



# **THE LABOUR MARKET AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

**Study Results and Recommendations of the  
Best Agers Project**

**2012**



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*"Employers should keep in mind that the older have much knowledge."*

*– Swedish unemployed administrator, age 59*

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# DEMOGRAPHY, AGEING AND WORK – addressing a European concern

Work participation and employability of Best Agers continues to be a timely and important subject – not only for the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). A few years ago, when this project started, many thought that ageing of the workforce was the major problem; now we all know that it is shrinking as well. The good news is that we also gradually learn that the problem is part of the solution: the 55+ year-olds are numerous, and they are healthier and better educated than ever; this is why we call them Best Agers.

Keeping the older in the workforce for longer may partly compensate for the shrinking of younger generations. However, we see large differences in rates of growth of older working-age groups and we also see large differences in attitudes toward active ageing and in the implementation of EU policies regarding employment of the older. Taking notice and understanding these differences may help to overcome difficulties in adapting to demographic change.

The European Community has declared 2012 as the Year of Active Ageing. Our report thus comes just in time. It is directed primarily to decision makers. However, it is clear that measures need to be taken not only at the political level, but also at workplaces and by the individuals concerned: the potential of best agers themselves should not be underestimated.

# GENERAL RESULTS

*“Companies as such should definitely confess to their elderly workforce. This is what I’m really angry about - the industry is crying for skilled labour force, and there are countless older workers who are perfectly skilled. There is kind of a “youth obsession”; I think a good age-mix is the best.”*

*– German industrial manager, age 55*

# COMMON CONCERNS

## – for the Baltic Sea Region

There is across the entire BSR a recognized need to increase work participation in the age range 55-64 years and higher, but how can this be achieved?

Even though each country has its own specific conditions and concerns with respect to ageing and work, analyses show that to a large extent, countries in the Baltic Sea region share problems as well as possible remedies. The present report is divided into a general part, applicable across the entire BSR, and a country specific part, adapted to each individual country<sup>1</sup>.

The Best Agers project has documented approaches that could be subject to benchmarking in the different BSR countries. Some of the most interesting initiatives are referred to here. More detailed information can be found in the reports listed in the back of this booklet; they can be downloaded from [www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu).

### • FORMAL BARRIERS MUST BE REMOVED

In all countries of the BSR, there are discriminatory rules and regulations that impair the possibility of older people to extend their working lives. Such barriers may concern pension systems that even punish continuing working, or prevent older people from continuing working after they have reached a certain age, even if they may wish to do so. Access to adult education may be prevented after a certain age. Older people may face age based economic barriers if they wish to start their own business. Part time work, which is an attractive

alternative to many older people, is sometimes not supported.

Every country needs to scrutinize what changes are needed in the legal system so as to eliminate all types of age discrimination, in accordance with the European Directive<sup>2</sup>. An effective ombudsman function, which follows up complaints from citizens who feel that they have been subject to age discrimination, should be instituted. Mainstreaming policies against age discrimination should be part of national strategies.

### • LABOUR MARKET CONDITIONS NEED REFORM

Statistics show that blue collar workers exit the labour market earlier than white collar workers, particularly so when compared with academic professionals. Inability to comply with conditions at the workplace prevents many workers from continuing working up to legislated pension age. Sustained work ability can be achieved at the work place by implementing age management

practices; that is, providing all age groups with adequate working conditions. Such initiatives include also competence development for all through implementation of lifelong learning practices, and preventive health care services at the workplace. Adequate health and preserved competence contribute substantially to the sustained employability of Best Agers.

1. This report is published in seven versions, that is, in the languages of the Best Agers Project, and adapted to the country specific concerns. They can all be downloaded from the project website, [www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu).

2. Council Directive (2000), 'Establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation', 2000/78/EC, Official Journal of the European Communities, L303/16-22, 2.12.2000.

## • WOMEN EXIT WORK EARLIER, BUT WHY?

Females exit working life earlier than men in the whole of the BSR, in white collar and blue collar occupations alike. In part, these gender differences may be caused by an increased mismatch in older women between individual work ability and work demands, but also cultural factors do play a role. Many women are prone to exit work life early, whenever this is economically feasible, due to family reasons.

Increasing work participation among older women, which in some countries is very low, would be one of

the most effective measures at hand in order to address the demographic challenge. A spectrum of measures needs to be considered. For instance, in some countries, the pension age is lower for women than for men. This may prevent many qualified older women from continuing working. Women's working conditions need reform. And better economic incentives for prolonging working life may be very attractive for many older women.

## • NEGATIVE ATTITUDES NEED TO BE CHANGED

Negative attitudes toward older workers are prevalent in all parts of the BSR. It is one of the the barriers most frequently highlighted by older people who wish to remain in or return to working life, after having been made redundant. Such attitudes are found all over: among employers, managers, workmates, and among the best agers themselves. They even extend to governmental agencies and decision makers at the political level. They focus on age related physical and mental changes that allegedly impair the work ability of older people, but they disregard the positive aspects

of ageing: know-how, experience, social ability, reliability, and carefulness. They also disregard the individual dimension: age alone is a poor predictor of work ability.

So attitudes need to be changed, but how? Changing attitudes is an admittedly difficult task. It is therefore encouraging that there are examples of countries where attitudes toward older workers have changed to the better, and also where pension reforms aiming at a prolonged working life have been instituted without much public resistance. We refer to the Norwegian example.

*“I like my work; I have to work anyway for the money, and people in my work group are nice, I like them.”*

– Latvian kindergarten employee, age 59

# FORMING A NATIONAL SENIOR POLICY

In the beginning of the 2000's, the Norwegian government noted that more people were leaving the labour market than entering it. This was not considered sustainable, and a process aiming at extending the average working life of Norwegian citizens was started. The point of departure was "The Tripartite Agreement on a more Inclusive Workplace" (the IW-agreement), in October 2001. Here the government and the social partners agreed to work toward an increase in labour market participation among older workers; i.e. an increase in the effective retirement age.

In January 2011, about ten years later, a major pension reform, covering the entire private sector of the labour market, came into force in Norway. It means that obligatory pension age is now abolished. As an employee, you may retain your permanent position and continue earning pension points up to age 75.

This important reform was decided upon in the Norwegian parliament, the Stortinget, and implemented without any major protests. The effective pension age has increased already. And the attitudes of employers toward older employees improved markedly between 2003 and 2007. But how could this happen, taking into account the violent reactions seen across Europe, when governments announce their intention to increase pension age?

One of the major lessons to be learned is that it may take time to develop consensus and acceptance around societal reforms that affect large parts of the population; perhaps not a decade is needed like in Norway, but sufficient time; and it is likely that the time required for a successful process may be longer in societies with a history of conflict between political power, trade unions, and employers.

A concrete Norwegian initiative that should be considered for benchmarking in other European countries is the creation of the Centre for Senior Policy (Senter for Seniorpolitikk), a national platform for information, communication and debate of senior policy issues. This platform, which is financed by the government, engages a wide spectrum of stakeholders, including ministries, political parties, governmental authorities, employer and employee organizations, researchers and NGOs, such as pensioners' organizations. A website has been developed for communication purposes. Here it is stated:

*"The purpose of the Centre is to make individuals, companies and politicians aware of the benefits of being adaptable in the workplace, as an increasing proportion of the workforce is aging. By promoting research, through awareness campaigns and by forging links with the Workers' Union, the Employers' Association and politicians, the Centre encourages a broad range of activities that aim to reverse the growing trend towards early retirement."*

# NATIONAL RESULTS

In the following pages, partners from the participating countries highlight results and recommendations in a national perspective.

*“The approach to the elderly is often stereotyped; after all, society is changing, the older people are becoming more active, dynamic.”*

*– Lithuanian unemployed bricklayer, age 60*

# DENMARK

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The choice of a Danish individual to stay or to leave work life is influenced by a set of positive and negative factors.

### FACTORS THAT DISCOURAGE STAYING IN THE LABOUR MARKET:

- Health – physical ability, coordination and cognition, and the fear of acquiring bad health are of great importance in the desire for retirement.
- Rules and regulations, too much bureaucracy and demands for documentation take time away from what employees experience as the quality of work.
- Demands for specific competences can strengthen the employees' wish to leave the labour market.

### FACTORS THAT PROMOTE STAYING IN THE LABOUR MARKET:

- The older employee demands quality. The work must be exciting because the employee's personal identity is tied to the work. Quality of work is for example to be able to carry out one's work according to one's personal values.
- People who can organise their own work in a way that challenges them, and continuously have the possibility of developing in general, expect to remain in the workplace for longer.
- Adapting the job demands and challenges to the needs of the individual can positively influence employees to remain in the workplace. For some employees, working hours and work pace is important. It is therefore essential that management to a higher degree offers flexible working and/or adapts the work to the needs of the individual.
- Retention of older employees in the workplace is to a high degree decided by whether the employee thrives and feels appreciated. Trust and recognition is important to the employees. Management's communication about retirement is of great importance and the employees who feel encouraged to remain, feel appreciated. It may be appropriate to consider age limits in the labour agreements, but also to change practices in the workplace, so it becomes 'normal' to work into an older age.
- If companies incorporate Lifelong Learning and the so-called life-phase perspective, the company personnel policy can take into account that people have different needs at different stages in their lives. Regular job changes and continuous upgrading of skills can help keep the mind open, stimulate innovation and adaptability.
- A successful senior policy should be based on a common ambition in the company. This means that management, as well as the entire staff and the individual older employee, take responsibility for the process when developing and implementing a senior policy.
- Prioritising family/leisure plays a big part in the considerations surrounding retirement. Reduced hours, for example in the form of flexible early retirement or other types of flexibility, can have a positive effect on employee retention.
- The better the work situation, the more attractive remaining in the workplace becomes, and the more competitive the work becomes compared to retirement.

# GERMANY

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite a significant increase of employment among older workers in recent years, the current discussion on a longer working life in Germany remains highly controversial. Although socio-economic preconditions are far better than for instance in the transformation states of Eastern Europe, Germany still struggles with an integrated and sustainable employment and retirement policy in times of demographic change.

### 1. ADAPT AND MODERATE DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE

Germany's working age population will decrease by 6 million people until 2030, while ageing at the same time. Population ageing and shrinking is a fact and should be balanced and adapted by reasonable political measures, instead of promoting growth-based strategies.

### 2. COMBINE STAKEHOLDERS FOR INTEGRATED POLICIES

Research and experience in the field of employment, ageing and retirement from Northern European neighbours like Norway, Finland and Sweden have to be combined with existing knowledge and redirected towards a more comprehensive approach. Political actors and social partners have to agree on common and integrated policies instead of pursuing partial interests.

### 3. HIGHLIGHT QUALITATIVE APPROACHES

The discussion on retirement age focusses almost exclusively on a later exit from the labour market, but neglects the qualitative dimension of a longer (working) life. However, health, gender, educational level and family situation diverge among 55+ year-olds. A more individualized approach – combining flexible working hours, mentoring activities, entrepreneurship and other innovative employment models – could prominently consider the individual preconditions, needs and wishes of people in the prime of their lives.

### 4. PROMOTE FLEXIBLE AND SOCIALLY SECURE RETIREMENT POLICIES

Consequently, a flexible and individualized retirement system instead of a fixed retirement age

might allow for the inclusion of these diverging capacities: creating both incentives to remain employed for those who are willing and able, as well as providing socio-economic security for those who cannot work until retirement should be the primary aim.

### 5. ASSIST SME – LEARN FROM LARGE COMPANIES

Experiences and strategic capacity in the field of workforce ageing and human resource management still mostly remains a domain of large and trans-nationally operating enterprises. However, small and medium size enterprises constitute the great majority of German businesses and often lack these capacities. They should be especially supported by providing sustainable age management policies as well as incentives in order to implement them on a broad scale.

### 6. ABOLISH AGE DISCRIMINATION

The need for a re-articulation of prevailing negative age cultures is huge: both working life as well as society in general demand regulations and perspectives which highlight peoples' individual strengths and experiences, not their age-related constraints and disadvantages.

### 7. ALLOW FOR SPATIALLY DIFFERENTIATED SOLUTIONS

The regional dimension of demographic change in Germany is highly heterogeneous: a differentiated and sustainable approach should take into account the diverging challenges – as well as capacities – of urban, sub-urban and rural areas and their specific dynamics with regard to ageing, growing and/or shrinking population.

# LATVIA

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. PROMOTE THE VISIBILITY OF BEST AGERS IN LATVIA.

People above 55 are not visible in the public space, where youth is considered the driving economic development force. Prejudice and stigma of age signify belonging to the “other” namely “Soviet, outdated, non-contemporary”, and stem out of disrupted continuity in skills and capital transfer due to the changes from planned to market economy, which set new rules for ownership of capital as well as necessary skills for development. Today’s Latvia’s society in general experiences low understanding of the benefits of diversity: fears of all kind of diversity (ethnic, age) persist. Awareness of what diversity can bring for social and economic development could lead towards better integration of best agers in working life and society in general.

### 2. RECONSIDER LIFELONG LEARNING FOR THIS REGION AS PARADIGM SHIFT IN LEARNING, RATHER THAN JUST ADDING TO EXISTING SKILLS.

Current best agers of Latvia were educated in the Soviet Union, which implies a need for considerable adjustment in necessary skills for today’s labour market. Continuing (or life long) education in general is poorly developed in Latvia, and does not provide a mechanism for increasing the capacities necessary for the labour market, neither for best agers nor for others (unemployed, youth etc).

### 3. STABILIZE AND EXPLAIN THE PENSION SYSTEM.

The fact is that indexation of pensions is a politically sensitive topic, and there are frequent changes in the way pensions are indexed. This creates unclear incentives either for working or for retirement. Due to the fact that many of to-days’ best agers received salaries paid in cash (even now shadow economy amounts up to 40% of total economy in Latvia) the pensions, when taxes have been paid, are too low to survive on. This is one of the reasons why best agers seek employment.

### 4. INCREASE NETWORKING ABILITIES FOR BEST AGERS.

Lack of public space for networking in the best agers community leads to isolation. There is insufficient space not only for best agers’ professional development, but also for spending leisure time. This prevents any spill-over process that might take place from leisure time to professional development. Low networking opportunities in addition to generally low trust and cooperation leads to a fragmented society unable to achieve joint well-being of various social groups.

### 5. FOSTER COMPANIES TO TAKE MORE ACTIVE ROLE IN BEST AGERS INTEGRATION IN THE LABOUR MARKET.

The role of companies should not be underestimated in Latvia’s society, where attitudes towards the government are distrustful and where the non-governmental sector still has comparatively low ability to provide an impact. The private sector should be prompted not only to take a proactive role in best agers education and employment but also for decreasing discriminatory practices (e.g. advertisements saying “do not get your dream old”, showing best agers as somebody not able to fulfill their dreams of life).

### 6. IMPROVE THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM SO AS TO BENEFIT BEST AGERS

The current health care system in combination with low income and lack of public space for spending leisure time leads to unhealthy and health damaging life style among best agers, which prevents best agers of full-fledged participation in work and social life.



# LITHUANIA

## RECOMMENDATIONS

In Lithuania, the population structure is changing rapidly. The retirement age population is growing, and the share of children and young people is declining. Under these conditions, it is important that older people work longer. However, the labour market in Lithuania is not friendly to older people. Age is one of the main sources of discrimination; older people are employed only reluctantly. Even in the public sector, such as in educational institutions or public services, an age of 65 years is considered the upper limit. In the private sector, staff older than 55 years are confronted with negative stereotypes.

Only when a person can choose freely his or her amount of work, the work schedule, and when to retire, we can say that the labour market is elderly friendly.

1. The process to increase the retirement age gradually from 62.5 years to 65 years by the year 2025 must be realised according to plan.
2. Increase people's incentives to remain longer in the labour market – create a system providing for higher pension if retirement is delayed.
3. Create new incentives: the present motivation to work longer only due to the low pension and in order to avoid poverty, must be changed, so as to encourage working also based on personal and social motives. The low pension cannot remain the overriding factor motivating older people to remain working.
4. Encourage development of a positive self-image among older people, motivating them to work longer. They should see themselves as respected experts in the labour market.
5. Employment of older people must be encouraged in enterprises; relevant government initiatives are urgently needed. Only few employers are socially responsible. They address the business problem, but neglect employing older people, since they do not see the benefit. Experience shows that the most successful group of workers consists of a mixture of young and older employees. These teams work better; they create particularly good results since they combine specific knowledge and experience with assets such as innovation, energy and drive.
6. Employ mass media: show the capacity of the Best Aged, form a positive public opinion. Initiate discussion and dialogue on the political, social, and economic levels: for example by using arguments such as, "older people who work create jobs also for the young ones..."
7. Reform working life: foresee the arising health obstacles hampering a prolonged labour life of older people, and find suitable solutions. Address barriers related to working hours: support the development of part time work possibilities for the older employees.
8. Initiate social research from different perspectives, since the problem is not currently on the priority list. There is a lack of statistical data – but this does not prove an absence of problems.
9. The most important aspect overall is that public opinion must change. What is needed is better coordination from the state: regulation, creation of incentives to businesses, counteracting unfounded stereotypes. Governmental support and initiatives forming positive public opinion and reducing discrimination against older people can have significant influence. The EU directive against age discrimination is part of the legal framework, but no real practical measures have been taken.

# POLAND

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Due to the progressive ageing of the Polish society, economic and social mobilization activities of people in elderly age groups are needed in the Polish social and economic policy for the coming years. The knowledge and experience, gained in the Best Agers Project, help to formulate a recommendation, as for the desired direction and the scope of such activities.

### 1. STRATEGIC AND COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH.

To mitigate the negative consequences of the ageing of the Polish society, it is necessary to develop a long-term strategy to counteract inactivity and social exclusion of elderly people. Its aim should be to coordinate the activities undertaken by the various stakeholders at the national, regional and local levels, and to increase their efficiency and effectiveness.

### 2. RETIREMENT POLICY.

Many Polish people benefit from pension long before the formal retirement age. Raising the retirement age must be associated with the policy of keeping older people in the labour market, with the participation of companies and social partners, mainly by improving competency levels.

### 3. PROMOTION OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY.

Actions in the field of professional mobilization of older people should not focus solely on the unemployed or economically inactive older people. A particular attention should be paid to those, that are still active on the labour market. It is crucial, that they will retain their further economic activity, even after reaching the formal retirement age. Promotion of economic activity should also be implemented for the younger age groups, especially now, in the view of the forthcoming changes in the Polish pension system.

### 4. THE SOCIAL IMAGE.

Old age is still perceived by the Polish society as the time of the withdrawal from the economic and social life, is associated with poor health and lack of independence. It is necessary to promote the idea of 'active aging', engaging older people in the mainstream of social and public life. There is a need for ambitious initiatives to create a new, positive image of older people in the workplace and beyond, including through intergenerational cooperation and elderly volunteers.

### 5. ADAPTATION OF WORKING CONDITIONS.

Increase in the participation of older people in the total population, including among workers, requires employers to adapt working conditions. Workplaces (in terms of ergonomic), as well as the organization of work and conditions of employment (flexibility) need adaptation. The powerful motivation factor for elderly people to remain professionally active is the positive workplace atmosphere – employers should pay greater attention to the relationship inside the organization and promote age friendly organizational culture.

### 6. THE POTENTIAL OF KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE.

Among the major positive attributes of older workers, Polish employers distinguish their knowledge, experience and loyalty. Simultaneously, the majority of Polish companies do not have systems that would make use of the potential of older workers. Enterprises not very often apply best practices in age and competence management. It is necessary to intensify the education and promotion of intergenerational transfer of knowledge, as well as substantive and technical support to enterprises (especially SMEs) implementing such practices.



# SWEDEN

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the work life problems linked to the demographic changes may be less demanding than in many other countries, also Sweden will have to change her age relevant policies and practices.

In the light of the identification of problems and possible remedies, what should Sweden do? In addition to the points that are valid for the whole of the BSR, there are specific concerns that need to be addressed in Sweden.

**1. FACILITATE BENCHMARKING OF SUCCESSFUL APPROACHES AND SOLUTIONS.**

Create networks for exchange of experiences between employers who are concerned about competence access and development in an ageing society. Learn from German experiences.

**2. AVOID INSTITUTING A DISCRIMINATORY PENSION SYSTEM.**

Simply increasing pension age to 69, as suggested, or to abolish it altogether, is likely to lead to a widening of the economic gaps between occupational groups, and would leave large groups behind.

**3. REVOKE ALL SORTS OF AGE DISCRIMINATION IN LAWS AND REGULATIONS.**

Provide all age groups with adequate opportunities, for instance by supporting competence development of all, including the best agers.

**4. CREATE NEW INCENTIVES FOR COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT IN THE LABOR MARKET.**

In order to implement life-long learning and to support sustained employability, a system with individual “competence checks” was devised some years ago, but not implemented. This initiative should be considered anew by politicians and social partners.

**5. CREATE INCENTIVES FOR EMPLOYERS AND TRADE UNIONS TO IMPLEMENT AGE MANAGEMENT PRACTICES AT THE WORKPLACE LEVEL.**

The social partners should make this a joint concern.

**6. ADDRESS THE PREVAILING NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARD OLDER EMPLOYEES AMONG EMPLOYERS.**

Ageism and negative attitudes constitute perhaps the most important barriers to a prolonged working life. Learn from the Finnish and Norwegian endeavors.

**7. BE ALERT TO THE NEEDS OF REGIONS AND MUNICIPALITIES THAT ARE SUBJECT TO NEGATIVE DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS.**

It is necessary to empower regional stakeholders in order to create a sustainable economic future.

**8. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES AND ENCOURAGE OLDER PEOPLE TO BECOME ENTREPRENEURS.**

This may be a more attractive alternative to early exit from work life than is often understood.

**9. FIND WAYS FOR OLDER PEOPLE TO MAKE THEIR KNOWLEDGE USEFUL.**

Encourage best agers to become mentors in business and work life.



# WHY DO WE TALK OF “BEST AGERS”?

Each individual defines his or her “best age” differently, and subjectively. In economic life, however, an age above 55 years is often not viewed as a productive age. Despite their experience and skills, and in many cases despite their willingness and ability to remain active, older people are often treated in a discriminatory way.

Yet the 55+ are the growing part of the working-age population, and we cannot afford to disrespect their readiness to share their expertise and know-how. Instead, these hidden potentials should be utilised.

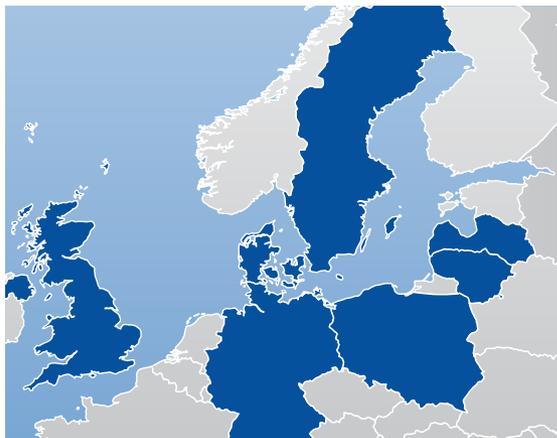
The contributions of older people must increase to make up for the shrinking number of young people. At the same time, “innovation” should not be equated with young age, as it often is.

Seen from this perspective, the 55+ remain of “best age” for economic activities for many more years, sometimes even well beyond retirement age. This is why in this project, every person older than 55 years, woman or man, is defined as a “Best Ager”.

## IS WORKING LONGER THE ONLY SOLUTION?

In the debates about retirement ages and pension policies that are currently taking place in many European countries, it seems to be forgotten sometimes that the classic full-time working position is not the only way for older people to be economically active. An increasing number of older people is ready to make a change late in their professional career and to get involved in

- coaching, consulting and expert service activities, often on a voluntary or honorary basis, for the benefit of small and medium-sized countries and non-profit organisations;
- mentoring and tutoring activities for students in primary, higher or vocational education and for young entrepreneurs; or
- entrepreneurship and generation of innovation.



*In the Best Agers project, a spectrum of partners of different character participated, including chambers of commerce, universities, public authorities, NGOs, science parks, and training institutions.*

*They are based in seven countries: Denmark, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, and the U.K.”*

*“The good employees have experience which should be used”.*

*- Danish hospital care worker, age 57*

While these ideas are not entirely new, the number of older professionals involved in such activities must be increased if we want to make full use of their human capital. Barriers are to be found both at the individual and the structural level. Those best agers who ponder about starting their own business need practical and moral support. Those who are ready to become mentors need training in pedagogical and psychological skills. Those who want to promote their ideas need networks and professional support.

In a number of pilot initiatives, the Best Agers Partners have addressed these needs:

- They have improved networking between initiatives and individuals both on the regional and transnational level – for instance by creating [www.biiugi.eu](http://www.biiugi.eu), a web-based matching platform for senior experts and those who seek their help.
- They have conducted pilot training of mentors for different target groups and developed toolboxes for organisations to acquire volunteers and for older persons interested in becoming self-employed.
- They have brought together experienced managers and experts with young people to work on business ideas in online and real-life seminars and business competitions.

More information about these activities can be found on the project website [www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu).

To show encouraging examples of older people who are determined to remain active, the project has produced a documentary film which tells the story of four ‘best agers’ from four countries:



Hans-Georg Billmann from Eckernförde, Germany was forced to retire at the age of 62 due to cancer. After recovering, he fulfilled his lifelong dream: founding his own business advisory company.



Miervaldis Rozenbergs from Riga retired at the age of 68, but quickly began to focus on his passion: Inventing and guiding young talent through his involvement in the Latvian Inventors Association



Karen Marie Ravn, 65, has already reached the official retirement age but continues to work at a museum in Give, Denmark, and to guide people with psychological problems back into the labour market as a social mentor.



Kerstin Sofia Andersson (70) returned to Northern Sweden following a successful career as a business advisor, determined to set up a conference and tourism centre in her hometown.

# A 17 POINT PROGRAMME FOR SUSTAINED EMPLOYABILITY

## FOR BEST AGERS THEMSELVES:

- Look for employers who have a good record with respect to work environment, competence development programmes, and a positive attitude to older employees.
- Take advantage of offers to join competence development programmes.
- Avoid as far as possible repetitive work, shift work, and physically strenuous work tasks. Listen to your own body.
- Try to establish a good relationship with your supervisors, so that they engage in your work and are aware of your accomplishments.
- Engage in your trade union and try to interest them to open discussions with the employer how to further principles of Age Management in the workplace.
- Engage in physical training in free time.
- Develop a CV that reflects the full range of knowledge that you possess, not only listing exams and jobs.

## FOR EMPLOYERS:

- Develop the work environment so as to make sure that all employees are given work tasks that comply with their capacity, taking into account individual characteristics such as age and sex.
- Implement principles of Age Management in the work organization, in consultation with the trade unions.
- Develop work career plans for all employees, involving competence development programmes.
- Develop mentoring programs where older employees can use time for knowledge transfer to younger ones.
- Develop stepwise and flexible pension options in order to retain some older employees and their knowledge for a longer time, rather than applying strict compulsory retirement based on age alone.
- Work with the organization, in particular middle management, in order to develop a positive attitude towards older employees. This means recognizing the competence of older employees and communicating that they are often able to achieve at least as good results as younger workmates, if they are given adequate working conditions.

## AT THE SOCIETY LEVEL:

- Revoke all sorts of age discrimination in laws and regulations.
- Build safeguards against age discrimination in the operation of governmental agencies having an impact on ageing and work.
- Implement an ombudsman function for appeals from people who consider themselves victims of age discrimination.
- Be trendsetters. Involve older people in parliamentary work and other visible governmental operations.

# MAIN REPORTS, LABOUR MARKET AND EMPLOYMENT

## **Work Participation and Employability of Best Agers in the Baltic Sea Region.**

*Center for the Study of Demographic Change, University of Rostock (DE).*

This report contains a major overview of the demographic situation and work participation across the BSR countries and regions, and identifies the vulnerabilities linked to ageing and shrinkage. There is also a review of what is known about factors that constitute sustained employability of best agers. Appendices include specific reports contributed from partners in Germany, Poland, Sweden, and Lithuania.

## **Study of employment patterns in selected BSR regions.**

*County of Pinneberg, Schleswig-Holstein (DE).*

The aim of this report is to analyze the employment patterns of older workers – mostly the age group 55–64, the so-called ‘Best Agers’ – in selected regions of the Baltic Sea Region, based on contributions from Germany, Poland, Latvia and Sweden.

## **Best Agers in the Baltic Sea Region – A comparative study of employers’ attitudes.**

*County of Pinneberg, Schleswig-Holstein (DE).*

Based on data gathered by project partners in six BSR countries, results are presented concerning employers’ awareness of the demographic threats, and their attitudes toward older workers. For instance, 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.

## **Perceived employment situation of Best Agers in the Baltic Sea Region: an interview study.**

*Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg (SE).*

Based on interview data retrieved by partners in six BSR countries, barriers to continued work participation are identified. Competence and health related barriers are highlighted by best agers in all countries, but the most prevalent barrier experienced is the negative attitudes.



*“Laughing at and humiliation of older employees is commonplace. There is a phenomenon of mobbing which is unfortunately accepted by employers. This is something that needs to be changed.”*

*– Polish unemployed engineer, age 55*

### **Analysis of rules, regulations, policies and strategies at national and regional level, in the fields of employment, retirement, education and training, and career planning.**

*Institute for European Initiatives and Gdansk University of Technology (PL).*

In this report, the policy frameworks with respect to work participation of Best Aged in the BSR are outlined, with special emphasis on national and regional initiatives in Poland, Sweden and Lithuania.

### **Survey on what support instruments are missing for stimulating activity of people 50+**

*Institute for European Initiatives (PL).*

In this report, an analysis is presented with respect to the need for new initiatives for stimulating professional activity of best aged in various regions of Europe, using Polish conditions as a point of departure.

### **Costs and Benefits of Best Aged Employment.**

*Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg (SE).*

Economic considerations and concerns present a major barrier with respect to sustained employment of Best Aged. In this report the costs and benefits of keeping or employing older workers are analyzed. Models for economic analysis are presented. It is shown that introduction of age management can be highly profitable.

### **Competence preservation and transfer in a generation shift.**

*Department of Sociology and Work Science, University of Gothenburg, Göteborg (SE).*

In a generation shift in a small or medium size company, the company may face closure due to problems to find a competent successor. Based on contributions from four countries, this report analyzes the level of problem awareness in the BSR countries and offers for benchmarking a Swedish tool for sellers and buyers of SMEs.

## CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

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- County of Pinneberg (DE)
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# How to address the demographic challenge: A SHORTLIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

With demographic change – recently defined as one of the four key challenges for European regions by the EC – and the current economic crisis looming, the cities and regions of the Baltic Sea Region have to find creative ways of disclosing and utilizing unused opportunities. One of these hidden potentials is the people in the prime of their lives – the so called “Best Agers” (defined here as those aged 55+). They are a pool of older professionals who are healthier than ever, well-educated and motivated, and who can be mobilized to counteract the negative effects of demographic change.

In the study of labour market and employment, partners from six countries in the Baltic Sea Region have come together to analyze and present the problems as they are manifested in different parts of the region, to document approaches that can be benchmarked, and to present creative solutions.

The present summary report is directed to decision-makers, and to all those who share an interest in the demographic challenge in the Baltic Sea Region, and how it can be addressed.

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