## Identified Facilitator: Intergenerational relay and knowledge transfer mechanisms (e.g., apprenticeships, mentoring)

Initiatives of intergenerational relay date back to the ‘80s in Italy. These initiatives are based on the intergenerational replacement/distribution logic that believes facilitating the reduction of working hours or gradual retirement will generate new job opportunities for youths. These intergenerational company schemes are subsidized by public resources as compensation for some of the income loss of older workers. This same logic was followed by Decree n. 807/2012 of Labour Ministry21 that provided the possibility for the transformation of part-time to full-time employment contracts of older workers (50 years and over), and concomitant hiring of young workers (18-25 years old unemployed (up to 29 if a graduate) eligible for permanent work or apprenticeship).

Intergenerational relay mechanisms are the main negotiated channels for active ageing. Pursuant to such agreements, managers who are about to retire can convert their employment relationship into a part-time one and act as tutors for their newly employed younger colleagues or middle managers. However, this kind of agreements have not been very well implemented in the practice. In sectors where small companies prevail, the management or the owner are the oldest persons in the production/service cycle, and they perform the same tasks of their younger employees: they are often involved in the same working teams together with young workers, and managerial activities tend to overlap with daily, ordinary working tasks. This facilitates knowledge and skill transfer, on the one hand, especially in family companies, where solidarity among the firm community is higher. On the other hand, this also results in informality in employee relations, and can bring for example the owner to underestimate the importance of formal training courses to improve his/her expertise or the one of his/her employees.

The implementation of knowledge transfer mechanisms, as apprenticeships or mentoring programmes, have been identified as a possible solution to overcome stereotypes and assumptions regarding older workers.

Sometimes, tutoring and mentoring programmes take place spontaneously within team of workers where older and younger workers cooperate even when an official programme of transference of knowledge has not been implemented in the company. Knowledge circulation is immanent in social relations in general. For that reason, a priority for companies is to create the environmental condition to promote spontaneous forms of cooperation within the workforce that promotes knowledge transfer.

However, as employee relations are not always based on cooperation, trust and solidarity as both older and young workers are often jealous of their skills, and unwilling to transfer them, structural programmes at company level should be implemented.

In this context, collective bargaining is fundamental to promote active ageing and the implementation of knowledge transfer mechanisms. Trade unions and employers representatives can add a value in building solidarity among workers. However, both companies and workers’ representatives are rather sceptical on this issue, as in some cases that kind of measures implicates an added cost for companies or a reduced net income for workers.

Mentoring and reverse mentoring stands out among the most used cross-generational programmes. Some collective agreements mention these kind of measures, although their source of regulation remains unilateral HRM.

Mentoring can be considered as an instrument to promote skills and knowledge transference from older workers to younger generations. This instrument is useful to keep older workers active and to promote knowledge transference in order to prevent company from losing the know-how that the older worker has obtained in long years once he is retired. Younger workers are supported by older workers in their transition from school to work and they are able to received on the job training form a person that know better, not only, the job but also the companies’ context. From this point of view, active ageing is related to the productivity of the company.

However, there is also another perspective regarding knowledge transference mechanisms. Reverse mentoring is an initiative to promote the permanence of older workers in labour market in which the older worker is mentored or accompanied by a younger worker on topics such as technology, social media and current trends. Reverse mentoring is seen as an opportunity to promote a dialogue between generations and to allow older workers to become familiar with new technologies and other instruments that did not existed when they started to work. We can find an example of a reverse mentoring project in Italy, in Sanofi where there are not specific measures to older workers but they develop projects that address the entire working population, regardless of age or seniority in the role or in the company. From 2017 Sanofi is implementing a reverse mentoring project to allow talents (both senior and junior) to meet, exchange ideas, share the company’s culture strengthening skills.

Also apprenticeship are considered as a good way to promote the transference of knowledge. Apprenticeships, which in Italy are regulated via collective bargaining, are good schemes to promote older workers mentoring and cooperation with young people. Although there a no formal provisions related to wage of the tutors enrolled in apprenticeship schemes, they generally have a longstanding experience in the qualification that the apprentice should acquire, thus the latter is generally younger than the former. The same goes for school-to-work transition schemes and any form of on-the-job training.

## Questions to consider

1. Do you know successful intergenerational relay mechanisms? What do you think are the main barriers for its implementation?
2. There are knowledge transfer mechanisms in your organization? Do you know examples of that kind of mechanism?
3. Do you think that become a tutor for younger workers is the right way to keep older workers active in the labour market?