## Good practice: Involvement of retired union members in consultancy, mentoring and counselling activities in favour of younger activists and workers

In many countries, trade union membership does not need to end once the worker retires. Retired people can continue to be part of the trade union movement through associate membership in their unions. Many unions offer retired people the chance to continue their union membership after they leave work on a reduced rate. Older workers and retired employees represent a significant share of trade unions membership in Italy. In the UK, the share of members who are retired is small (about 5%) but still represents a significant part of the activist base. There are a variety of reasons why unions organise retired people:

* It is an important way to advocate for pension rights, especially for retired people who depend on the state pension for their retirement. In the UK, for example, the National Pensioners Convention has played an important role in protecting the “triple lock” which guarantees that the state pension will rise by inflation, growth or 2.5% per annum, whichever is highest.
* It gives voice to a group of workers who might be otherwise excluded from dialogue on public policy and workforce issues. Many unions have retired members’ groups which are able to offer policy advice on issues affecting retired people. Some unions also allow retired member groups to put forward conference motions to advocate for policies important to their constituents
* It gives retired people a way to stay connected to people in their workplaces. In a survey of retired union members, 81% said that the main reason which they have continued their union membership was because it keeps them in touch with their former colleagues (Flynn & Croucher, 2006). Some workplaces have retired members’ groups so that they can meet periodically and even return to work on an occasional basis.
* It gives unions a voice on community issues affecting older people such as local transport or neighbourhood safety. Retired activists can be ambassadors for unions in giving the union representation on local policy making boards.
* It provides an activist base which can be mobilised to work on important workplace issues. Many retired union members have experience as activists or elected representatives. Like organisations which rely on their retired employees to provide skills when needed from time to time, unions can mobilise their retired members to support campaigns. For example, UNISON relies retired members to support campaigns like the Ethical Care Charter which encourages local authorities to set at least a minimum workplace standards for social care which is commissioned.
* It may provide a framework for involving other people who are out of work like people who are unemployed or economically inactive for health reasons.

**Retired members and workplace active ageing**

Retired workers tend to remain unionized as trade unions offer them services and welfare measures. On the other hand, older union activists, especially those that used to work in executive roles in trade unions structures, are involved as trainers in training programmes for unions officials or in other activities such as campaigning and policy making. In some sectors like construction, retired people have been involved in apprenticeship programmes, helping to support young people in their learning on a formal or informal basis. In the UK care sector, some retired members are also ‘care ambassadors’ who promote working in the industry while also advocating for better training and career paths to support those who are in work.

The involvement of retired union members in consultancy, mentoring and counselling activities in favour of younger activists and workers is reported as a good practice, despite not widespread yet. A trade unions’ representative observed that the involvement of retired workers in these processes is important for three reasons: first, to “activate” them and to promote their inclusion; second, to make union consultancy services available for workers beyond working time; third, to promote knowledge transfer among trade unions’ members.

**Questions to consider**

1. Do retired people have a way to maintain their work networks via their unions? Does union membership offer a way to stay connected?
2. Do retired members have a voice on workforce issues? Can the perspective of people out of work be drawn through retired member committees so that active ageing measures are developed in a more holistic way?
3. Are retired activists’ skills and experiences able to be mobilised to address issues both in work and the broader community?
4. Can retired member groups act as a bridge between working and retired people on important issues facign both groups?
* Flynn, M., & Croucher, R. (2006). Retired members in a British union. *"Work, Employment and Society", 20*(3), 593-603.