



**Best Agers in the  
Baltic Sea Region –  
A qualitative study of  
employers' attitudes**

Jonas Meixner



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## List of abbreviations

BeA – Best Agers
BSR – Baltic Sea Region
DE – Germany
DK – Denmark
IT – information technology
LT – Lithuania
LV – Latvia
N – sample size
n.s. – not specified
PL – Poland
SE – Sweden
SME – small and medium sized enterprises

## Summary

The present report aims at identifying the impact of demographic change on enterprises in six countries of the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). Employers' attitudes towards older workers and the consequences of ageing workforces for businesses on the regional level constitute the main analytical focus. In the respective studies, the response rate was low and samples diverged with respect to their size. This indicates that conclusions must be drawn with reservations and results are not necessarily representative. As comprehensive knowledge of the issue is lacking, the findings nonetheless allow for valuable insight in currently and upcoming demographic challenges of BSR enterprises on the regional scale.

The study reveals that the selected enterprises are affected by demographic transitions to differing degrees and with different implications – but basically on all business levels. Domains like personnel planning and skill shortage seem to be predominantly important in this regard. Although there is quite a consensus that demography poses a huge future challenge, awareness with respect to demographic challenges varies.

Furthermore, the report identifies gaps between perceived *incentives* for older workers in terms of longer employment, and the actual *offers* enterprises are providing for their Best Agers. As main incentives, individually adjusted working hours and work content as well as an improved social work environment can be identified, whereas mentoring activities and competence development show significantly lower importance. On the other hand, concrete offers for older workers are rather limited. Generally, systematic and coordinated approaches to support older workers and attract longer employment cannot be detected from the data.

Research on potential reasons for early retirement is based on individual estimations of employers and reveals health-related aspects as predominant source for these decisions. The wish for more free time and family-related aspects bear further importance. Finally, attributes of older workers are evaluated predominantly positive regarding their professional as well as social competences such as experience, reliability and loyalty to the company – a result which calls for substantial future efforts on behalf of employers in order to integrate these potentials.

Last but not least, further need for research in the respective regions is crucially important in order to identify specific problems of regional labour market structures and concrete needs of local enterprises. This should be connected with qualitative approaches and include perspectives of the main target group – older workers themselves – and other regional stakeholders involved in that issue.

## 1. Introduction

The European Union has recently declared demographic change as one of the key challenges for European regions, which increasingly affect various levels of society. Especially the BSR is characterised by a multitude of demographic developments: population shrinkage, ageing of total and working-age population, migration of well-educated younger people (“brain-drain”) especially from large rural areas pose a number of huge challenges for both member states and actors on the regional level. This perspective is approved by the scientific community which points out the negative scenario of decreasing labour supply as a threat to economic growth and competitiveness of the entire macro region (Stiller/Wedemeier 2011: 12f).

One prominent attempt on behalf of the EU and its member states to counteract the perceived negative economic effects of demographic change is a better labour market integration of older workers. The third ‘Report on Demographic Change’, conducted by the EU-Commission in 2010, highlights that “Europe’s future depends to a great extent on its capacity to tap the strong potential of [...] older people” (European Commission 2010: 6), notably with respect to policy fields as employment, economic growth as well as social cohesion. This attempt is prominently pursued in the INTERREG IV-C project “Best Agers” which has the goal to improve the integration of the generation 55+ (so called Best Agers) into labour markets, innovation processes and entrepreneurial activities in the BSR. Based on an analysis of the specific age structure in this region, which holds especially many people between 55 and 64 years, the broad experiences and specific know-how of this age-group are highlighted and systematically explored. That way, the potential benefit for employers and businesses as well as for Best Agers themselves shall be emphasized in order to increase their inclusion in working life, business and skills development.

The following report, carried out by the County of Pinneberg in the “Best Agers”-project, sheds light on employers’ attitudes on Best Ager employment in various regions of the BSR. Based on a transnational applicable questionnaire, qualitative case studies with enterprises in Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Sweden were initiated and allow for insights in related challenges and problems. Furthermore, the survey aims at sensitizing employers and enterprises for ageing workforces and demographic challenges and setting off concrete measures to counteract related negative developments. Last but not least, the findings will be adjusted with results from a transnational interview-study with employed and unemployed Best Agers in order to sketch a more coherent picture of ageing labour market issues and demands.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the results provide background information for the establishment of age-specific expertise which will be used in different pilots of the Best

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<sup>1</sup> Report to be published within the “Best Agers”-project

Agers-project, among others mentoring activities, curricula-based competence development and age certification of enterprises.

Initially, after a short summary of the main results, the methodology is documented briefly, including a description of the participating regions' main characteristics. This is followed by a discussion of the main results from the surveys. Finally, the main findings and implications are summarised with regard to the most relevant fields for future action and further need for research.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Technical information

The survey was conducted by **9 partners from 6 countries** in the Best Agers project: University College of Lillebaelt/Denmark (research area: Municipality of Fredericia), County Council of Pinneberg/Germany (County of Pinneberg), Stockholm School of Economics in Riga/Latvia (Latvia); National Regions Development Agency & KTU – Regional Science Park/Lithuania (Municipalities of Kaunas and Siauliai), West Pomeranian Business School, Gdansk University of Technology & Institute of European Initiatives/Poland (Pomeranian and West-Pomeranian Region) and County Council of Norrbotten/Sweden (County of Norrbotten). Please note that although the research focus was predominantly on regional scale, in the interest of readability results are referred to by using the national category (e.g. results from the Swedish County of Norrbotten are presented as “Swedish results”).

Regarding the aspect of **validity and comparability of the results**, it is important to note that problems with data availability posed a serious obstacle for the intended common methodological principle and comparative approach. Low response rates and diverging sample sizes indicate that the report should be assessed in terms of a summary of qualitative case studies which cannot be comprehensively compared. Consequently, conclusions must be drawn with reservations and results are not necessarily representative. However, we have chosen to include and report on this data, since the response rates in corporate surveys are generally in the range 20 to 30 per cent, or even lower (e.g., Remery et al. 2003, Henkens 2005, Van Dalen et al. 2009; 2010). Additionally, the respective sample size is individually listed in most diagrams of the following report. However, the results allow for a analysis of broader trends and developments, including differences and similarities, in order to identify good practices and main challenges in the field of Best Ager employment and ageing workforces. These insights are an important contribution to the analysis of employment patterns of elderly in the BSR. With regard to other activities of the project, they serve as an additional valuable source.

In all regions, the survey was based on a **transnational applicable questionnaire** with 17 questions, prepared by the County of Pinneberg in cooperation with the regional Business Development Agency WEP and assisted by the University of Gothenburg. The individual project partners held responsible for the collection of addresses and the set-up of the sample of enterprises in their respective region. The data procession was prepared by the partners themselves. In the step following, the County of Pinneberg was responsible for the final analysis of the data via SPSS software, the creation of diagrams and tables and finally, the preparation of this report.

The participating partners chose different **distribution methods** for the questionnaires (see Table 1). Unfortunately, an intended common approach could not be realised due to different regulations concerning e-surveys, E-Mails, telephone-interviews and the availability of company-addresses in the participating regions. This also partly explains varying response rates and to some extent differences regarding the quality of data.

**Table 1: Technical details of the regional surveys**

Region/Country	Overall response rate in %	Number of responding enterprises	Number of enterprises included in the report (only those with at least 10 employees)	Distribution method
County of Pinneberg/ Germany (region)	13%	152	96	Via mail
County of Norrbotten/ Sweden (region)	32%	31	30	Via mail
Municipality of Fredericia/Denmark (municipality)	61%	33	20	E-Mail/ electronic survey
Šiauliai & Kaunas/ Lithuania (municipalities)	~ 25% (Šiauliai)	58	47	E-Mail & Face-to-face interviews
Pomeranian & West-Pomeranian region/Poland (region)	~ 10%	31	26	E-Mail
Latvia (nationwide)	~ 10%	407	317	Telephone-interviews

Nevertheless, the overall quality of the results can be considered as good, especially because existing personal connections to employers were used, a vast majority of respondents being executive/personal or branch managers.

The decision to split the sample and **exclude micro enterprises** with less than 10 employees from the final analysis was based on different reasons. On the one hand, questionnaires from micro enterprises – especially in the German survey – often held poor quality in terms of incompleteness. Consequently, their consideration in the final analysis was rejected in order to avoid distortive variations. On the other hand, a comparison of the companies' age structure with unacknowledged questions or comments by the company responsible indicated that demographic change was simply not an issue within the company – be it because of a rather young staff, or because there was simply no interest. However, a separate part of this report (see chapter 3.7.) briefly reflects on the role of micro enterprises.

## 2.2. Regional characteristics

This passage provides background information on the respective surveys and related regional characteristics such as company- and branch-structure or methodological problems. Generally, an anticipated common principle in order to achieve a comprehensive and representative sample of enterprises faced the obstacle of severe problems regarding data availability. As a result, samples vary with respect to size and branch structure.

- **Denmark**

The University College of Lillebaelt in Denmark conducted the survey in the municipality of Fredericia. The results were also used in order to support the municipality's initiative called "Fredericia shapes the future" which deals with the local situation of older people, also in the labour market. The eldercare sector as well as technical enterprises and public administration were selected for the survey. From a focus group interview, the Danish partners gained additional insights on employers attitudes towards Best Agers: "When the employees do the expected, respects agreements and contribute to the culture and the social, then I believe it is fine that they keep on working. Often I do not know how old they are, I must admit." This quote exemplifies the impression that employees' age doesn't seem to matter in the Danish enterprises, but their quality of work. A related Danish report from the "Best Agers"-project (Larsen/Svendsen 2011) provides detailed information about methodology, theoretical background and the initiative mentioned above.

- **Germany**

The County Council of Pinneberg together with the local Business Development Agency WEP conducted the survey in the County of Pinneberg. The selection of branches and size of enterprises was a random sample, but largely represents the branch structure in the region where small and medium sized companies dominate. The study clearly supported the

establishment of personal contacts to enterprises and business developers. Furthermore, local and regional media showed great interest in the study and the underlying results and reported repeatedly which helped to communicate the projects' goals and intentions.

- **Latvia**

The Stockholm School of Economics in Riga conducted the study in Latvia. An initial random sampling frame of 3000 enterprises with the aim of achieving 500 interviews was created, but response was very poor and followed by a second sampling frame of the same size. As a further consequence, the eventual number of 407 interviews was conducted by phone, because E-Mail as distribution method failed. Some companies had no workers in the age group 55-64, but were nevertheless willing to respond. Generally, the majority of enterprises are located in Riga or the capital region, since the enterprise structure in Latvia is predominantly centralized. Partners from Latvia repeatedly underlined the lower age of labour force exit compared to Western EU-member states and the necessity of retired Best Agers to generate additional income, since the existing pension system captures only a minimum of living costs.

- **Lithuania**

The survey in Lithuania was separately conducted in face-to-face interviews by the National Regions Development Agency in Siauliai and the Kaunas Technical University (KTU) - Regional Science Park in Kaunas. Data from these interviews was nevertheless analysed as one joint survey, because both institutions used the same questionnaire, methodology and distribution methods. At least the survey in Siauliai had problems with the communication of the study's' background and motive: employers did not consider the study as useful, but rather time-consuming and too difficult. Regarding the size of companies and methodological specifics, the project partner from Kaunas adds that in Lithuania "99,6% of all private companies are small and medium sized enterprises and 96% are micro or small. [...] We haven't selected any branch particularly, but ICT business is dominant in our network and region (Kaunas), so some 75% of responses comes from ICT sector. This leads to one problem which we had during the interviews: ICT people are comparably very young to the other business sectors and they didn't have a chance to cope with age problem. The other problem could be that small companies usually have employers and employees of the same or similar age. Only medium or large companies have 'age policy'."

- **Poland**

The survey in Poland was conducted by three partners in the Best Agers-project: West Pomeranian Business School in Szczecin, Gdansk University of Technology & the Institute of European Initiatives in Gdynia cooperated on this task. Consequently the database of enterprises was based on joint data from University of Szczecin and West Pomeranian Business School. A general impression from the Polish survey was that “older workers have huge problems with the ability using the new technology tools as IT and the acceptance of changes connected to that”. Furthermore, it seemed that employers in Poland “do not yet see the changes/threats/need of reaction resulting from demographic change”.

- **Sweden**

The Swedish survey was carried out by the County Council of Norrbotten and comprised 97 companies in the County of Norrbotten, from which 31 participated in the survey. The huge amount of large enterprises goes back to the fact that institutions from public administration (which usually employ a large workforce) were represented in the survey above average and the share of SME in the region is rather limited. Norrbotten, a sparsely populated part of Sweden in the very north of the country, is a region with already significant implications emerging from demographic change. Especially the shrinkage of the workforce and “brain-drain”/labour-driven migration of young people to the southern parts of Sweden pose a serious challenge for the regional labour market and enterprises.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1. Overview - structural data of enterprises

Apart from several multivariable questions, the questionnaires included questions for structural data of participating enterprises. The following chapter presents and discusses these results. Table 2 provides a first overview on structural characteristics of companies in the BSR which took part in the survey:

**Table 2: Structural data of participating enterprises**

Country/Region	DE	DK	LT	LV	PL	SE
Share of SME <sup>2</sup> in %	93*	100	92	66	92	47
Average number of employees	67	19	97	147	228	546
Share of companies with employees 55+ in %	65	55	72	n.s.	54	76
Share of companies with employees 60+ in %	53	40	43	n.s.	35	76
Share of companies with employees 65+ in %	9	10	23	n.s.	8	32
Quota of companies offering training in %	71	95	79	69	96	83
Estimated average age of labour force exit	60	61	62	62	61	64

\* All numbers are based on the answers provided in the questionnaires.

- The **size of companies** was quite similar in all surveys but Sweden and Latvia. Generally, SME constitute the predominant enterprise structure. Only the Swedish and Latvian sample included a high number of large enterprises.
- According to the structure of **branches**, all surveys except Denmark (see 2.2.) aimed to include all branches. The following table sums up the branch division in the respective samples:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> SME = small and medium sized enterprises with 10-49 (small) or 50-249 (medium) employees, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that numbers are depicted from statistics which do not necessarily add up to 100 %, because an allocation to multiple branches was made in some of the surveys.

**Table 3: Dominant branches in the regional surveys**

Denmark	Eldercare, Public administration, Technical sector (no numbers)
Germany	Service (30%), Manufacturing (24%) & Trade (19%)
Latvia	Manufacturing, Trade (each: 27%), Service (16%), Transport (15%)
Lithuania	Service (34%), Manufacturing (30%) & Trade (17%)
Poland	Service (27%), Public Administration (19%) & Manufacturing, Construction (both: 15%)
Sweden	Public administration (27%), Manufacturing (17%) & Trade, Service, Real Estate, Media (each: 10%)

The German and Lithuanian sample show the highest similarity with Service, Manufacturing and Trade constituting the dominant branches. Sweden and, to a lesser degree, Poland exhibit a high share of employers from public administration; Latvia reveals a high share of trade-related enterprises.

- Regarding the **age structure**, the sample reveals interesting results which show a clear divide. Among other factors, this might go back to diverging retirement regulations in the selected countries (see p.13). What the data cannot detect is a representative picture of the age structure in the respective countries or regions. However, the especially divergent numbers from Sweden and Poland mirror a general estimation whereas the share of older workers differs in-between enterprises and branches, but also regions and countries. Specific reasons for these results can not sufficiently be presented and need therefore further in-depth studies on a broader scale.

More precisely, a huge share of Swedish companies (almost three-quarter) employs workers from the age-groups 55+ and 60+, and still a third employs workers older than 65. Germany exhibits the second largest numbers. On the other hand, Polish enterprises manifest the lowest share of enterprises employing older workers with respect to all three categories (see p.11). Furthermore, it is noteworthy to compare the gap between the 55+ and the 60+. In this regard, only Sweden maintains the same level, while enterprises in other countries comprehensively reveal a decline (Poland especially strong). The gap between the 60+ and the 65+ is even stronger, although Swedish and Lithuanian enterprises still maintain quite high numbers of older workers above the age 65. In Germany, Poland and Denmark only 10% of the enterprises or less employ workers 65+. Only a very small share of Latvian enterprises provided information about the age structure so that specific numbers cannot be executed in this regard.

- The quota of companies which offer **training** for young people is largely consistent and comprehensively high. Latvia and the Germany appear as the only cases where less than three-fourths of the enterprises are engaged in this field, whereas nearly every participating company in Poland offers apprenticeship.
- The employers' estimation of the **average year of age at labour force exit** in their companies approves existing statistics on the age of labour force exit in the Baltic Sea Region.<sup>4</sup> Enterprises in the German region exhibit an age of 60 years, while in contrast companies in the Swedish region assume that their employees leave the job with approximately 64 years. Although these numbers only go back to the individual estimation of the employer, the wide gap and the specific results approve the perspective of differing structural retirement regulations as well as diverging retirement practices in the BSR countries.
- Another question asked whether enterprises had already sought or actually received **expertise on demography by external experts** such as business developers, chambers or job centres. Across all BSR countries, the use of external expertise was incredibly low. Only Latvia (40%) and to a lesser degree Sweden (21%) and Denmark (15%) exhibited a moderate number of enterprises which had actively asked for external consulting and advice. In Latvia, for instance external consulting and training as well as recruitment measures were predominantly important in this regard. In Germany (7%) as well as Poland and Lithuania (both less than 5%), only a very small minority engaged in this regard. Without presuming a direct correlation, this small number indicates a quite problematic level of awareness, given the impression that especially SME often lack the financial and personnel budget to cope with demography-related challenges all by themselves. The need for information and systematic analysis of age-related challenges in enterprises should therefore be deepened and strengthened on a broader basis.
- One indicator only measured in Germany asked for the period of **strategic planning** for future tasks: accordingly, 73% of all German enterprises arranged their strategic planning only 1 or 2 years in advance. At least 23% indicated a period of 3 to 5 years and only 3% composed future planning for a period of 6 to 10 years. Although constituting only one of many aspects of business planning, the insight is nevertheless relevant. It can be presumed that a majority of companies – looking only one or two years ahead – cannot be fully aware of demographic challenges such as major changes in the age structure, shrinking supply of

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<sup>4</sup> Latest comparable EUROSTAT statistics on the average year of age at labour force exit expose huge differences in the BSR, exemplified by the difference between Poland (59.3) and Sweden (63.9) in 2007. The EU-27 average marks 61.2 years in 2007 (<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu>).

workers with special skills or rather candidates for training. Therefore the initiation of long-term planning would be a useful approach in order to deal with demographic implications. However, to be realistic, a great majority of especially micro enterprises and SME cannot afford strategic planning on this level, due to a lack of budget and staff. A large amount of smaller companies, for instance in craft business, are also strongly financially dependent on external jobs and contracts which complicate long- or even mid-term planning in advance. All in all, the focus on everyday-business and the lack of long-term strategic planning seems to constitute one of the main challenges and problems to be dealt with regarding the demographic impact on enterprises and business. Thus, the ambition should be to extend efforts in order to sensitize employers through competence development by business developers and other experts.<sup>5</sup>

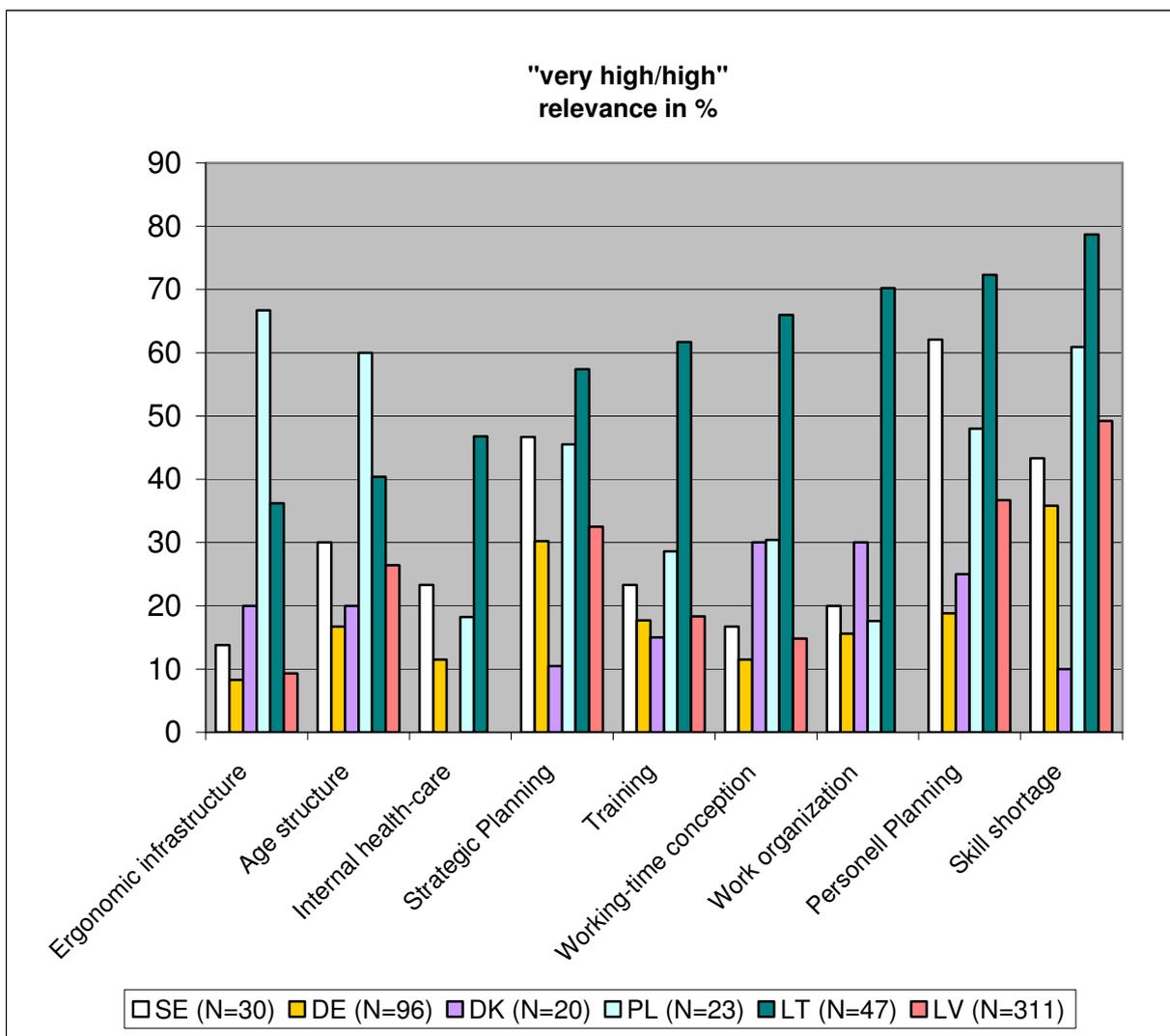
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<sup>5</sup> The curriculum developed by the Best Agers-lead partner at the Wirtschaftsakademie (WAK) Schleswig Holstein in Work Package 3.5. aims specifically on the sensitization of executive and personal managers with regard to demographic challenges in enterprises.

### 3.2. Impact of demographic change

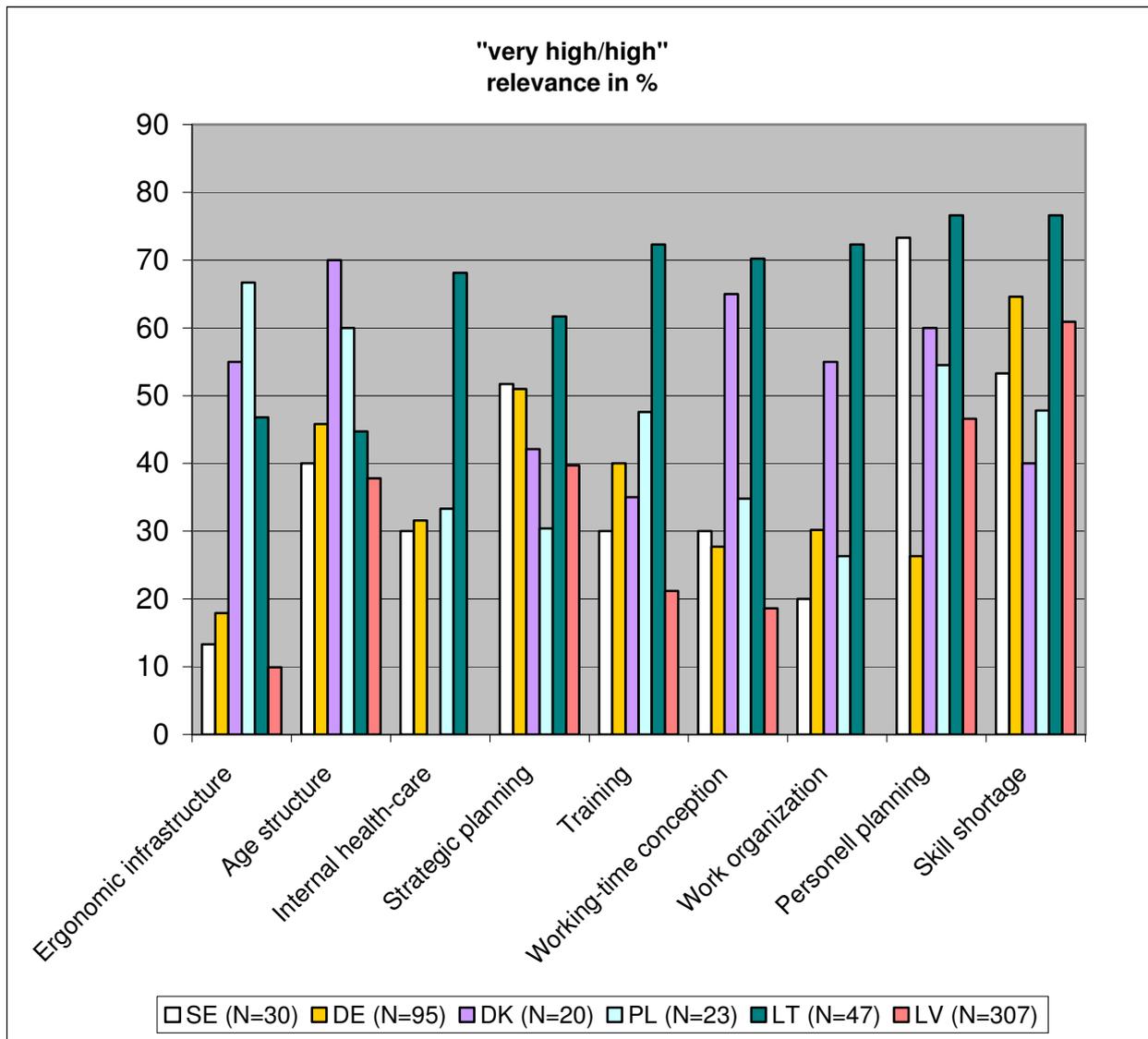
In order to assess the impact of demographic change – and the impacts’ development over time – enterprises were asked to estimate the demographic impact on various business domains, both retrospectively and anticipatorily. Resulting from that, the surveys reveal an increasing relevance of demographic change in all participating regions and for all business domains while differing in-between the regions at the same time. Interestingly, there is no single domain which is not affected by consequences of demographic change. However, certain domains seem especially connected to and affected by demographic developments, especially “skill shortage” and “personal planning”. These domains by far show the largest mean importance across countries. Please note that the samples of the surveys diverge, the specific numbers are included in the figures below.

**Figure 1: Previous impact of demographic change on business domains**



A closer look on the specific results reveals that the **previous impact of demographic change** – the employers’ evaluation of demographic impact in the past – differs significantly in the BSR. Personnel planning and skill shortage seem to be predominantly affected by demographic change in most countries. On the opposite, internal health-care for older workers and special ergonomic infrastructure seem to be less connected with demographic developments, except for Poland regarding the latter. Training and working-time conceptions are highly affected according to a third of the enterprises. The exception is Lithuania, where even two thirds of the companies are affected with respect to these domains. Germany and Denmark exhibit a rather low mean relevance for demographic impact, whereas especially companies from Lithuania ascribe a high importance of demographic change for nearly all business domains.

**Figure 2: Future impact of demographic change on business domains**



The anticipated **future projection of the impact of demographic change** is mirrored in the second figure. Compared to figure 1, it is clearly obvious that the absolute relevance of demographic impact on business domains is growing comprehensively and across all regions. Especially in Germany and Denmark which revealed rather moderate values in the review, importance of demographic change increases considerably. In Lithuania and Sweden, in contrast, the evaluation does not differ much between past and future estimation. This might be explained by already high values in Lithuania on the one hand and an already relatively high degree of “demographic sensitivity” in Norrbotten on the other hand.

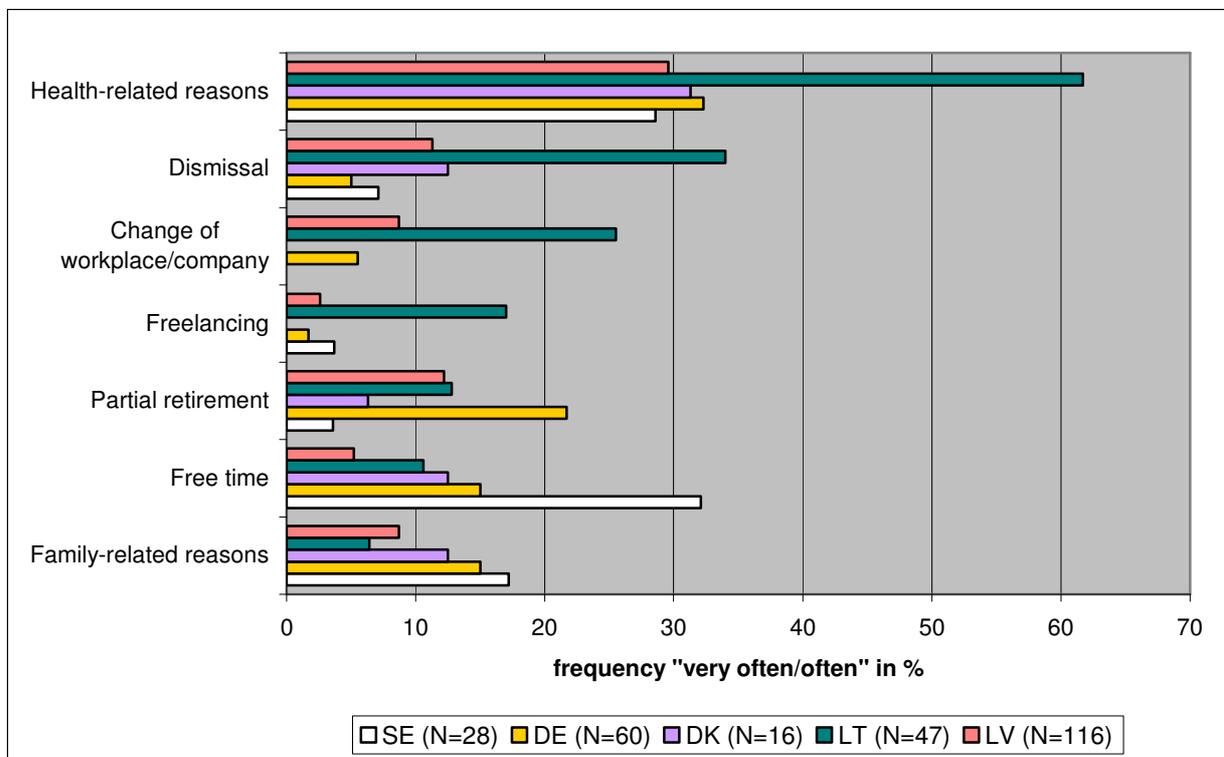
According to the relative importance, personal planning and skill shortage rank highest among the domains affected by demographic change in the future. Furthermore, demographic impact on domains age structure, training and internal health-care increase in relevance. At the opposite, work organisation and strategic planning show decreasing relevance compared to the other domains. With regard to the relative development of single domains' significance, the “age structure” of the workforce seems to constitute the most pressing issue in Denmark and Germany. Polish and Lithuanian employers however ascribe “internal health-care” the strongest increase. Interestingly, Swedish enterprises see “working-time conception” as the domain with the strongest growth in relevance. Same accounts for Latvia, where “personnel planning” witnesses the second major increase. Last but not least, the Polish survey is the only one featuring decreasing values for two aspects: demographic impact on skill shortage as well as strategic planning loses importance according to employers in the Polish study.

Summing up, Germany and Denmark exhibit the largest gap between the review and forecast of demographic impact. Germany is the country where demographic change so far had the lowest relevance. This does not necessarily lead to the assumption that demographic change had no impact on enterprises so far. In comparison to other results, however, it seems also likely that the method of data collection influenced the degree of importance, employers have attributed to demographic change. The mean importance of demographic change in Lithuania, for instance, is tremendously higher than in all other surveys. This can be traced back to the method of face-to-face interviews, where people usually try to document their awareness of a certain problem stronger than in an anonymous study. Generally, the Latvian contribution shows that a larger sample might yield more differentiated results.

### 3.3. Reasons for early retirement

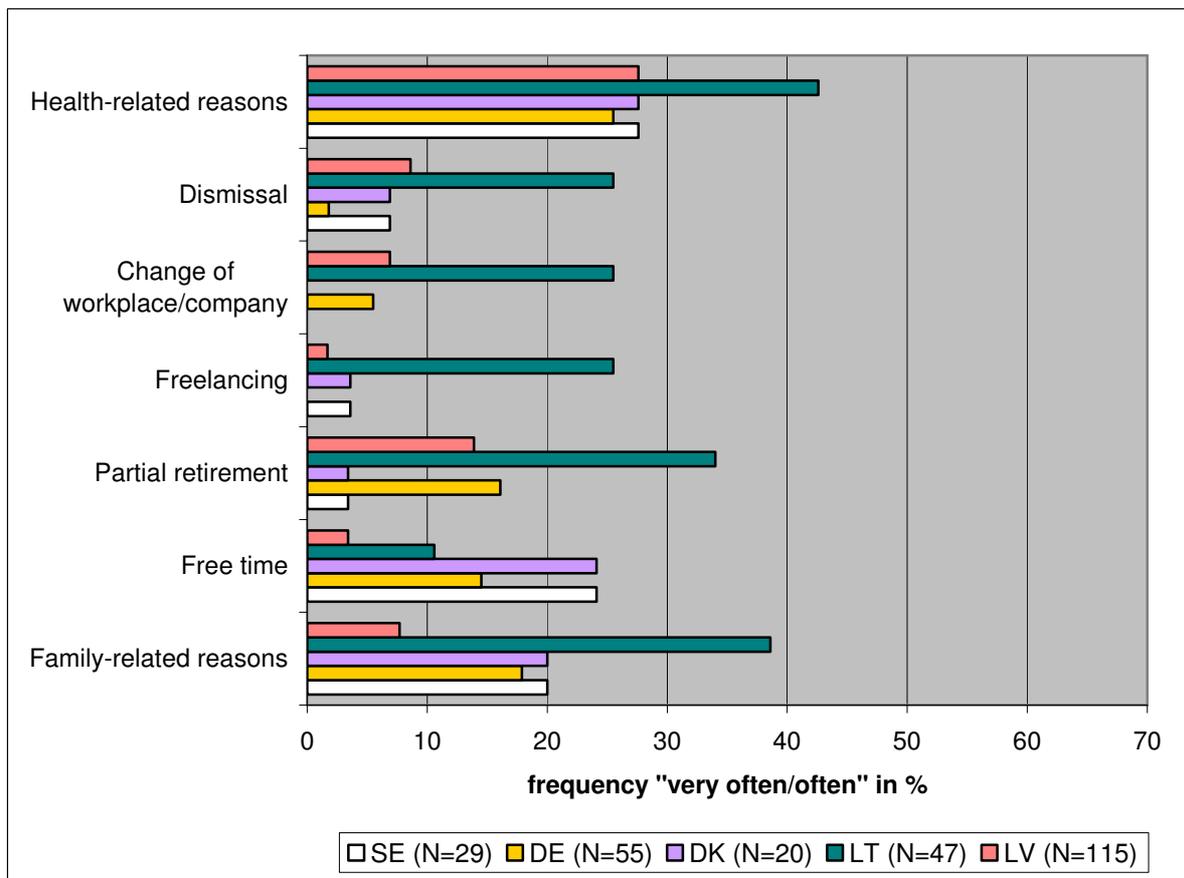
According to the employers, health-related aspects comprehensively and by far present the most important reason for early retirement of older workers – across countries and genders: male employees are more often affected in this regard than women. Furthermore, Lithuania exhibits a high frequency of “dismissal” of older workers. “Partial retirement” measures are notably frequent in Lithuania, Latvia and Germany (especially for male workers). “Free time” seems to constitute an important motive for leaving the job before official retirement age in Sweden (both genders) as well as Denmark (women). Finally, “family-related reasons” such as care of relatives play a larger role for female workers who are often the ones in charge in this regard. Methodologically, it is important to note that the results are based on individual estimations, not comparable statistics with common indicators. Some employers remarked that they did not really know the reasons why their employees retired earlier. Finally, it can be expected that also the size of a company – and the respective opportunity of “short way-communication” – plays a crucial role in determining whether employers have knowledge in this regard or not. Please note that the sample size of the surveys diverges, the specific numbers are included in the figure below. Results from Poland were excluded because of varying samples.

**Figure 3: Estimated reasons for early retirement of older male workers**



With respect to **male employees**, health-related reasons comprise the main reason for early retirement. More than a quarter of the employers state that this affects the decision for leaving the job before official retirement age – in Lithuania, numbers are even higher. Family-related reasons, being relevant for early retirement decisions between 6% in Lithuania and 17% in Sweden, seem to depict a rather small significance for male employees. Slightly more relevance is attributed to the ambition of having more free time: almost one third of Swedish enterprises allocate a very high or high relevance to this factor. Four other variables (dismissal, change of workplace/company, freelancing, partial retirement) exhibit rather heterogeneous patterns. Particularly regarding the first three aspects, Lithuania shows higher numbers. However, it is not clear whether this can be traced back to actual differences or maybe reasons connected with the methodology of the survey. Last but not least, partial retirement measures seem relevant for early retirement mostly in Latvia, Lithuania and Germany, the latter possessing a long tradition of partial retirement instruments in major branches.<sup>6</sup>

**Figure 4: Estimated reasons for early retirement of older female workers**



<sup>6</sup> A development which is about to change in Germany in upcoming years, since at least some branches, for instance public administration, traditionally showing high numbers of partial retirement, more and more renounce these offers as a reaction to skill shortage as well as decreasing financial support by the state.

Data for early retirement of **female employees** approves the evaluations made for their male counterparts. The relative importance of the various reasons sees health- as well as family-related reasons as particularly crucial and, regarding the average numbers, more important compared to men. However, family-related reasons seem to be more determining for women than for men, an appraisal which can be explained by the observation that women are traditionally more in charge of taking care of relatives, e.g. parents in need of care, compared to men. The gap between former socialist and Western states becomes equally obvious with regard to other early retirement reasons, whereas the numbers for partial retirement and freelancing are much higher in Lithuania than for male workers. A phenomenon which cannot be explained or further justified by existing data.

Summing up, the results on reasons for earlier retirement have to be considered carefully. Official statistics on the reasons of early labour force exit as well as the perspective of employees themselves should be necessarily included in a further step in order to contrast employers' perspectives.<sup>7</sup> However, the existing data allows to conclude that health-related reasons constitute the main background for early retirement decisions of both men and women. A stronger focus on ergonomic equipment, "age-specific" work tasks, health- and fitness-programmes, but also reduction of psychological burdens, stress and working load are issues which have to be reconsidered soundly. Regarding family-related reasons, a need for flexible working hours can be detected which might enable older workers to combine private and job-related demands. Last but not least, the wish for more free time should be respected as an important precondition for the wish to remain employed, and therefore integrated in reflection on specific work characteristics of older people.

### 3.4. Incentives for longer employment

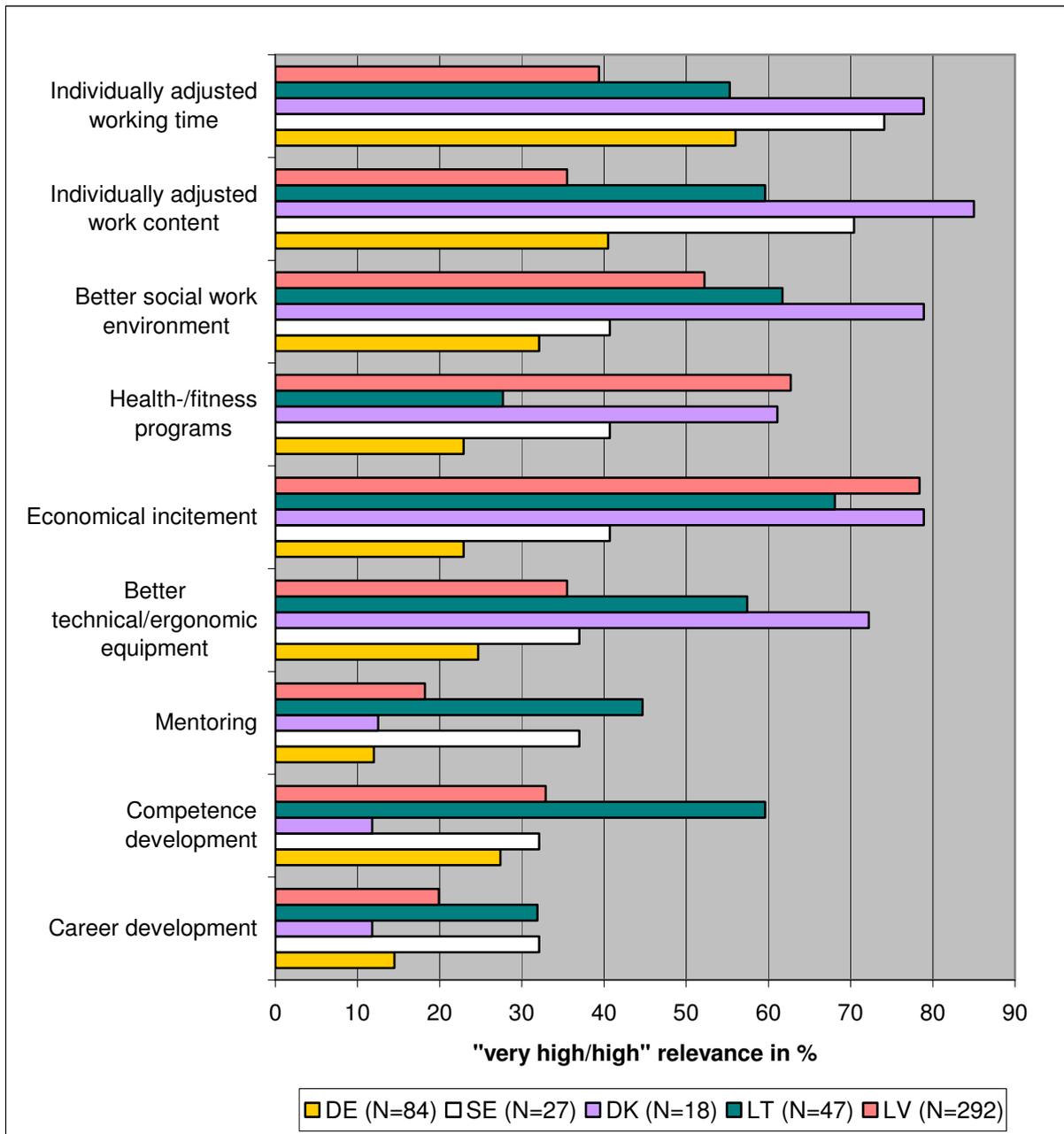
Closely connected to the reasons for leaving employment before official retirement age is the question of possible incentives which make continued employment attractive for older employees. Whether the phenomenon of early retirement – not least an individual question of every employee and also politically regulated by federal governments – can be counteracted with more and/or better incentives, is an arguable question, and cannot be answered here. However, the call for incentives is based on the insight that to date older employees might have not been in the focus of employers and enterprises very much. A systematic reflection on their interests, wishes and ambitions concerning labour market and workplace has thus been widely neglected. The question for incentives tries to set the focus on this unattended issue and initiate reflection on improvements for employment of older

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 1. The report conducted by the University of Gothenburg comprises interviews with Best Ager-employees in all BSR countries and included similar questions.

age-groups. In comparison with the actual offers for Best Agers in enterprises (see 3.5.), the results in figure 5 offer revealing perspectives on the difference between theory and practice in Best Ager employment. Please note that results from Poland were excluded such as in the previous chapter. The samples of the surveys diverge and specific numbers are included in the figure below.

**Figure 5: Incentives for longer employment of older workers**



Summing up the main results, “individually adjusted working time” as well as “work content”, and less coherently “economical incitements”, constitute the most important incentives for attracting a longer employment of older workers. Equally, a “better social work environment”

and – to a lesser degree – “health- and fitness-programmes” are valued as highly relevant by employers in the BSR. Surprisingly, “competence” or rather “career development” as well as “mentoring” seem not to bear a large relevance in this regard, with the exception of Lithuania and Sweden for the latter. With respect to the transnational comparison, German enterprises often allocate possible incentives the lowest significance – by far lower than in any other country in the sample. Referring to single incentives, the perspectives on the relevance of “economical incitements” appear especially divergent. While in Latvia (79%), Denmark (79%) and Lithuania (68%) employers attribute a huge importance to financial aspects, German (23%) and Swedish companies (41%) do not estimate economical incitements as highly relevant in order to attract longer employment of older workers. Although no definite “east-west”-gap is observable, comments from Lithuania and Latvia also point to a much higher necessity of earning money in these countries on behalf of older workers themselves. A similar result can be allocated for “health- and fitness-programmes” and also “mentoring”, where German and Lithuanian or rather Danish and Latvian companies exhibit clearly lower values than the other countries.

As a final consideration, the results reveal the thought whether a clear divide of “soft” vs. “hard” incentives can be concluded. Especially the comprehensively high relevance attributed to incentives dealing with self-determination regarding working-structure and -environment supports the notion that soft incentives seem to appear as important to attract longer employment. On the other side, economical incitements are estimated as extremely relevant on behalf of employers in some BSR countries, whereas carrier opportunities fall behind in importance. Further in-depth studies in the respective regions comparing perspectives from employers and workers might enable deeper insight on this issue. Consequently, an ongoing dialogue between employers and employees might lead to a better understanding and could serve as starting point in order to improve working structures of older employees as well as an examination of their related wishes and ambitions.

In a comparative approach with scientific insight on the perspective of employees, this report would like to point to a German study. Conducted by the Federal Institute of Population Research in 2008, 1500 men and women between 55 and 64 years were asked for their main wishes, preconditions and opportunities regarding their disposition to work after reaching official pension age (see Dittrich et al. 2011).<sup>8</sup> The overall conclusion, presented by the authors, is a significantly higher flexibility and autonomy with respect to working hours, time of retirement and the individual work content to be dealt with after official pension age. This perspective is clearly approved by the employers who participated in the “Best Agers”-survey, at least with regard to individual working hours and content.

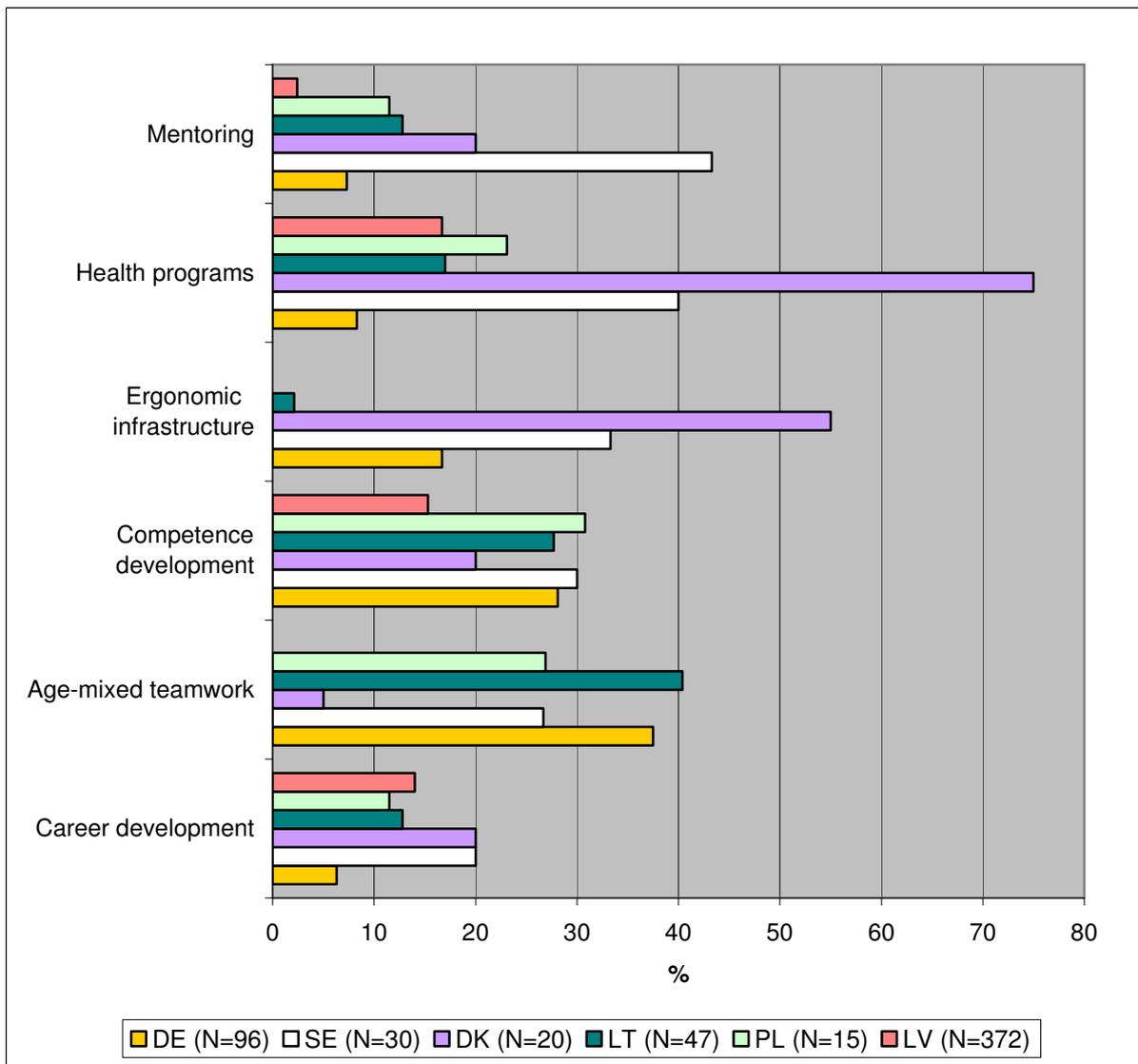
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<sup>8</sup> See also Flynn/McNair (2009) for a similar study conducted in Great Britain.

### 3.5. Special offers for Best Agers

Regarding the question which special offers for older employees were available in the companies, “competence development” constituted the only aspect with comprehensive significance – around 30% of the enterprises in the BSR provided that offer. The by far most provisions – especially “mentoring”, “health programmes” and “ergonomic infrastructure” – were offered in companies in Sweden and Denmark. These enterprises also often hold a diversity of arrangements. On the opposite, German and Latvian enterprises exhibit the lowest values which might lead to the assumption that a systematic structure of special arrangements for older workers has not yet materialised. Please note that the samples of the surveys diverge, the specific numbers are included in the figure below.

**Figure 6: Special company offers for Best Agers**



Looking closer at the results, it becomes obvious that special offers for older employees do not seem to have a huge importance in the companies. Only very few provisions are offered by more than 30% of the companies, for instance competence development. However, a representative study on productivity of older workers in more than 8500 German enterprises (Göbel/Zwick 2010) revealed that competence development for older employees does not necessarily correspond with an improvement of their working situation. This is based on the estimation that “continuing training of old employees frequently has a smaller scope and is not associated with the option to move on to jobs with higher productivity” (ibid.: 16) or adaptation of innovations. Equally, “age-mixed teamwork” seems to constitute a measure which is likely to be adopted by a certain amount of enterprises, with the exception of Denmark. However, the results for this variable should be regarded carefully. It is not clear whether companies perceive “age-mixed teamwork” as a systematic approach with the specific ambition to initiate transfer of tacit knowledge and experiences, or just ascribe any co-operation between older and younger employees within daily working routine as such.

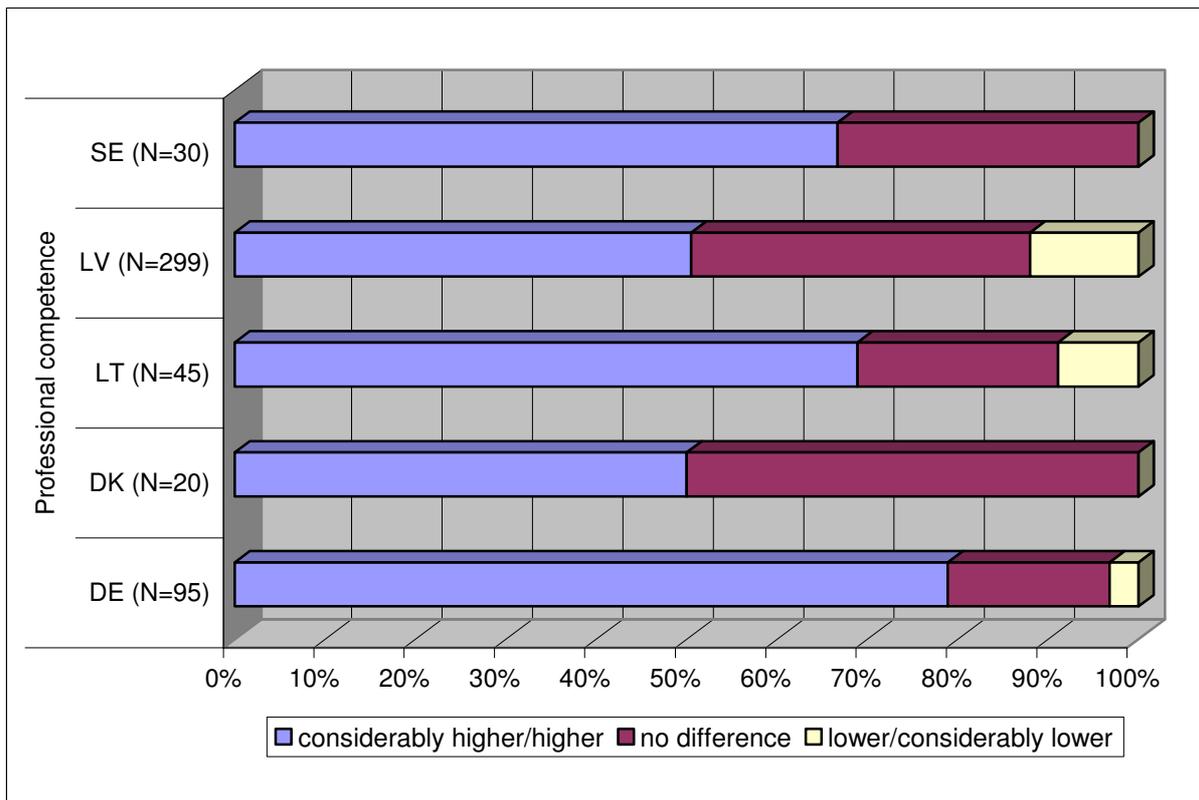
With respect to “ergonomic infrastructure” and health-related offers, Sweden and Denmark stand out. This might correlate with the large size of companies in the Swedish survey which are able to initiate such offers on a more systematic basis than SME. Also, the focus on enterprises in care-branch in the Danish survey may explain the high provision of ergonomic infrastructure. However, the data allows for the conclusion that awareness for health-related provisions might be at least slightly higher in the Scandinavian countries. In opposite to that, the very small value in Lithuania can be traced back to a huge amount of companies with a rather young age structure – Poland does not offer any data on that issue.

Furthermore, the results for “mentoring” demonstrate the instruments’ quite high significance in Swedish companies. This result – in parts – approves the theoretical consideration presented in the previous chapter, where mentoring was valued most relevant in Sweden. A “Best Agers”-study on mentoring practices in Poland exemplifies the need to transfer older peoples’ great willingness of sharing their knowledge and experience. In order to establish functioning “knowledge sharing cultures” in enterprises, however, the specific ambitions of older workers – including gender-related differences – have to be systematically explored (see Richert-Kazmierska et al. 2011). Last but not least, the position of a “Best Agers confidant” has not materialised so far in the enterprises located in the BSR countries. This insight might express the thought that awareness for the age structure of employees (see chapter 3.2.) does not necessarily correspond with practical provisions on behalf of the enterprises.

### 3.6. Evaluation of Best Agers’ attributes

The part of the survey which asked for attributes of older employees offered the opportunity to reflect on their specific role in enterprises, especially compared to younger workers. Not least, the survey aimed on identifying general advantages and challenges with regard to ageing workforces. Concluding the results, older employees are highly and comprehensively appreciated for their professional but also social competences. The adaptability to change, for instance regarding new technologies, still remains a challenge to be dealt with. In a comparison of the results from five participating countries – the Polish survey did not provide comparable data for this issue – similarities between Germany and Lithuania on the one hand, as well as Sweden and Denmark on the other hand become obvious. Please note that the samples of the surveys diverge, the specific numbers are included in the figures below.

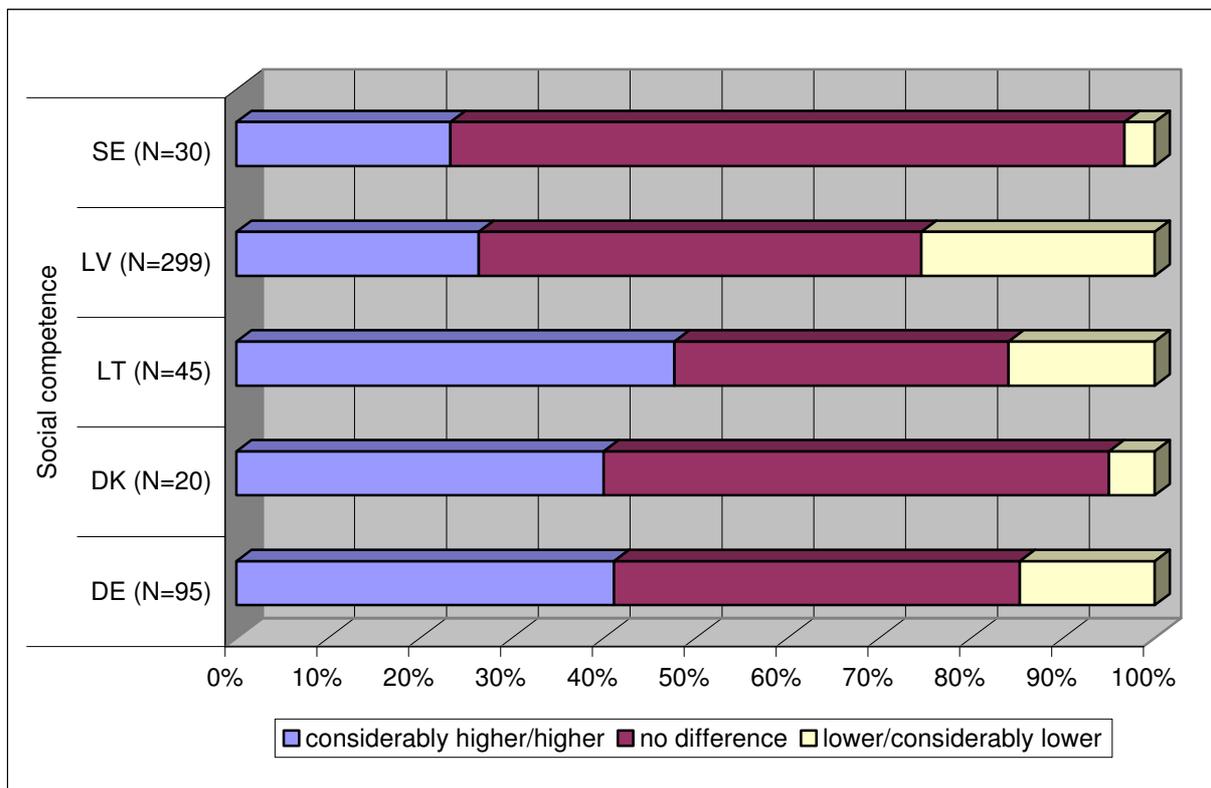
**Figure 7: Evaluation of Best Agers’ attributes – professional competence**



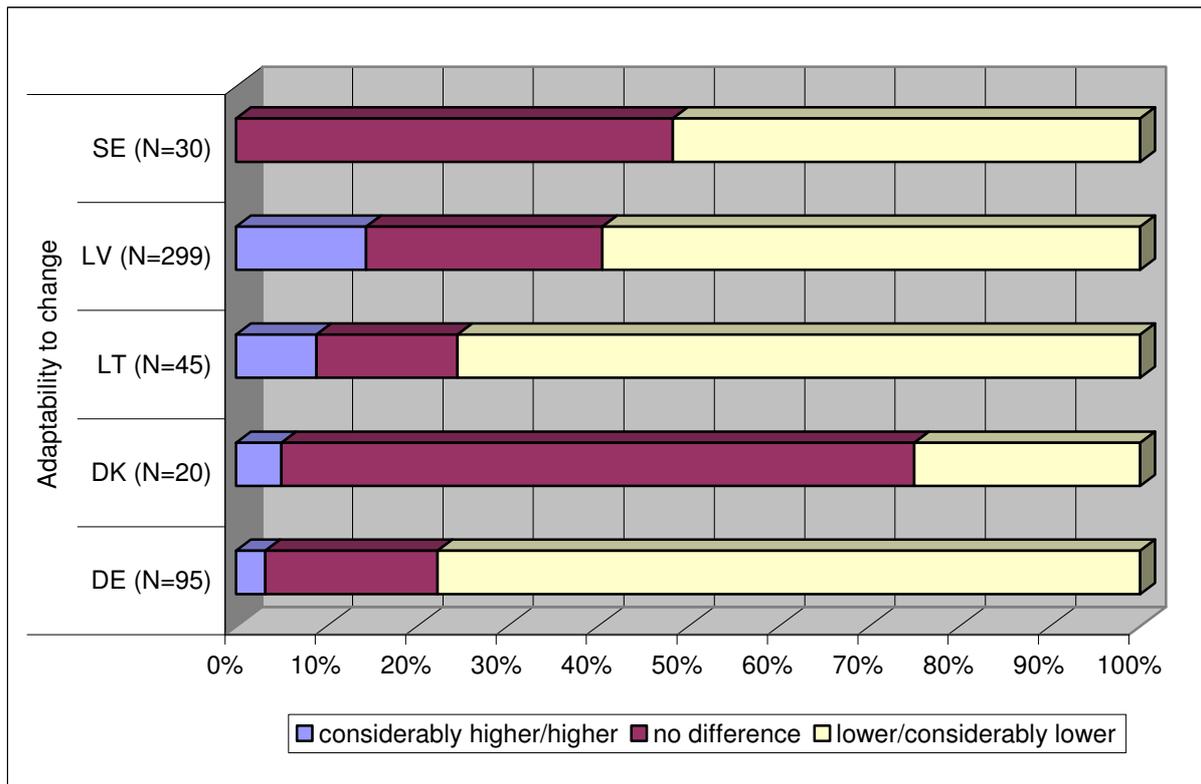
With respect to **professional competences** of Best Agers, a majority in nearly all surveys allocate older workers higher or significantly higher job-related skills. The best values are allocated by German enterprises (79%), followed by Lithuanian (69%) and Swedish ones (67%), while Danish and Latvian enterprises feature almost 50%. Interestingly, in Sweden and Denmark professional competences of Best Agers are not estimated negatively at all, but

Denmark has quite a high share of answers (50%) stating that there is no difference between younger and older workers. A similar result accounts for Latvia where the negative appraisal of Best Agers’ competence is the highest. In German and Lithuanian regions only very few employers think that Best Agers’ competences are lower than those of younger colleagues.

**Figure 8: Evaluation of Best Agers’ attributes – social competence**



Regarding **social competences**, the results are more diverse: in Lithuania and Germany, a large share of employers attribute older employees higher or even significantly higher skills, but the share who estimates these skills as lower or significantly lower is equally higher than in Sweden and Denmark. To this effect, the results from Sweden and Latvia (48% each) as well as Denmark (70%) exhibit a majority which claims that older and younger colleagues show no difference with regard to social competences. Consequently, fewer employers allocate higher social competences to Best Agers in these countries. While a negative appraisal of Best Agers’ social competences is quite high in Latvia, numbers in Sweden and Denmark are very small.

**Figure 9: Evaluation of Best Agers’ attributes – adaptability to change**


Finally, employers were asked to evaluate their older workers’ **adaptability to change**, for instance related to new technologies and IT processing. In this regard, results for Lithuania (76%) and Germany (77%) are comprehensively negative. Surveys in Sweden and Denmark bear lower negative numbers, especially Denmark and Sweden exhibit a majority stating there is no difference regarding the adaptability to change (DK: 70%; SE: 48%). Latvia exhibits slightly diverging features and even 14% state the adaptability of older workers is higher or considerably higher than that of younger ones. However, one might reasonably object whether the questions’ notion is already biased, since older workers are often associated with a decreasing or low adaptability to change. To this effect, further and more detailed research might be useful in order to gain a more differentiated picture.

In an additional open question on **general advantages/opportunities** of Best Ager employment, employers approved the results presented above and referred primarily to the huge experience and professional competence of their older workers. In the following, Best Agers’ reliability, loyalty to the company, a high work commitment and the ability of knowledge transfer were valued positively. On the other hand, **general disadvantages/risks** were mainly associated with health-related constraints, decreasing physical capability, sick leave and a low/decreasing acceptance of change and/or new technologies.

Summing up, a comparison between attributes of older and younger employees display the general advantage of broad professional competency of Best Agers. This conclusion is clearly and positively acknowledged by employers throughout all BSR countries. Together with high social competences such as reliability and loyalty, this result supports the notion of older workers as crucial members of a skilled and differentiated workforce. Thus, especially their professional experience as well as good knowledge of company-specific structures and internal sequences should be picked up systematically and used in knowledge transfer, mentoring and competence development. At the same time, rising awareness of a perceived lower adaptability to change might help to cope with that challenge, and employers ought to deal with this task in order to support older employees. Here, for example a knowledge transfer between younger workers and Best Agers – for instance on IT-related tasks – could be initiated the other way round. Last but not least, decreasing physical capabilities and growing health-constraints are inevitably connected to an ageing workforce. This result should however not lead to a negative estimation of older workers as such, but instead support further investments in internal health-care measures and an improved ergonomic infrastructure for an ageing workforce.

### 3.7. Micro-Enterprises

As already exposed in the methodological introduction, micro enterprises with less than 10 employees were excluded from the analysis. Although they constitute a relevant share in some of the original survey samples, the low overall numbers in all surveys but Germany and Latvia (LT: 11; DK: 8; PL: 5; SE: 1) make it impossible to draw any sustainable results from the data. However, these enterprises perspectives are nonetheless valuable and important regarding employment patterns of older workers. In fact, their share in relation to the overall structure of enterprises is usually very high on regional level – an observation approved by project partners in the BSR. Furthermore, micro enterprises may be located among the demographically most heavily challenged businesses, assumed their financial and personnel budget is substantially lower than in larger enterprises which may afford a human relations department and enact strategic initiatives counteracting demographic developments.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, one reasonable solution might therefore be a subsequent study which focuses exclusively on demographic impact on micro enterprises and the special challenges arising in these companies.

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<sup>9</sup> A separate study in the Best Agers project deals with the challenge of preservation and transfer of Best Agers' expertise in companies in a generation shift. In this regard, SME are also much more affected than large enterprises. See Kadefors (2011) for detailed information.

## 4. Final remarks

The present report aims at identifying the impact of demographic change on enterprises in six different countries of the BSR. Employers' attitudes towards older workers and the consequences of ageing workforces for businesses on the regional level constitute the main analytical focus. Participating enterprises are to a large extent SME, representing all branches – mainly service, manufacturing and administration – and providing training on a high basis. Regarding the age structure, enterprises exhibit prominent shares of Best Agers and even older workers beyond official retirement age. At the same time, the estimated age of exit from the labour force varies substantially in-between the BSR countries.

The study reveals that enterprises in various regions in the BSR are affected by demographic transitions to differing degrees and with different implications, but basically on all business levels. Awareness and sensitivity for demographic challenges varies, although there is quite a consensus that demography poses a huge future challenge. Domains like personnel planning and skill shortage seem to be predominantly important in this regard. Furthermore, the report identifies gaps between perceived incentives for older workers in terms of longer employment, and actual offers enterprises have provided for their Best Agers. As main incentives, individually adjusted working hours and work content as well as a better social work environment can be identified, whereas mentoring activities and competence development show lower significance. On the other hand, concrete offers for older workers are quite rare in all regions of the BSR, with some exceptions for Sweden and Denmark which exhibit the most promising features in this regard: mostly health-programmes and ergonomic infrastructure. Generally, a systematic and coordinated approach to support older workers and attract longer employment cannot be detected from the data. At the same time, external expertise on demographic challenges is sought by only a small minority of companies, with the exception of Latvia.

Potential reasons for early retirement are based on individual estimations of employers and reveal health-related aspects as predominant source for these decisions. Equally, the wish for more free time and family-related aspects (both displaying no major gender gaps) bear huge importance, besides a range of other factors. More flexible work structures and working time-concepts must therefore be considered more prominently when discussing potential barriers for older workers who want to remain employed. Last but not least, attributes of older workers are estimated predominantly positive with regard to their professional competences and expertise as well as social competences such as reliability, loyalty to the company and life experience.

In general, the results as well as various experiences from data collection in the different regions reveal that concrete action with regard to demographic change is still quite limited in the selected enterprises around the BSR. Although awareness and sensitivity for demographic challenges and potentially affected business domains can be ascribed to a majority of enterprises, this does not necessarily materialise into systematic approaches in order to counteract these challenges, and to establish demography-sensitive personnel planning or business policy. There might be a number of reasons for that, among others limited financial power, lack of staff and/or expertise to tackle the issue properly – especially in SME. Nevertheless, this gap between high awareness and limited action poses a major problem in times of ageing workforces and a shrinking working age population.

One possible suggestion which can be drawn from these results might be another increase in information and sensitisation of enterprises with regard to development of the working-age population and other demographic consequences. Additionally, workforces and employees themselves might become more prominent addressees in the future as well, since their perspectives must not be neglected, but their active participation encouraged. In contrast, a stronger position of employees and a clearer focus on more self-determination in “later working-life”, a flexibilization of working hours, working conditions and specific work content might serve as a good approach to include employees’ perspectives towards a larger benefit.

Finally, the results of the present report approve the perspective that demographic change has strong regional specifics and creates diverging regional profiles – with individual challenges, approaches and solutions, respectively (see also appendix). As a consequence, there is a need for further insight in regional population development as well as respective business structures in order to identify specific demands for external expertise and support. This document constitutes a starting point for potential fields of action.

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## Appendix

Below the “Best Agers”-partners who participated in the questionnaire-study give a feedback on the results presented in this report. In this matter an inquiry with five topics was accomplished:

- Results with main relevance for respective region/country
- Results with practical use for the respective contribution to the project
- Gap between theoretical/practical evaluation of demographic impact
- Results to be highlighted in future recommendations and reporting
- Further need for research and improvement

The remarks allow for a brief reflection of the specific regional or rather national perspectives. The diversity of the aspects clearly approves that the analysis of demographic challenges has to carefully consider regional diversities in order to create suitable policy strategies.

### ➤ Best Agers-partner # 2: County of Pinneberg – Pinneberg/Germany

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>The especially high gap between perceived demographic impact in the past and future, respectively, is quite paradox: on the one hand companies show high awareness, almost “alarmism”, but perform extremely poor regarding concrete activities for Best Agers on the other hand.</p> <p>Furthermore, the low share of companies which sought external expertise approves the need that especially political actors should put some pressure on enterprises in order to initiate concrete action – available expertise is available, but must be implemented. As companies do not seem to appear as the most dedicated actors in that regard, “bottom-up”-approaches and the role of older workers themselves should be also supported more intensively.</p>
<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p>	<p>The results clearly support our aim to increase sensibility and awareness of local companies through competence development by business development agencies and educational institutions, among others by pointing to successful approaches in other BSR countries (e.g. Sweden). The provision of these results shall at the same time sustain the projects’ pilot-initiatives by highlighting the main challenges on company level (e.g.: mentoring; flexible working time; health related activities).</p>

<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p>	<p>It is hard to explain this gap, as there are a lot of good reasons for companies to act with regard to demographic challenges. It might be the case that economic pressure or skill shortage in Germany is not yet dramatic enough to initiate change in all branches or regions.</p> <p>Compared to other countries in the BSR (see e.g. comments from Latvia), German enterprises might perceive demography as a rather negligible issue because of still high socio-economic standards and a quite stable macro-economic situation.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>The comprehensively positive evaluation of their professional and social competences should be highlighted and systematically explored in mentoring, tutoring and knowledge transfer. Even more important is the high relevance, employers ascribe to flexible working time &amp; content. This has to be adopted in companies and company cultures should strongly develop these flexible approaches in favor of their employees.</p> <p>Therefore strategic planning has to improve, especially with regard to the needs of an increasingly ageing staff. Finally, the different capacities of SME on one hand and large enterprises on the other hand have to be reflected and SME should be supported with respect to appropriate age management.</p>
<p>5. Where would you identify open questions, missing aspects &amp; further need for research?</p>	<p>The gender-aspect could not be highlighted sufficiently in this study, but bears a huge relevance for further research. Equally, the diverse socio-economic and demographic profile of BSR countries should be taken into account more intensively. The comparison with and incorporation of employees’ perspectives is clearly necessary in order to improve their role in society, enterprises and the labor market.</p>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 6: Institute for European Initiatives – Gdynia/Poland**

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>Programmes for the activation of people aged 55+ characterized in this report are only a small percent of possible activities that can be undertaken in this matter in the Pomeranian region. As a result the scale of professional activation of Best Agers is low. Specific activities of government and public institutions aimed at enhancing the activation of the 50+ group should include in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissemination of knowledge about age management</li> <li>• Possibility to work flexible hours for 50+ employees</li> <li>• Promotion of training focusing on skills of 45+ employees</li> <li>• Improvement of the balance of financial incentives for both employers and for individuals who are willing to retire early</li> <li>• Improvement of the attractiveness of working conditions</li> <li>• Improvement in the range of gender balance associated with discrimination against women especially in the age group 50+</li> </ul> <p>These activities would enable an increase in employment of older workers in the Pomeranian region.</p>
<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p>	<p>The problem of the gap results from the fact that employers in Poland do not yet see the changes, threats and need of reaction resulting from demographic change. Furthermore, older workers have huge problems with the ability of using new technologies and tools as well as the acceptance of related changes.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• professional and general training including job searching</li> <li>• training and traineeship programmes and professional preparation in workplaces</li> <li>• allocation of funds for opening a business</li> <li>• additionally training to start up a business</li> </ul>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 7: Gdansk University of Technology – Gdansk/Poland**

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>The most important problem seems to be no response to the risks associated with future demographic changes. Noted a differentiated approach to the employment of older people. The report contains important findings regarding the different needs of women and men in connection with early retirement. We should carefully examine these needs and include them in documents governing the local labor market.</p> <p>Additionally, the growing importance of strategic planning in the creation of future employment structures in enterprises is an essential aspect.</p>
<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p>	<p>Most useful are mentoring and coaching programmes in business. Using this form of training would allow companies to retain experienced employees as experts and specialists. The importance of media &amp; public initiatives in the Best Agers project would be useful as well.</p>
<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p> <p>Which consequences arise from that observation?</p>	<p>The gap between theoretical awareness for demographic change and concrete initiatives for Best Agers will result in a mismatch in the labor market. In addition, a problem widely recognized in the Polish labor market are stereotypes of older workers which are perceived as having reduced physical capacity for work.</p> <p>In the near future this situation may result in severe shortages of skilled and experienced workers.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>Integration of young workers with older age workers towards the development of social and technical skills as well as the growing importance of flexibility in the structure and conditions of employment.</p>
<p>5. Where would you identify open questions, missing aspects &amp; further need for research?</p>	<p>The study could be extended to cover issues related to the possessed and desired qualifications of economically active older people.</p>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 8: West Pomeranian Business School – Szczecin/Poland**

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>In Poland, employers do not see the potential threat/problem resulting from demographic change yet. In their opinion only the issue of being able to work is important. They do not yet see the need of integrating younger employees with Best Agers as a key aspect of their company succession.</p>
<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p> <p>Do you draw upon results in order to initiate further activities in the project?</p>	<p>Crucial issue (crucial lack/gap) resulting from this study is that mentoring and coaching programmes are still missing in Poland, or the programmes are aiming at the wrong target groups. The need for close cooperation of all institutions dealing with demographic changes is required.</p> <p>Some steps/activities are under development in WP4 (mentoring and coaching programmes).</p>
<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p> <p>Which consequences arise from that observation?</p>	<p>Firstly, the main problem is the lack of awareness of existing programmes devoted to demographic changes. In some way the programmes are on a different level of existence than the target groups are. The need for very comprehensive activities is essential.</p> <p>The authorities and institutions have enough awareness of problems but in some way the target groups – employers and Best Agers – are not informed well enough.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>Problems of uninformed employers who do not see the need of integrating the staff, even though they claim to have respective programmes.</p>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 11: KTU Regional Science Park – Kaunas/Lithuania**

<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p>	<p>Results in figure 7 are most useful because it indicates that professional competences of Best Agers are valued, and that is important for WP5 of the project which deals with tutoring of young people by Best Agers. It means that involvement of Best Agers into innovation related activities of younger people will be positively received and valued.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>In my opinion, results in figure 5 represent the project goal of better integration of older workers and it is covered in the report already.</p>
<p>5. Where would you identify open questions, missing aspects &amp; further need for research?</p>	<p>It was correctly noted that the dominant sector of Lithuanian companies (at least from Kaunas) was ICT, which means young people who are not dealing with ageing policies in their companies. However, the results regarding future impact of demographic change (figure 2) show that Lithuanian companies ascribe a high importance for nearly all business domains. It would be interesting to know why younger (or average age) people already reflect upon demographic change. It conflicts to my personal belief that only large industrial companies are affected by demographic change and have related policies.</p>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 13: Stockholm School of Economics – Riga/Latvia**

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>The differences across countries in the prevalence of older workers, e.g. large share in Sweden as compared with probably small share in Latvia. Hence the scope for ‘best agers’ related actions is very different.</p>
<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p> <p>Do you draw upon results in order to initiate further activities in the project?</p>	<p>So far we have not proceeded to using the Latvian results in other parts of the project in Latvia.</p>
<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p>	<p>The issues in Latvia are comprehensively income related. In contrast to e.g. Sweden, it is unlikely that many people at any age will offer their services on a voluntary basis. This implies limited scope for ‘best-agers’ actions such as mentoring.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>The differences between issues arising in rich and poor countries</p>
<p>5. Where would you identify open questions, missing aspects &amp; further need for research?</p>	<p>Much more knowledge on the reasons for differences across regions would be desirable.</p>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 14: Norrbotten County Council – Lulea/Sweden**

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>The estimation that employees will retire at approximately 64 years. This means that employers have to adapt to Best Agers at work places.</p> <p>The gap between the theoretical awareness of demographic change and the concrete initiatives to counteract this. As Norrbotten has a huge demographic challenge it is crucial that the awareness of this becomes even higher and that the region finds tools to deal with it.</p> <p>The perceived wish among employees for more free time at the end of their work life. This raises needs for concrete methods to adapt working conditions to best agers needs.</p>
<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p> <p>Do you draw upon results in order to initiate further activities in the project?</p>	<p>That the employers in this report from Norrbotten think that individually adjusted working time and individually adjusted work content are the most important incentives for longer employment. But also that they rank competence development relatively low.</p> <p>I think that Age management at work places is important to work with in the Best Agers-project – and I already have and will initiate this in my region.</p>
<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p>	<p>Until now, employers have had enough young employees and unemployed to replace retired staff and this have meant that the employers haven't had enough incentives to develop methods for meeting the demographic challenge. But during the coming ten-fifteen years the skill shortage will be obvious and this will be a driving force to develop methods for competence transfer, age management, mixed work-teams, competence development, etc.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>See question 3</p>
<p>5. Where would you identify open questions, missing aspects &amp; further need for research?</p>	<p>The gender aspect: female and male employees in Sweden are to a high degree represented in different branches on the labor market. How do this affect the methods for age management?</p>

➤ **Best Agers-partner # 17: University College of Lillebaelt – Vejle/Denmark**

<p>1. Which results of the report bear the greatest relevance for your region/country – and why?</p>	<p>The employers have limited attention on age related conditions. And they don't see best agers as having special skills according to greater experiences. Therefore one of the advices to the Municipality of Fredericia has been to have more attention on having incentives that make staying in the labour market attractive. This is important because the retirement age is raised over the next years. It means the labour will get older. Without the employers being aware of the issue a substantial part of these elderly employees will go on sick leaves.</p>
<p>2. Which results are most useful for your specific contribution in the “Best Agers”-project?</p>	<p>The fact that managers have a limited focus on keeping their best agers employees is a starting point for developing a certificate for public companies which are successful in retaining their employees. The survey was combined with interviews with both employers and employees and this study provided a lot of information about what motivates best agers to stay in the labour market.</p>
<p>3. How would you assess the discussed gap between (quite high) theoretical awareness for demographic change on one hand – and (quite poor) concrete initiatives for Best Agers on the other in your region/country?</p>	<p>The Danish answers show that this insight is new to the employers. In the long run awareness raising can be necessary. In the short run the financial crisis will make employers believe that there is no problem.</p>
<p>4. Which results should be highlighted in the reporting in order to sustain the project goal of a better integration of older workers in the labour market?</p>	<p>It's important that employers – viewed as one cohort across borders – perceive senior employees as having skills and resources which younger people don't have.</p>
<p>5. Where would you identify open questions, missing aspects &amp; further need for research?</p>	<p>This study focuses on employers' views, but the view of the employees is just as important. It will complete the study to make an analysis that incorporates for instance employees attitudes concerning potential motivation to stay longer in the labour market.</p>