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JOINT EU SPs CONFERENCE ON "PROMOTING ACTIVE AGEING THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING"

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Concluding panel – "Active ageing: from challenges to opportunity"

General remarks

- The EU's longer-term growth prospects will be hampered by demographic trends. The proportion of elderly people in the population will be constantly increasing but the working-age population will shrink.
- The EU's working-age population (aged 20-64) starts falling this year, from the 2012 peak of 308.2m. It will drop over the next 50 years to 265m in 2060. That will raise the old-age dependency ratio from 28% in 2010 to 58% in 2060.
- These demographic challenges have serious consequences on our society, public finances and pensions systems. The equation has become even more complex with the crisis.
- The challenge will intensify in the longer-term but action is needed in the short-term for a timely adaptation of labour markets and social security systems.
- Comprehensive reforms are necessary. They should aim to foster the participation of older people in employment and lifelong learning activities to contribute to reaching the EU 2020 goals.
- In the context of the European semester, in particular in Country-Specific Recommendations, the Commission should promote policies and measures aiming to link retirement age with life expectancy.

Specific remarks

Anticipating and adapting skills sets of older workers

- We have seen today with the different cases presented that the role of adult education and lifelong learning is increasingly important both from individuals and employers' perspective.
- BUSINESSEUROPE believes, in line with the 2002 Framework of Actions, that adult and older workers participation in training activities should be promoted, and effective policies aiming to lifelong learning should be facilitated.
- Firstly, we needed to understand that the jobs that people enter at the start of their careers are unlikely to exist in exactly the same format throughout the course of their working life. Therefore, lifelong learning is necessary to keep



people's skills sets up to date and developing a mindset for lifelong learning can be considered a skill that people need to be trained for.

- Secondly, there is a growing demand for highly-skilled workers and this trend will continue. The same applies for people with medium level qualifications, in particular technical vocational skills. BUSINESSEUROPE advocates for a well-functioning vocational and adult training system that puts labour market needs at the centre of training programmes, which is vital to enhance older workers' participation and retention rates.
- Thirdly, older workers can play a central role in passing on their skills and knowledge to people, whether this is young people in the form of apprenticeships, or the up-skilling and re-training of adult workers.

Resources to invest in skills' updating and upgrading

- Already, lifelong learning has become a permanent feature of human resource management with 72% of companies checking the need for further training of their staff in a systematic way and 62% giving employees time off to undertake training.
- Moreover, according to the OECD, an individual can expect to receive around 1000 hours of instruction in non-formal education during his or her working life, of which 70% is job-related training sponsored by employers.
- Despite the existing incentives and initiatives, the level of participation of adults in lifelong learning is still low. Employers are increasingly aware of the need to promote active ageing through company initiatives aiming to maintain older workers' work ability. But it seems that individuals remain insufficiently aware of the benefits of training for them, which may explain the low levels of lifelong learning participation in particular in some countries.
- Not one single solution is applicable to every company. Our project has shown that flexible working has positive outcomes where employers consider how work processes can be restructured or re-distributed within teams. Other employers take into consideration the need and cost to adapt the workplace or work processes in such a way to allow individual workers to be able to continue their task.
- At the same time State-supported schemes must be more effective in helping people develop the skills to facilitate their re-introduction into working life. A prime example is the support that older workers receive through the European Social Fund (ESF). According to a March 2013 report by the European Court of Auditors neither the Member States nor the European Commission can accurately say how many older workers found employment after participating in initiatives funded by the ESF.



Conclusion

- Management and workers should give more priority to investing in lifelong learning. This way, more employable older workers will be able to remain in their position and/or find another job if necessary.
- But the responsibility lies at management level for deciding the overall strategy and competencies development plan necessary for the success of a company.
- On a much broader and global perspective, one major concern for companies is whether they will be able to recruit and retain the workers they need, especially to compete in the global market. Growth depends on businesses being able to recruit sufficient labour with the right qualifications.
- We support the goal to increase the share of industry in GDP to 20% by 2020. BUSINESSEUROPE calls for concrete measures which can lead to re-industrialisation of the European economy. Tapping the full potential of older workers can play a key role in this regard.
