

From the international workshop held in Brno on the employment of elderly people in the Czech Republic and comparison with EU

Martina Rašticová, Monika Bédiová, Jana Mikušová

On 26th May 2016, the Faculty of Business and Economics of Mendel University in Brno held an international workshop on the employment of elderly people in the Czech Republic in comparison with EU as part of the two-year project, Gender Dimension of Active Ageing Implementation in the Czech Private and Public Sector in Comparison with Western Countries funded by the COST Action IS1409 programme (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) with doc. PhDr. Martina Rašticová, Ph.D. as the project leader for the Czech Republic.

Based on international cooperation within the approved ISCH COST Action IS1409, the project aims to enhance the knowledge about the importance of the gender dimension in implementing and supporting active ageing focusing on the economic well-being of ageing employees in the Czech private and public sectors as compared with the Western countries. Emphasis is placed on the support for international cooperation with research institutions of the COST member countries.

The Brno international workshop consisted of several parts; first there was a plenary session opened by doc. PhDr. Martina Rašticová, Ph.D., who greeted all the participants, introduced the project stressing the topicality of the problems faced considering the demographic ageing of population somehow affecting all countries of the world and calling for preparedness for ageing policy.

The next speaker was Anne-Marije Buckens, a renowned Dutch founder/owner of 50 Company - The career agency for 50+ unemployed, who presented her rich practical experience in employing elderly people and in finding jobs for them in the Dutch labour market. The company aims to provide elderly employees with individual counselling to help them get a realistic view of the present labour market, obtain more information on the changes taking place in the labour market, and stay competitive in the labour market.

The last topic of this group was the concept of the ability to work – support for successful ageing in the workplace presented by RNDr. Bohumil Pokorný, CSc. The most important factor deciding whether elderly people stay employed is the attitudes of their superiors about ageing issues and their willingness to find solutions concerning modified working conditions. A key role in the development was played by the research of abilities to work in ageing employees conducted by a Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (FIOH) in the 1980's. Led by prof. Juhani Ilmarinen, a research team tried to find out how long people can work and what is the right retirement age. To find an answer to this question, a positive approach was chosen – how to determine the ability rather than inability to work. As part of this research, a new method was developed based on an auto evaluation of a person under research called a Work Ability Index (WAI).

In the afternoon part, two thematic groups were formed for round table debates with Czech and English as working languages - barriers and stereotypes in employing elderly people from the points of view of the employers, the senior persons, and the public sector in the Czech Republic as compared with the EU and age management or flexible conditions for

employing different age groups in the Czech Republic in comparison with the EU. The groups consisted of academics and representatives from both the public and the private spheres. The topics discussed at round tables included the current opportunities for and barriers to employing elderly people and suggestions of aims and measures that should not be overlooked in strategies for active ageing. The problems discussed at the round table concerned with the barriers and stereotypes in employing elderly people as viewed by the employers, senior citizens and the public sector in the Czech Republic included the advantages, drawbacks, and specific features of the 50+ age category. The participants in the debate agreed that the positives of older employees include their valuable previous practical experience, their competency, good grasp on their professions, and generally, better maturity. Thus, elderly people bring benefits to a company when applying their specialized expertise in some professions and when transferring their experience and knowledge to the younger generation. The barriers or drawbacks of elderly employees reflected by numerous companies (particularly as viewed by the employers) include rigidity, lack of perspective and flexibility, diminished physical strength that may negatively affect performance especially in professions requiring fitness, insufficient computer-oriented skills, and fears of low performance or lack of productivity.

The topics of the discussion in the afternoon session included the required changes among society, employers, and employees in their attitudes to ageing and the comparison with EU. The workshop participants agreed that demographic ageing might be an opportunity and challenge concerning the use of the knowledge and potential of elderly people. The most frequent worries caused by the changing of the age structure are related to increased costs of social welfare and health care, lack of labour, and the sustainability of the pension system financing. A major problem is the media, which apply stereotypes in presenting problems related to ageing or senior citizens - in the Czech media, senior citizens are described as an economic and social burden causing stress in the pension system, as victims of crimes and disasters, a Czech senior citizen is often medially connected with poverty of mental disorder.

The international workshop was closed by a plenary session, thanks were given to the speakers and all the participants. The outcome of each discussion will be published at a project website and sent to representatives of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech government, selected municipalities, regional authorities, non-profit organizations, research institutions concerned with issues related to the employment of elderly people in the Czech Republic, and other stakeholders among experts and a wider public.

The international workshop was very well organized and, owing to the discussion of experts from the academic sphere, the public sector, and private firms, whose professions deal with the issues related to senior citizens or age management, it was a significant platform with impulses for problems of active ageing and for the dissemination of the of the workshop outcomes.