

Policy Document 1:

Age Management 1

Workplace Practices Promoting Older Workers' Employability

Description of the Problem

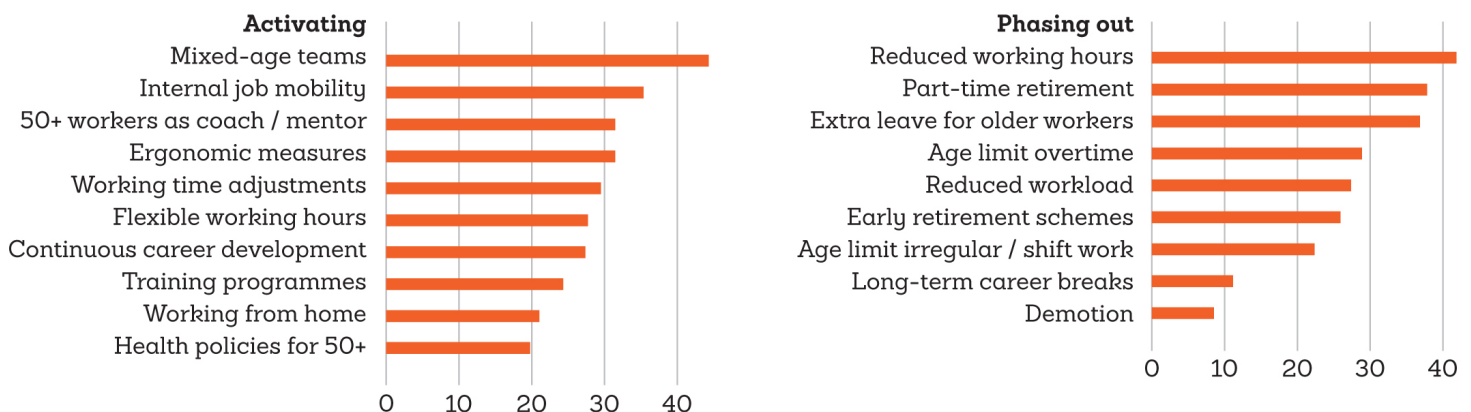
Population ageing is a global, pervasive and enduring phenomenon with profound societal implications. One consequence is an anticipated pension sustainability challenge. A frequent response has been to increase state pension ages. However, there is ample evidence to suggest that strategies targeted exclusively at the labour supply are not sufficient because the demand for older workers is sluggish. Previous analysts concluded that **such national level-policies need to be combined with company-level solutions to be effective**. This Policy Brief assesses the state of senior human resource management in Europe and shows to what extent policies exist that may offer more sustainable solutions. Age management is a holistic concept describing a proactive, workplace-centred approach to keep older workers longer employed. Age management covers a range of different policies, such as more flexible work time arrangements or continuing education and workplace training (see Figure). Traditionally, 'phasing out' policies aiming to accommodate a gradual transition of older workers towards retirement were most popular; more recently, there has been an increase in

'activating' policies, aiming to strengthen the position of older workers, often through age-specific training and flexibility measures.

This Policy Brief focuses on activating age management policies related to **training and flexibility**. Several studies indicate that both training and flexibility potentially contribute to increased motivation and job performance of older workers, as well as increasing their preferred and actual retirement age. However, these policies rarely influenced all of these outcomes simultaneously, so any benefits of training older workers may only register in the bottom line of companies in the long run. Conventional (state-run) active labour market policies have been shown to enhance the employment chances of unemployed people, but there is some evidence that they are less effective among older workers. While older workers have comparatively decent job protection, once older workers become unemployed it is very hard for them to get back into employment. Thus, to minimise late-career job losses, it is crucial to help sustain ageing workers' employability through adequate continuing education and on-the-job training.

Current Situation

Figure: Percentage of organizations in Europe implementing certain age-sensitive personnel policies



Note: Figure shows authors' own calculations based on 20 data sets, containing over 30,000 organisations in 22 EU countries.

Promising Practices

Flexibility:

The STAR program.

STAR stands for "Support. Transform. Achieve. Results", a programme that targeted workers aged 50 to 64 years. This organisational intervention was carried out in the IT division of a large US company. This involved three components: (a) participatory training sessions where working groups evaluate new ways to increase employees' working time flexibility by increasing the efficiency of work flows (b) training supervisors to be more considerate of employees' private lives; and (c) assessing ways to reduce low-value work and to focus on results rather than "face time", e.g. by avoiding inefficient meetings requiring unnecessary physical presence.

Policy Recommendations

Recommendations to four different stakeholders:

Employers

- Consider implementing successfully evaluated policies such as the STAR program on a larger scale
- Promote access to and financial support for training, which is unequal for older workers and appears to be affected by gendered ageism among managers (Lössbroek and Radl 2018)
- Empower employees in the decision to use personnel policies, such as personal training budgets
- Stimulate diversity training for managers so they understand how to support their older workers

Policy Makers

- Support anti-ageism projects, e.g. through information campaigns and government sponsored 'best practice' company prizes
- Fund social scientific research to carry out more randomized trials and undertake field experiments to evaluate promising practices
- Stimulate employers to extend successful

Acknowledgment

This publication is based upon work from COST Action IS1409 "Gender and health impacts of policies extending working life in western countries", supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

Training:

A very promising type of initiative, interestingly, influences older workers' performance by training their managers in how to manage a mixed-age team. In the control group, team productivity was hampered by ageist attitudes among workers, which generated friction and impaired cooperation. Managers who participated in age-diversity training were significantly better at realising a helpful climate and thereby increasing productivity of both younger and older workers. Mixed age teams potentially outperform homogenous age teams; training can help to fulfill this potential.

policies also to include those who are marginally or temporarily employed, many of whom are women

Researchers

- Continue testing promising policies
- Assess which workers are most likely to benefit from which types of personnel policy
- Rigorously evaluate which good practices are transferable to new settings, are scalable, and contribute to prolonged working lives and healthy ageing without losses in productivity

Trade Unions and Employers' Organisations

- Inform employers about good practices
- Include implementation of good practices in employee-employer negotiations
- Increase workers' knowledge of personnel policies
- Stimulate older workers to take initiatives towards personnel policy implementation and use



Funded by the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme of the European Union

For Full Policy Brief with references please see:

Lössbroek, J., Radl, J. & Warwas, I. (2018). "Age Management: Workplace Practices Promoting Older Workers' Employability". GenderEWL Policy Document 1. Galway, NUI Galway. Available at <http://genderewl.com/publications/>