

EU countries are simultaneously experiencing below-replacement fertility and a continuous increase in life expectancy, leading to an ageing of the workforce. The Europe 2020 strategy responded to this societal challenge by recommending that the employment participation

of individuals aged between 55 and 64 should increase. Indeed, most EU governments implemented pension reforms during the past decade to prolong working life, even beyond age 65.

The Problem:

Health and workforce participation are deeply intertwined across the life course. While poor health can limit work participation, employment conditions (exposure to physical and psychosocial risk, fast pace of work, tight deadlines, low autonomy) can result in poor health, irrespective of age. These workers are more likely to state that they would be unable to do the same job when aged 60. Older women suffer particularly from health risks associated with low quality, often temporary, jobs. In fact, the prevalence of physical and mental health conditions is higher among older women than among older men, while across Europe, more than one third of the general employed population aged 50+ suffers from a physical limitation or chronic morbidity.

In sum, forcing individuals to work in lowly qualified jobs with poor working conditions beyond current retirement age might further negatively affect the health of workers, especially of those with existing health conditions, and reduce work ability, with increasing risk of leaving the labour market via alternative exit routes to retirement, such as disability or long-term unemployment benefits.

Standard policy strategies have focused on the ageing workforce by considering older workers as a sensitive group that need special protection,

permitting older workers with health conditions or employed in jobs which are considered dangerous for health to exit the labour force:

- early retirement schemes for 'arduous jobs'
- long-term sick or disability retirement programmes
- leave schemes for caring purposes
- anti-age discrimination laws

Innovative/Promising policies are required to improve labour market perspectives for unemployed and older workers. Although no such single policy exists, integrated policies that adopt a life-course approach and synergies between different policy areas have been promising. Policies and interventions should

- aim for better risk prevention and health promotion in the earlier stages in the life course.
- exploit the synergies between different policy areas, such as employment, health, education and public transportation in order to achieve better and more sustainable results.

An effective implementation of integrated policies/interventions is complex. In the case of work sustainability at older ages, several important required factors have been identified as shown in the figure below:

Figure 1. Factors required for an effective implementation of policies on work sustainability at older ages



Source: Based on Ardito C, Neves R, Spijker, J (2018), Policy Brief on Health in Late Career. COST Action IS1409: Gender and Health Impacts of Policies Extending Working Life, Policy Brief 2. Galway: NUI Galway. http://genderewl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/COST_Policy2_GenderEWL.pdf

Recommended Policies

Policies promoting work-life extension should have a life-course approach, as the young workers of today are the older workers of tomorrow.

Work sustainability at older ages should be promoted by exploiting the synergies between different policy areas, including public employment agencies, public health, education and transportation.

Policies improving working conditions are as important as raising the official retirement age or restricting access to early retirement and disability claims to promote work-life extension.

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For Full Policy Brief with references please see:

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