decades. No one age group consistently experiences working conditions inferior to those of other age groups. However, disparities do exist in specific areas for specific age groups. Lack of job security affects younger workers in particular. Workers under 25 are likely to have less secure work contracts, with just half having indefinite contracts, compared with three-quarters of the 25–34 age group and 85% of the 35+ age group. Young workers are almost three times more often hired on fixed-term contracts than workers over 35 (one and a-half times more often than the 25–34 age group); 10% are hired without any contract, compared to 4% of 25–54-year-olds and 6% of workers aged 55 and over. They are also more likely to fear losing their job.

Levels of exposure to physical risks have fallen over time through the reduction of environmental hazards in some instances, but this gain has been counterbalanced by increases in the prevalence of posture-related risks. In 2010, there were few marked differences between age groups in level of exposure to physical risks. In the past, workers tended to switch out of more physically demanding jobs as they aged, but it appears that access to this protective mechanism is diminishing.

Average working time has decreased from 40.5 hours a week in 1991 (when there were

just 12 Member States) to 37.5 in the EU27 in 2010. The number of people working long hours (48 hours or more per week) has also fallen. Ability to adjust working time to suit different phases of life is important for achieving a balance between the needs of work and private life. Many workers, for example, will have caring responsibilities at some point in their working lives, and alternatives to the standard nine-to-five job can be crucial to their ability to stay in work. The EWCS found that almost one-fifth (18%) of workers are dissatisfied with their work-life balance; the sense of imbalance is most common among men aged 35–49 years, with nearly a quarter (23%) indicating that their working hours do not fit well with family or social commitments. Dissatisfaction in this area declines with age (Figure 3). Since 2005, the proportion of jobs where the job-holder has some possibility of choosing or adapting their working time arrangements fell from 46% to 42%.

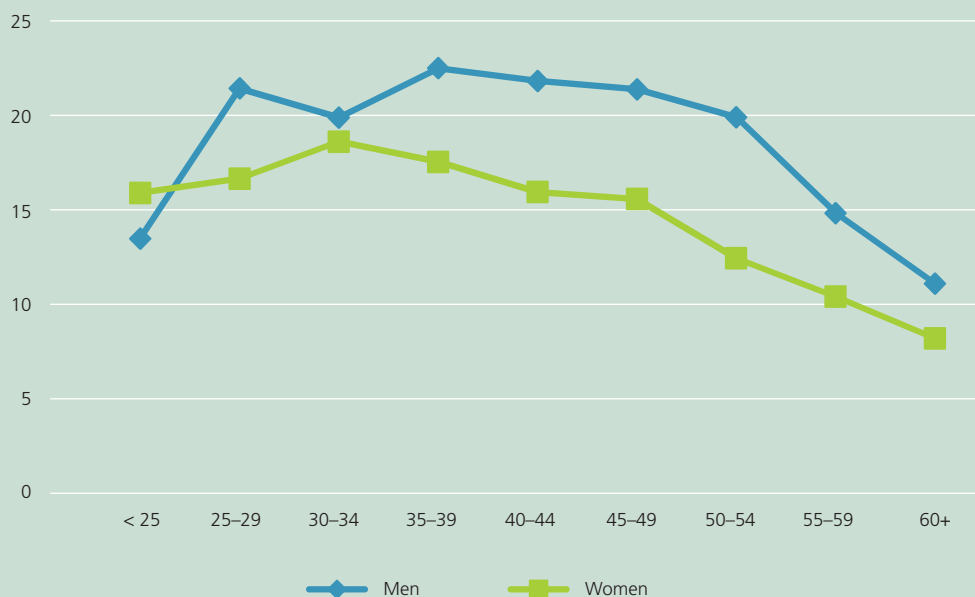
Around one-third of workers would like to reduce their working hours – this is especially

the case for those with children. Middle-aged and older workers are more likely to express a desire to reduce their working hours in comparison with younger workers.

Work intensity (working to tight deadlines and working at high speed, for instance) has grown over the past two decades, although the rate of change appears to have slowed down since 2005. Measures of the intensity of work indicate that it falls with age: working at high speed decreases, as does the prevalence of other people determining the pace of work and working to tight deadlines.

Autonomy is an important dimension of well-being at work. The EWCS indicates that just under half of the EU workforce enjoys a high level of procedural autonomy (involving the ability to change or choose the order of tasks, the speed or rate of work, and the method of work) and that increases in autonomy have been negligible over two decades. However, autonomy and the freedom to apply one's ideas at work improve somewhat with age (Figure 4a).

Figure 3: Dissatisfaction with work-life balance, by age and gender (%)



Fifth European Working Conditions Survey, Eurofound



Changes in the content of jobs over time require that workers acquire new skills continuously, and an emphasis has been placed on lifelong learning as one of the key means of achieving several of the EU's policy goals for growth. At present, younger workers report most often that they learn new things in the course of their work (71%), while the proportion of workers aged 50 and over reporting the same is substantially lower (63%). Learning new things at work starts to decrease in workers over 49 years; between the ages of 50 and 60+ a gap of 10 percentage points opens up (Figure 5a).

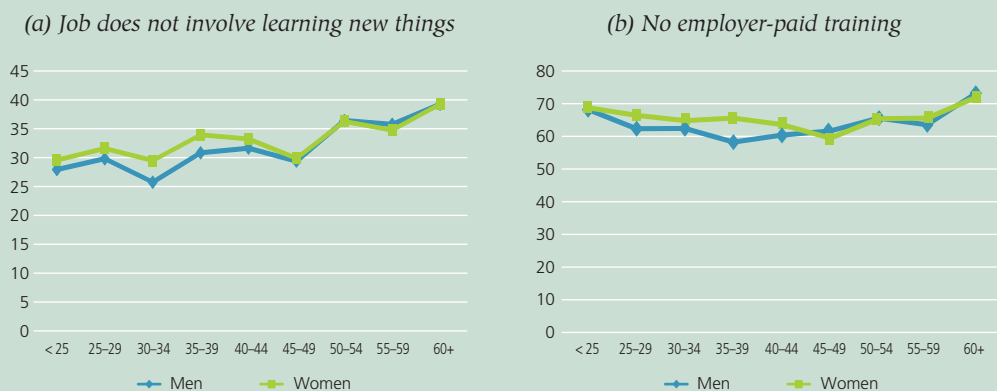
The level of employer-paid training is relatively low, with just one-third of workers receiving such training in the previous year. The age group that receives most training is workers aged 35–49 years. The proportion of workers not receiving employer-paid training starts to increase around 40 years for men and for women when they enter their 50s (Figure 5b). These findings show that learning experiences and opportunities tend to be skewed towards younger workers. If work is indeed to be sustainable, the distribution needs to be more even across age groups, and the level of training increased across the board.

Figure 4: Latitude at work, by age group (%)



Fifth European Working Conditions Survey, Eurofound

Figure 5: Learning at work, by age group (%)



Fifth European Working Conditions Survey, Eurofound

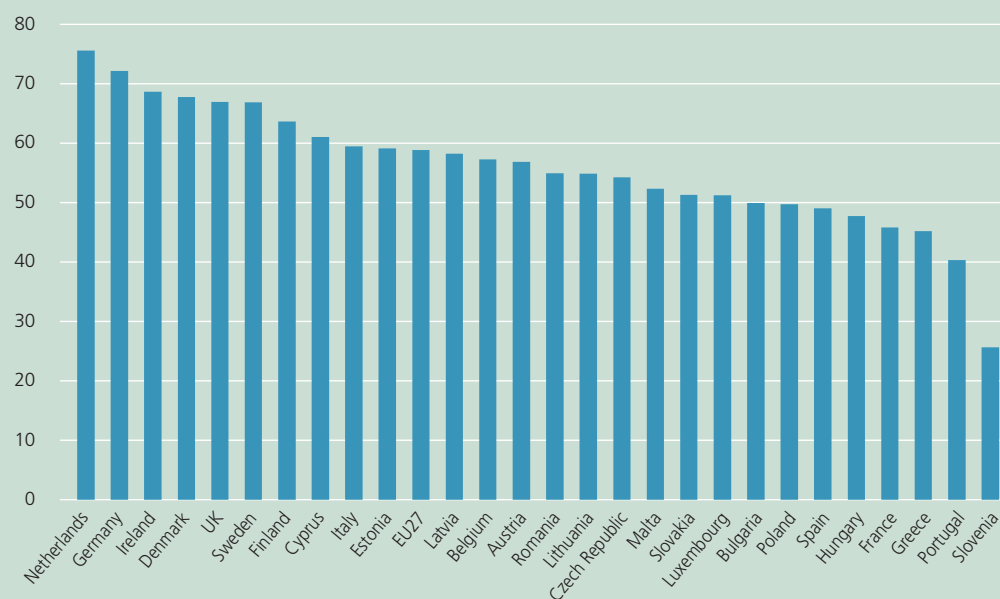
On the question of the sustainability of the job into older age, 59% responded that they would be able to do their job at age 60, a quarter responded that they would not, and the remaining 16% reported that they would not want to. Looking just at workers closer to the age of 60 (aged 50–54), however, one-third felt that they would not be able to do the same job. Further analysis of the data found that factors explaining perceived unsustainability were painful positions, unsatisfactory working time arrangements, perceived job insecurity and poor prospects for career advancement.

There were substantial differences across Member States (Figure 6): out of the 10 Member States with the lowest percentage of workers expecting to be able to do their job at age 60, seven were also in the bottom 10 in terms of the proportion of workers aged 50 and older in the workforce. This finding suggests that expectations about work in older age are related to a country's age culture.

Flexible working time for informal carers

The ability to avail of flexible working time arrangements is particularly important to working carers, and it is an issue that is likely to be of increasing importance as the number of older people needing informal care rises. The contribution of informal carers will be central to the sustainability of long-term care provision as demand grows. At the same time, the increased participation of women in the workforce has reduced the traditional pool of care providers – women working in the home – and EU strategy is focused on promoting this trend. The confluence of demographic ageing, increased participation of women in the workforce and employment growth strategy suggests that contemporary workplaces will have to accommodate working carers to keep them in the workforce. Some companies have already implemented measures to support working carers in their staff. Most common are measures that offer flexibility in working time: leave-

Figure 6: Workers' views on ability to do their current job at 60, by Member State (%)



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related provisions, options to reduce hours and flexible weekly hours of work.

Employers have been slow to appreciate the needs of working carers, and line managers are often resistant to facilitating carers in resolving home life and work conflicts. However, the case studies indicate that problems can be overcome by raising awareness among employers and enabling line managers to plan for the needs of working carers.

Volunteering

As the barrier between work and retirement becomes more permeable, the definition of retirement is also being revised. With people having a longer and healthier old age, the notion that economic productivity and societal usefulness largely ends with retirement has lost credibility. There is increasing focus on the best ways to mobilise the potential of this growing population cohort in order to strengthen communities and build intergenerational solidarity. Volunteering is an important area where older people can have a significant impact. The UN's 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing calls for changes in attitudes, policies and practices at all levels to fulfil the enormous potential of ageing in the twenty-first century and specifically advocates recognising the contribution of older people through volunteering.⁸ Volunteering brings double rewards: while society gains from the activities of the older generation, older people themselves also benefit. Since the risk of social exclusion escalates once a person leaves the labour force, maintaining a person's social engagement is central to their well-being, and therefore participation in voluntary work is a very effective means to that end.

Older people have traditionally been seen more as the beneficiaries of volunteering rather than as actors. Participation in voluntary work declines after the age of 50, and programmes tailored specifically to the involvement of older people as volunteers are few. But programmes

can be successful if they are adequately promoted among older people and if appropriate training and flexible hours are offered, as well as due recognition for their contribution.

Eurofound's research on volunteering by older people in the EU has brought to light a range of activities that go beyond the scope of traditional age-related concerns such as support to frail or sick older people. A few of the volunteer projects that reach out across the generations are reviewed here.

Újbuda 60+ (Hungary)

Újbuda 60+ is a framework community development programme in the Újbuda district of Budapest that aims to boost and support the participation of older people in the community. The programme focuses on people aged 60 and over, facilitating their transition to life in retirement. By building networks between older people in the district, it hopes to reduce the risk of marginalisation following withdrawal from the labour market. It was launched by the municipality in 2008 with funding from the EU's Central Europe programme through the Q-Ageing project and from the local authority.

A major component of the programme is involving older people in volunteer activities, mobilising them for the benefit of both older and younger generations. Self-organising, independent local groups are set up to develop and run projects. One group, the 60+ Neighbourhood Voluntary Network, recruits and trains volunteers to provide support and assistance to people of all ages living in their neighbourhood. The *Granny's Tales* book was a one-off project by a group of older women which involved the writing and illustration of a children's storybook. Published in 2009, the book has become part of the kindergarten programme in the local district through regular readings of the stories by the book's writers.

The activities developed by the volunteers draw on the skills they developed in their work-

⁸ This document is available at <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/ageing/>

ing careers and give them the opportunity to pass on those skills. The programme is developed continuously as the project management explores possibilities for cooperation with other actors and assesses the needs of older people in the district. It has attracted an unexpectedly high level of support since its launch, and many initiatives have been so well supported that they have become self-sustaining.

Website: <http://www.ujbuda.hu/60plusz>

Bočiai (Lithuania)

Bočiai (the Lithuanian Pensioners Union) was set up in 1991, after Lithuania regained its independence, to represent the economic, social and cultural interests of older people and to articulate those interests to government. It has 45,000 members, making it the largest organisation of older people in Lithuania. Activities include the organisation of education and training services, theatrical events, concerts, hobby clubs, and charity events. It publishes its own newspaper *Lietuvos Bočiai* (Lithuania's Elders).

With the support of government institutions, Bočiai runs a voluntary care and assistance initiative for people with special needs in Vilnius. One of the project participants summarised the motivation for this initiative in one sentence: 'We just know that one day the same thing can happen to any of us.' One of the main partners in this initiative is Lietuvos Neįgaliųjų Draugija (the Association of Disabled People in Lithuania), which informs the service about people with special needs that are in the most urgent need of help. Cooperation with social service workers is also common. As well as providing care, volunteers also organise cultural and social events, such as concerts, theatres, orchestras and social evenings, for the people under their care. Funding for the initiative is very limited, provided mainly by the local authorities. Volunteers often have to provide their own transport, which can be a problem for older people and which makes recruitment of volunteers difficult.

This project is a good example of how one group with a high risk of social exclusion and poverty helps another group with similar diffi-

culties. The initiative is modest in scale at present, with 10–20 volunteers, who are capable of looking after 20–30 people. The board of Bočiai is behind the continuation and development of the project. The main plan is improve the structure of the project and to organise it more effectively.

Website: <http://www.lietuvosbočiai.lt/>

Seniors Show the Way (UK)

Seniors Show the Way is a large-scale project in Bradford, run by a public body (the National Health Service (NHS)), which aims to recruit a large number of older people as volunteers to promote the health and well-being of people in their communities. Launched in 2008, it aims to recruit, train and support 1,400 people aged 50 plus to become Community Health Champions (CHCs). It enrolled its 1,000th volunteer in September 2011. The project is funded from National Lottery funding over three years.

CHCs are recruited from existing over-50s groups such as luncheon clubs, day community centres, and, more recently, sheltered accommodation. Paid Community Health Activators (CHAs) run workshops for these groups on topics such as healthy eating, the benefits of physical activity, and mental well-being. Attendees are then engaged to become volunteer CHCs, with a specific 'Pass it on' session preparing them to transmit these health messages to friends and family. Each CHC is expected to talk to five people as a minimum, amounting to approximately 7,000 indirect beneficiaries of the project. The CHCs are also invited to attend network meetings held around the area. These sessions provide an update on what is happening in the area, and include guest speakers. A number of CHCs have moved on to become Super Champions, with a regular weekly commitment, who organise their own activities and leading projects.

Statistical age data exist for 426 of the volunteers. This reveals that 28% were between 55 and 64 years; 26% were between 65 and 74; and 29% aged 75; 17% were aged between 45 and 55 – younger people are not turned down if they come forward. One-third of volunteers



were men, and they also formed a high proportion of the Super Champions.

Website: <http://divabradford.org.uk/Organisation.aspx?ID=2535>

Jonge Luu en Aole Knarren **(the Netherlands)**

One-off projects also have a place on the volunteering spectrum, providing the opportunity to participate for a short but intense period instead of requiring a long-term commitment. **Jonge Luu en Aole Knarren** was one such project, a musical conceived, developed and staged with the purpose of bringing together the younger and older generations of Nieuw-Amsterdam/Veenoord in the Netherlands. It was hoped that the project would improve understanding and tolerance between the generations in the town. Nieuw-Amsterdam/Veenoord is a town of 7,000 people, with a substantial level of socio-economic deprivation, where the relationship between young and old is largely one of mistrust and lack of respect.

The main forces behind the musical were the welfare group Sedna, which works in the community to promote social cohesion, and the local care centre, Oldersheem. The musical is set in the town and explores the relationships, misunderstandings and mutual interests of the two groups, and the potential for cooperation between them. In order to appeal to the young as well as the old, different musical styles were

used, including rock and rap. The performers were recruited from both age groups: the youngest player was 12, the eldest 80. Eighteen volunteers in total performed, most of whom did not have any previous experience of performance.

The musical was staged three times in June 2009, once for the residents of Oldersheem and twice for the entire village population in the community hall. Although it was a one-off project, residents reported that it had nurtured a feeling of togetherness and regularly ask for a repeat of the endeavour. A tangible outcome of the project remains in the form of an outdoor bench in the town marketplace.

These case studies demonstrate the contribution that older people in a volunteering capacity can make to a range of social, cultural and other organised services, especially at local, community level. They show that effective cooperation between older volunteers and younger professional staff is essential in making programmes successful and sustainable. They also strongly suggest that volunteering does not just happen spontaneously – it requires organisation, leadership, concerted effort and substantial support structures. Workable volunteering projects must endeavour to match older volunteers to specific shorter or longer-term activities reflecting their preferences, interests and capacities. The diversity of older people is too easily overlooked; they are not a homogenous mass to be offered a bland menu of uniform pursuits.



Policy pointers



Creating the conditions for intergenerational solidarity as the demographic profile of the EU evolves demands long-term, coordinated and multilevel strategies from policymakers. A partnership approach is necessary, involving consultation and social dialogue, so that reforms are agreed among the various stakeholders.

Ending the early-exit culture

The social and economic project to extend working lives is likely to achieve greater and earlier success if workers remain in work because they want to, not because they have to. Coercive strategies run counter to the concepts of reciprocity, consensus and co-dependency that underpin intergenerational solidarity. While penalising early withdrawal from the workforce continues to be part of the package of measures, policy should be weighted towards approaches that make continuing in work a desirable rather than a discouraging prospect as workers enter their later years. In addition, the approach should take care to avoid sacrifices on the retirement side: a retirement free from hardship should be part of the picture. Workers need to be confident that pension and

health systems will support them when retirement comes.

A major effort must be made to change an age culture that sees older workers as surplus to requirements and to recognise the value of human capital to productivity. The unique attributes of older workers should be recognised and better use made of their skills: in particular, the transfer of skills to younger workers should be highlighted and cooperation between different generations actively promoted. New career trajectories need to be explored so that workers can look forward to occupational prospects at every age.

Improving working conditions for all

For workers to accept longer working lives and for work to be sustainable over a longer period, advances must be made in the conditions in which work takes place. A life-course perspective on improving the quality of work addresses the well-being of workers at every stage of their careers and supports their retention. Aspects meriting particular attention are physical and psychosocial risks, job quality, working time flexibility and lifelong learning.



- At a most basic level, physical and psychosocial risks damage the physical and mental health of workers. Temporary working contracts are becoming more common, but the associated job insecurity is a source of stress. There is also concern at the rising levels of stress associated with the content of jobs, especially stress associated with job strain – highly intensive work effort combined with low workplace autonomy.
- Enhancing the intrinsic quality of jobs helps to make work fulfilling. Autonomy – the worker’s capacity to make decisions and to control aspects of their work – is important. So, too, is work that stimulates and that involves collaboration. Having emotional support in the workplace is also positively associated with health and well-being.
- Working time flexibility options enable workers to balance the demands of private life with the demands of work. These demands vary over working life, and the ability or the desire to remain in work is often dependent upon ability to achieve the right balance. Working time flexibility is intrinsic to the concept of downshifting as a transition to retirement.
- While there is much discussion of lifelong learning, it has yet to become a reality for workers. In an economy where knowledge becomes obsolete fast, it is essential for workers to keep their skills current. It also means that if a worker loses their job, they will have the skills that the labour market needs.

More could be done to promote better understanding of the relationship between job quality and productivity. Working conditions associated with a high level of well-being among workers are also associated with high levels of motivation and commitment. It is not the case that better working conditions for workers are achieved at a cost to the employer. Eurofound research has found associations between practices that improve job quality – such as autonomous teamworking, a focus on skills develop-

ment and flexible working arrangements – and improved company performance.

Supporting youth employment

Young people are a fundamental asset to society and the economy. Unemployment erodes their ability to participate fully and benefit from its rewards, and some are scarred by the negative effects over their lives. Empowering young people demands that policy focuses on creating favourable conditions for them to develop their talents and to actively participate in the labour market. The policy response must also recognise the heterogeneity of the NEET group and offer comprehensive and multifaceted interventions.

Globalisation and the shift towards a knowledge economy mean that young people need the right mix of both job-specific and cross-cutting core skills to be able to access the labour market. Eurofound findings suggest that successful interventions at getting young people into work involve ensuring they have the skills that employers are looking for; tailoring programmes to individual needs; providing one-to-one guidance; making comprehensive information on options available; and offering working-life familiarisation opportunities.

From an intergenerational perspective, a great deal more could be done to tap the reservoirs of experience and knowledge that older people hold to help integrate young workers into the labour force. Mentoring and coaching schemes could fill the gap between the skills young workers have and the skills employers seek. Frameworks to enable such knowledge transfers should be explored and developed.

Promoting volunteering among older people

Case studies prove that older people in a volunteering capacity can build social capital between the generations through a wide range of activities, such as cultural endeavours, support programmes and health initiatives.

Volunteering can play an important part in active ageing, ensuring that older people are vitally engaged in social and community life. More effective promotion of volunteering opportunities among older people is needed, however. Organisations need to raise awareness of the value of volunteering and develop professional human resource policies to recruit, train and retain older volunteers. Enabling older volunteers to choose the extent and duration of their involvement gives them flexibility, and activities should reflect their preferences,

capacities and interests. Organisations need to build variety into the opportunities they offer, to encourage the participation of people with diverse skills and different skill levels so that even people with low skill levels can make a contribution.

While voluntary work is unpaid, its activities still need to be funded so that the expenses of volunteers, such as transport, are covered. This can be especially important for older people, who often have limited income.



Further reading

More information on the topics discussed here can be found in the following publications:

Company initiatives for workers with care responsibilities for disabled children or adults
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1147.htm>.

Employment trends and policies for older workers in the recession
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1235.htm>.

Fifth European Working Conditions Survey - Overview report
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1182.htm>.

Income from work after retirement in the EU
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1259.htm>.

Recent policy developments related to those not in employment, education and training – NEETs
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/emcc/erm/studies/tn1109042s/index.htm>.

Sustainable work and the ageing workforce
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1166.htm>.

Third European Quality of Life Survey
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1264.htm>.

Trends in job quality in Europe
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1228.htm>.

Volunteering by older people in the EU
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1134.htm>.

Young people and NEETs in Europe: First findings
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef1172.htm>.

All Eurofound publications are available at www.eurofound.europa.eu.

'Older people depend on the success of younger people if they want to enjoy good social protection and social services; so it is in their best interest to invest in the future of the young. Younger people care about their elders and want themselves to be treated with respect and dignity when they are old. We can and must avoid confrontation between generations by developing a positive approach to tackling the challenge of ageing: an approach focused on creating better opportunities for an active and fulfilling life for people of all ages.'

László Andor, European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, at the Third Age Conference to mark International Day of Older Persons, Dublin, 1 October 2012

Foundation Findings provide pertinent background information and policy pointers for all actors and interested parties engaged in the current European debate on the future of social policy. The contents are based on Foundation research and reflect its autonomous and tripartite structure.



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ISSN 1830-8805

ISBN 978-92-897-1073-2

