Active Strategies for an Ageing Workforce
Turku, 12-13 August 1999

The Turku conference examined the development, implementation and assessment of ‘active’ measures and ‘integrated’ strategies for an ageing workforce. Some 140 participants from European institutions, Member State governments, employer and trade union organisations and research came together for two days of debate during the Finnish Presidency of the European Council.

The conference drew upon experience across the EU to identify more successful strategies for ageing workers. The programme was built around the pillars of the EU’s employment policy, specifically on promoting the employability and adaptability of both men and women workers as they age. The Finnish National Programme for Ageing Workers emphasises the joint role of many different sectors and interest groups in developing active strategies; similarly, the organisers of the conference were drawn from some of the key policy areas that influence workers’ prospects: health, education, pensions, employment. A central issue was to examine how these sectors and key actors were linked or coordinated for more integrated approaches in both public policy and at the enterprise or workplace levels.

CONCLUSIONS

Key points which emerged to guide age management in employment were:

- the need to rethink early exit policies is urgent, both to ensure more opportunities for older workers, and also to safeguard the welfare of those at high risk of exclusion from employment;
- promotion of employment for, and the employability of, an ageing workforce demands action throughout the whole of working life;
- active policy approaches should be preventive, avoiding age-specific employment problems by combating risks in earlier phases of working life;
- many older workers today have experienced disadvantages, for example, in skills and training for which remedial action is necessary. A ‘dual approach’ should be adopted, improving employability over all of working life but also addressing specific risks or problems for some older workers;
- more specific measures, including opportunities for self-employment, are both necessary and effective in improving prospects for unemployed older workers;
- systematic coordination of measures is required but also achievable at both enterprise and public policy levels. A close coordination of public and workplace policies is warranted; there is also a need to link enterprise initiatives with use of local community services such as social security, education and care;
- effective measures depend upon worker involvement from the start, not only as ‘experts in their own matters’, but also in realising integrated actions at the workplace level;
- evaluation, though difficult, is essential to inform effective practice and to avoid unintended consequences. Economic evaluation is particularly lacking, but there is a general need for research to support the development and implementation of policies;
- demographic changes are rapid in both the workplace and the wider community. There should be a means to monitor developments in national, local and workplace policies in the years ahead; this should consider impacts not only for the ageing workforce but also for intergenerational solidarity.
For more than 20 years, the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions has advised the European institutions, national governments and the social partners on issues confronting European society, including employment, health and well-being, social cohesion, equal opportunities, participation and sustainable development.

The Information Centre of the Foundation responds to enquiries (e-mail: info@eurofound.ie). A free newsletter is published ten times a year.

The full conference report can be found at www.eurofound.ie

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