## Identified Barrier: Rampant ageism and stereotyping against older workers

Ageism or discrimination on the grounds of age is a rampant phenomenon nowadays. Ageism is conditioned by the cultural approach and by the assumptions and stereotypes about older workers and their role in the wider society.

Directive 2000/78/EC, establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation considers age as a cause of discrimination. However, it contains also an exception to this rule and allows Member States to provide differences of treatment on the grounds of age within the context of national law. If there is an objective justification, these differences will not constitute discrimination.

The first of the assumptions about older workers consist in considering that the main instrument to encourage youth employment is to introduce a mechanism that facilitates the exit from the labour market of older workers. The extension of the working life for older workers is considered a barrier to youth employment. So, early retirement is considered as one of the solutions for young unemployment. It is assumed that recent pension reforms that increased the requirements to access to early retirement have reduced the possibilities to hire young workers.

The second one is related to the health status of older workers. Statistics show that older workers are more likely to be absent from work and to suffer from long-term health conditions. Employers consider that this is an important problem that implies costs derivate from the substitution of older workers and affects company’s productivity. Older workers propensity to absenteeism is often seen as a problem from young colleagues as they are requested to substitute the former, to increase their workload, or to adjust their tasks and shifts accordingly. This is one of the reasons that explain the existence of conflicts between generations.

The third one is related to the labour cost as wages are usually based on seniority and not on competences so, generally, and old age implies also a higher salary. Young workers consider that this have a negative impact on their salary and career opportunities as they will always receive less compensation. Generally, older workers have higher pensions in comparison to future pensions of new generations of workers and they usually have open-ended full-time employment contracts while young people are generally hired with non-standard employment contracts. For that reason, young workers consider that they are in a more precarious condition than older workers. All these stereotypes contribute to the development of intergenerational conflict.

Fourth, it is assumed that older workers are not interested in participating in vocational training activities related to life-long learning and that they do not want to keep active at the workplace. Sometimes, it is also presumed that older workers are not able to adapt to the new way of work imposed by the digitalization of the labour market and that they are not as productive and creative as young people.

Moreover, in the context of performance evaluation the evaluators are generally older than the workers assessed. Younger workers feel they are penalising for that as older workers are not able to correct assess their value and needs that may differ from those of older workers.

## A possible solution: active ageing as an opportunity to overcome stereotyping against older workers

Work could represent an opportunity to overcome the stereotype according to which older people are seen as a burden for the society. Considering that retirement is not the end of active life, work would certainly help older people’s psychological well-being. Keeping a large part of the population active in social, political and cultural participation would have good implications for wider society.

It should be necessary to eliminate the culture that surrounds older workers in the transition to early retirement in order to promote the intergenerational exchange. It is not always true that the retirement of older workers will create new jobs for young people as usually young workers would not able to take automatically the vacancies of older workers.

Active policies at work aiming at promoting an adequate permanence of older workers in their job position should be promoted but this requires a change in the cultural approach to active ageing and about the role of older workers in the wide society.

One of the solutions to eliminate stereotypes and reticence regarding active ageing is to promote a culture that appreciate the skills of older workers by developing activities based on knowledge transference as mentoring. Active ageing can be identified as a process in which older workers transfer their know-how to younger workers. Knowledge should be transferred in a strategic and structured way thanks to which transition to retirement is not traumatic for older workers and neither the entry of young workers in the company. This allows a dynamic and supportive management of working relationships. Knowledge transference instruments consent the employer to take advantage of the investment that has made on a worker that has been working in a company for a long time. As the employer has done an investment on that person, he should be interested in extending the duration of the employment relationship.

## Questions to consider

1. Which is the role of older workers in your organization?
2. Do you consider that stereotypes presented about older workers are true?
3. Do you consider intergenerational conflict as a problem in your organization?
4. In your opinion, does active ageing can be considered as a solution to overcome stereotypes about older workers?