



Report of the Employment Week 2007

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Introduction

My purpose is to report back to AGE about the content of the 14th edition of the Employment Week and on my impressions, in particular on what is most relevant to older people. The main topics discussed were the social dimensions of company strategies, including diversity as a means of re-invigorating business, validation of new skills and respect for workers as human beings, work-life balance as a winning process, the active ageing perspective and the fight against discrimination.

Impressions

As it was impossible to follow all sessions, because of several of these were at the same time, I followed sessions 2 ("Europe's job creation performance"), 5 ("Work-life balance"), 12 ("Platform of social NGO's" - where I was the last speaker), 13 ("Talent management"), 18 ("Enterprise") and 21 ("Active ageing").

In "Europe's job creation performance", the most important was "the position of older workers in the labour market". Job creation works primarily in information technology and knowledge based industries, overall negative impact for older workers as demand for older skills has declined. The following are "difficulties for older workers": majority are less educated than younger generations but there are large differences among the Member States of the European union; lower level of familiarity with information technologies; most Member States have invested little in training older workers, especially in new skills and knowledge and where this occurred, it is often designed for the minds of young people and not those of older learners; where seniority is used as the main basis for wage increases, older workers appear more expensive than younger ones (though real wage levels vary between Member States); early retirement schemes, available in earlier decades, have influenced expectations.

But there are also positive aspects, like experience, knowledge of the products, customers, organisations, service and the work itself, loyalty. Member States vary enormously in the levels of education and skills among the older generations of workers. But this is dynamic. There is actual increase in older workers participation in the 25 Member States of the European Union, the employment rate of people aged 55 - 64.

Some Member States have reduced the barriers to working while receiving pensions, and provided tax incentives for older people to work. There has been an increase in the educational levels amongst older workers and labour market attitudes have started to change, e.g.: age discrimination legislation is important. Some organizations have started to increase their investment in their older labour force, e.g. through training, career management, consultation, cooperation. Older people are in better health than in previous



generations. The increases in the age at which people receive their pension, promoted by Member States, are unlikely to be nearly as important as the above factors.

According to Economic Organization for Cooperation and Development, labour market is deregulating in Europe and policy packages are the key to good employment performances.

In session 5 - "Work-life Balance" flexible work practices are important like holistic approach vs. instruments alone, formal procedures vs. organizational culture, tailoring programs to the needs.

In session 12 - "Platform of social NGO's", spoke first of all European Disability Forum representative's, focusing on flexicurity aspect and non-discrimination legislation, asking to sign for disability rights.

Afterwards the International Lesbian and Gay Association-Europe's representative spoke, a non-governmental umbrella organization representing some 240 organizations of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons that works with the European union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and the United Nations focusing on social policies and laws on equality for LGBT people at work making examples of good practices like in Germany and Spain to build a culture of respect.

The next speaker was from the European Federation of National Organizations working with people homeless' representative, funded by European Commission: unemployment is a pathway into homelessness and homelessness is a pathway into unemployment.

Then the European Anti-Poverty Network representative's explained how poverty and social exclusion are a denial of fundamental rights and promote the effectiveness of actions against poverty and social exclusion, including supporting access to quality employment for people furthest from the labour market. Active Labor Market Policies can be efficient in generating social inclusion balancing flexicurity to promote inclusive social economy, deserving more visibility and more efficient support.

So I described AGE, its aims and actions, and then "Associazione Lavoro Over 40" as one of its members and its objectives which are first of all to help older people to re-enter the labour market through the fight against discrimination.

In session 13 - "Talent management" the starting point was talent's definition as a complex combination of employees' skills, knowledge, cognitive ability and potential, that shows drive, capacity to learn, change orientation and flexibility. Talent management is turning people into assets. Better practices are product of globalization, like ethnocentric - synergistic and cultural changes, management re-structuring and inclusive leadership, appreciating differences (self and others) by inclusion and diversity, aligning talent management to business strategy and addressing retention.



Session 18 emphasised the innovation process in enterprises.

In session 21 - "Active ageing", problems stem from combination of ageing population and low activity/employment rates of older groups rather than ageing per se (fact people are living longer is good news). Immigration needed to lower dependency ratio (baseline population forecasts already assume 40 million additional non-EU migrants by 2050); increase lifetime savings requires culture shift in 'live for today' consumer societies while consumer spending already low in some member states, often with depressing effect on economic growth; increase state pension age doesn't address low activity rate problem; increase activity active ageing need to overcome some employer and social reluctance. It is desirable that some combination of each of the above is implemented (the precise mix varying according to specific circumstances in individual member states). Necessary tax burden on working age population too great, probability of pensioner poverty, increased inequality and 'intergenerational conflict'. Increased productivity is obviously desirable, but easier to aspire to than achieve.

In the best practice sessions, I found very interesting SVOAM/AOMAS 2005 - tailor made quality management for employment facilitation organizations (quality label SVOAM2005), developed by 25 SVOAM members organized according to the bottom - up principle, complying with European standards.

Among project sessions, my best impression was for "YXPiste™", a combination of research and forum theatre that offers organizations tailor-made information concerning equality at workplace, developed under Equality Trail (EQUAL) by University of Lapland, Regional Development and Innovation Services.

In our opinion, the most Relevant to older people is approach on Corporate Social Responsibility strategies, validation of new skills, active ageing - a new positive perspective, the fight against discrimination; integration of new issues as information society skills, sustainable environment, energy and flexicurity; adapting skills and anticipating economic change through lifelong learning; integration between energy and environment constraints as opportunities; entering the knowledge society but using it as a strength; internal flexicurity - sharing risks and benefits in a positive way.

New challenges for European Union policies are increasing economic and social cohesion, positive management of migration, following up the Lisbon strategy, social inclusion, facilitating new legislative and institutional frameworks to help flexicurity, providing better access to European Social Found programs and improving the quality of European union communication policies.

Conclusion

It needs more operational, transparent, comprehensive programmes that can be readily evaluated and policies that mobilise economic and social actors, as well as government



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bodies and that seek to improve and increase exchanges of best practices at the European Union level.