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Occupational health and safety (OHS) and risk factors of workers over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labour market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors – part 2

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Bezpečnost a ochrana zdraví při práci (BOZP) a rizikové faktory pracovníků nad 50 let - uplatnění starších osob v pracovním procesu s návrhy na opatření na úrovni odvětví a podniku - 2. část

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Abstract

Next article about results from project Occupational health and safety and risk factors of workers over 50 years old - the participation of older citizens in the labour market and proposals for measures in the industrial and commercial sectors is focused on target group – workers over 50, especially from the point of view of social policies and labour market.

Keywords: elderly worker, employers over 50 years, quality of working life, working conditions, safety and health at work, risk prevention, labour market, social policies, projects, results, Occupational Safety Research Institute

Abstrakt

Další článek ze série přinášející informace o výsledcích projektu “BOZP a rizikové faktory pracovníků nad 50 let – uplatnění starších osob v pracovním procesu s návrhy na opatření na úrovni odvětví a podniku” se zaměřuje na cílovou skupinu projektu – pracovníci nad 50 let, a to z hlediska sociální politiky a státu a pracovního trhu.

Klíčová slova: starší pracovníci, zaměstnanci ve věku 50+, kvalita pracovního života, pracovní podmínky, trh práce, bezpečnost a ochrana zdraví, prevence rizik, pracovní trh, sociální politika, projekty, výsledky, VÚBP

People over 50 as the target group from the point of view of social policies and the labour market

Summary of facts

The employment of older workers is tightly connected to the whole social system of the state. The approach by relevant entities to this topic is decided by a range of conditions that change over time and are determined by such factors as:

- the application of human and social rights (anti-discrimination, right to employment, to social security in cases of unemployment or working disability),
- demographic development (ageing of population, extending the average lifespan, proportion of productive and unproductive elements of the population,
- globalisation,
- economic policies and the situation in the labour market,
- the social security system, especially in regards to old-age retirement.

Most experts agree that it is necessary to react to the ageing of society with measures in various areas of social policy. For these policies to be effective it is necessary to carefully define the target group for which these measures are to be applied. That leaves us with the uneasy task of defining “old age”. Though the necessary operationalization exists (old age is easily associated with the age of retirement), the ageing of the organism and its manifestations are individual. From this point of view old age is a social construct that makes the understanding of this stage of life both easier and more complicated.

People of the same (retirement) age can have significantly different human potential - a potential that is identified mainly by health factors, education and also the degree of adaptability and resolve to both learn new things and cultivate one’s potential.

It is therefore logical that the target group of this project was circumscribed by the concept of “older workers over the age of 50”. This concerns the problems of both workers in their productive (pre-retirement) age and those who have reached retirement age and have remained in the labour market. Experts conversant in the labour market agree that older workers are a group that, to a greater extent, is threatened by unemployment. They talk about their

marginalization and cases of discrimination.

The trend that can make this situation even worse is the raising of the age of retirement. From the point of view of the sustainability of the current system of financing old-age retirement, this requirement of remaining longer in paid employment is understandable. But at the same time it will place new demands on the market. Those are especially connected with employers' attitudes towards employing older workers or towards retaining their current ones. On one hand, employers point out that the qualifications of older workers are insufficient. On the other hand, they are not willing to invest in raising their qualifications. This can be classified as discrimination by reason of age.

In order to remain objective it is necessary to mention that some studies have shown less motivation in older workers to learn and increase their qualifications. This deals especially with workers with a low base of qualifications. The lack of interest in older workers in further education leads to a drop in the quality of their human capital and their ability to hold their own in the labour market.

The problem may also be in the willingness of older people to continue in their employment in their senior years. When they lose their jobs and remain unemployed for long periods of time, older people prefer even more to find various ways to leave the labour market (early or disability retirement) over an effort to remain in it.

The relationship between unemployment and the obtainability of early retirement has become a tool of makers of social policy mechanisms – when unemployment rises, it is possible to use access to early retirement as a method to lower tension on the labour market and vice versa.

Suggested proposals

The policies dealing with retaining people over 50 (of pre-retirement age) in the labour market have several aspects that any mechanism should follow. Preventing unemployment and early retirement requires the use of tools in the areas of education, increasing skills and health services. An important thing to keep in mind during the creation and implementation of each measure is the fight against ageism and negative prejudices from the employer may have. This especially concerns measures in the area of income and wage policies that would motivate employers to employ older people. Additional measures toward the activisation of this group would be in the area of developing flexible forms of work and work conditions. Advocating such retirement, income and wage policies that would motivate older workers to remain in the labour market is also essential. Among the possible active employment policies is the implementation of measures inspired by the mechanisms being used for other risk groups in the labour market, such as people disadvantaged by health problems (work rehabilitation, employment incentives). It is also worth pondering “affirmative action”, establishing, for example, a mandatory quota for employers to employ workers 50 and over. The result of such measures does not have to have an explicitly desirable effect.

When writing employment policies regarding people over 50, it is necessary to keep in mind the diversity of the target group. Since there are social, cultural and economic differences between older people, it is possible to expect a differing amount of effectiveness among the measures aimed at retaining 50+ workers in the labour market. Policies should therefore be focused on combining measures in the area of the ageing of the population, reforming the retirement system and active employment policy.

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