

Extending working lives in Europe: Similarities and differences between early mover countries and late mover countries with special focus on Poland

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Due to demographic developments, in numerous European countries the share of older people is increasing. The main effects of this shift are financing problems in public pension schemes, as well as a lack of skilled labour in some professions. People aged 50 or older are considered a promising target group for higher labour supply. This is caused by their numerical strength and their high untapped potential resulting from low employment rates, both resulting in a high number of people not in paid employment.

In European countries, actors on different levels are trying to increase employment rates of this age group. On the macro level, policymakers implemented pro-employment reforms in various policy fields, for example pension/retirement policies, unemployment policies and disability policies. To focus on the first area, statutory retirement ages were raised, special (low) retirement ages for women were abolished, the latter especially in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. Further, early retirement routes were abolished or made less attractive, and the number of contribution years necessary for full pensions was raised. Especially in CEE countries, raises of statutory retirement ages and equalisations of these ages between men and women were conducted very quickly. For example, in Poland the statutory retirement age for men will be 67 in the year 2020 and for women in 2040. In the Czech Republic the legal retirement age of 67 will be reached for the birth cohort of 1977 (men and women). By way of comparison, in the year 2031 the German birth cohort of 1964 will reach the new retirement age of 67. Considering differences in residual life expectancies between CEE countries and Western Europe, in terms of policy reforms especially the Visegrád countries and the Baltic countries are not late movers when compared to Western Europe: Currently, residual life expectancies for Polish and Czech men at age 65 are more than two years below the German value, for women differences are at about one year (2014 data, OECD).

On the meso level, in contrast, developments in CEE countries lag behind. Research in the MoPAct project (‘Mobilising the potential of active ageing in Europe’, funded by the EU, 2013 - 2017) shows that pro-employability measures on the level of social partners and employers are markedly less developed in CEE countries than in Western Europe. In-company measures aimed at better health, skills, motivation, or the reconciliation of work and private life are less widespread and at a lower degree of social innovation. In this area, CEE countries can be considered ‘late mover’ countries when compared to Western Europe. Since workplace measures and their positive effects on older workers’ employability are an important component of a comprehensive strategy for longer working lives, and since older workers in CEE countries face significant barriers to longer working lives, especially in the area of health, in the current CEE strategy for longer working lives a stronger emphasis should be put on meso level measures, possibly with public support. Based on findings from the project MoPAct the paper depicts functioning, innovative and transferable strategies from various fields of action aimed at higher older worker employability.

Keywords: Pension reform, policies, employability, company level, best practice

JEL codes:

J18 Public Policy

J26 Retirement * Retirement Policies

J5 Labor-Management Relation, Trade Unions, and Collective Bargaining

J50 General

J81 Working Conditions