

## THE 50+ IN 2050

By 2050, the European Union (EU)'s working age population (15-64 years) will have declined by 48 million.<sup>[1]</sup> By 2050, there will be double the number of people aged 65 years and over relative to the people of working age.<sup>[2]</sup> By 2050, the ageing population will have contributed to a halving of the EU's economic growth rate and a 10% increase in its public spending.<sup>[3]</sup> <sup>[4]</sup>



Reading these and other figures, there is no doubt that the age profile of EU citizens is dramatically changing! Moreover, these demographic shifts are projected to have a major and direct impact on the labour market and consequently the EU's economic and social prosperity, all within a relatively short space of time. And so it is hardly surprising that demographic change is high on the EU policy agenda. Indeed in recent years, the European Commission has published a Green Paper and a Communication, issued age-specific targets for Member States, and established a high-level Forum on "Europe's Demographic Future."<sup>[5]</sup>

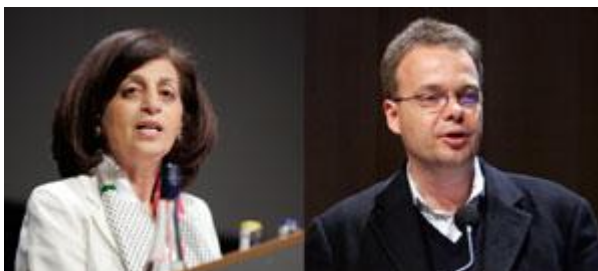
The EQUAL [Life Competence 50+](#) project sought to contribute to this EU agenda on demographic change by organising a European conference in Gothenburg, Sweden, on 18 – 20 June 2007. The subject of the conference was the situation of people aged 50+, people whose experience, skills and active employment participation will play an increasingly important role in the labour market between now and 2050. And hence the name of the conference: "Competence 50+ 2007: age as an opportunity."

The overall purpose of the conference was to bring together decision-makers, researchers and practitioners, especially those from the EQUAL community, to *"gain a broad picture of European developments within age management...and learn about the conditions that apply for future European investment to combat discrimination against older people in the labour market."* <sup>[6]</sup>

Over 480 conference participants participated in an exciting and very interactive mixture of seminars, exhibition opportunities, workshops and round-table dialogues centred on three main themes:

- Learning and Qualifications;
- Workplaces in Change; and
- Altered Conditions and Attitudes in the Labour Market.

Across these themes, the messages and insights were wide-ranging. For instance, the seminar entitled 'Union / Employer / State: three parts in one play' identified the health and safety dimension as being critical in age management. It is essential to consider one's health *throughout* working life; this constitutes a non-discriminatory approach insofar as it is too late by the time one gets to 50 to redress issues that have been coming up earlier in working life. The seminar also talked of a 'new intergenerational contract' whereby cooperation in work and competence transfer facilitate intergenerational solidarity. Arenas are therefore needed in which new solutions and measures are negotiated involving employers, social partners and researchers – in other words, a new pact between the generations facilitated by pro-active government.



Lenia Samuel and the Swedish minister Sven-Otto Littorin

Ms Lenia Samuel, Deputy Director of DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities also gave an interesting presentation, setting out how the European Social Fund (ESF) supports active ageing of the over 50s. One of her key messages was

the viewpoint of the individual: *"In the end it's all about adapting the work to the needs of the single individual and to make the job a pleasure. As Aristotle said 'Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work.' This is of course true for all age groups, not only older workers. But the person who has done manual work for 40 years and looks forward to retirement needs other incentives to have pleasure at work compared to a young graduate. In developing policies and practices on active ageing, we must therefore have in mind the viewpoint of the single individual."*

In linking the needs of the individual with those of wider society and EU policy frameworks, Ms Samuel also stressed the importance of awareness-raising targeted at policy makers, older workers and managers. She goes on to say that: *"An important element in awareness raising campaigns is to get rid of the negative stereotypes that surround older employees."*

Finally, looking to the future, Ms Samuel pointed out that active ageing is a priority in the new ESF (2007-2013). As such, she encouraged the conference participants to make good use of this financial instrument as part of their age-related work within their own Member States.

## **LAUNCH OF A NEW EUROPEAN AGE MANAGEMENT NETWORK**

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A particular highlight from the conference – and one that offers clear prospects for the future - was the seminar on the idea of setting up a European Age Management Network (based on a new EQUAL publication entitled "[A European Age Management Network: the way forward?](#)"). Indeed, the seminar was so engaging that it resulted in a spontaneous workshop, several meetings of interested parties and an 'action plan' during the course of the conference!



Why have a European Age Management Network? The seminar answered this question by firstly setting out current EU policies and initiatives in relation to age management and making clear that the network could help representatives at the EU, national and regional/local levels in addressing the 'age management challenge.' For example, the 2006 Joint Employment Report indicates that (overall) Member States are on the right path, but not making sufficient progress in meeting the 2010 target for the average employment rate of older workers (55 to 64 year olds), lifelong learning participation of the working age population and average exit age from the labour market. In addition, the European Commission has indicated a number of areas of concern, including:

- An insufficient lifecycle approach to work;
- The low participation of older workers in lifelong learning;
- The low employment rates of older women; and
- A general lack of emphasis on the "increasing adaptability of workers and labour markets" strategic priority of the European Employment Strategy.[\[7\]](#)

The network could therefore provide a forum to find solutions to these and other difficulties. Another reason for having the network is that EQUAL can provide a rich source for these solutions. In fact, the seminar went on to explain how numerous and active the age management projects in EQUAL are! Across both rounds, over 200 EQUAL projects have been experimenting with new approaches and tools to either help older workers individually and/or to address related issues and target groups (such as employer attitudes, younger workers in terms of knowledge transfer or anticipating demographic trends at the regional level). What is more, these projects show a close thematic fit with the EU policy agenda. By way of illustration (and based on a new piece of analysis presented for the first time in the seminar):

- The projects have been most active in relation to the themes of lifelong learning, (re)-integration into the labour market and adaptation to change;
- "A lifecycle approach to working life" was the main theme for the European working group on age management and many of the European dissemination activities set up under first round of EQUAL; and
- Older women feature as a key target group, as do older workers generally and employers.

All of these themes are directly relevant to the EU difficulties mentioned above.

The age management projects in EQUAL are also apt in terms of their activities. Based on a project sample, the EQUAL projects are clearly addressing age management from a wider perspective, not just basic training and support of older workers.<sup>[8]</sup> Many of them are undertaking research and studies, networking and focus group activities, as well as awareness-raising – activities that are well suited to engagement in a network on a European scale.

Aside from saying that there is a demand for the network – in terms of EU policy agenda – and supply – in the form of EQUAL – the seminar also made the argument that the network is 'perfectly' timed insofar as it builds a bridge to new ESF initiatives (2007 - 2013) before EQUAL ends (in 2008). In other words, EQUAL projects can use the network to inform people engaged in designing and implementing new ESF activities related to age management based on the EQUAL principles (such as partnership, innovation and transnational cooperation). And longer term, the network can provide a platform for these future ESF programme and project managers to collaborate, exchange good practice and learn from each other – something that is critically important now that the Member States have greater responsibility for day-to-day ESF management in the new funding period.

Underpinning all of the positive messages about the network, the seminar stressed the importance of addressing the strategic and operational issues, such as what *exactly* would the network do, who would be involved and where will the finances come from? Taking this on board and convinced that the network was a good idea, a group of 25 conference participants (representing 12 countries) volunteered to form a working group, and to discuss and scope out the "what, how and who" of the network.

## **WHAT, HOW AND WHO OF THE NETWORK**

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And here is what they came up with. In terms of objectives, there was a general agreement that the network would seek to:

- promote and facilitate mutual learning, benchmarking and knowledge transfer;
- aide communication and cooperation;
- collate and disseminate good practice and innovation; and
- raise awareness of relevant issues.

via a range of activities, including thematic seminars, discussion groups, peer reviews, a website and/or newsletters. One activity that gained overwhelming support was that of a "European Age Equality Award" whereby companies would be recognised (by the network) for their good practice in age management. Employers were seen as an important, but difficult-to-reach target group, and the award – based on the successful experience of a German company called CC:B - was seen as an ideal way of engaging them!

In terms of network membership, a whole range of 'age management actors' were identified. These were grouped into:

- policy makers such as the European Commission, national and regional governments, and social partners;
- researchers, for example academic institutions and think tanks; and
- practitioners including EQUAL project promoters, various service providers and most importantly, companies.

Given the wide scope of the membership, it was proposed that the network could in fact serve as an 'umbrella' for smaller groupings and networks, thereby enabling an invaluable multi-disciplinary approach; for example, on one occasion, the network could organise a thematic seminar for researchers to share innovations in the field, and on another, an event for practitioners to meet with government officials, or perhaps one for companies to learn from each other.

One challenge emerging from the working group discussions was: what exactly is age management?! Some participants saw it as solely applying to older workers, whereas others had

a lifecycle perspective, taking account of younger workers and people throughout their working lives. Whilst the working group did not come to any definitive conclusion, they all agreed that the question of definition was an important one for defining the exact scope of the network – and hence needed further discussion after the conference.

## **THE MORE THE MERRIER!**

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Overall, Competence 50+ was a highly successful event. In fact, it directly responded to Ms Samuel's call for awareness-raising by bringing together people from all spheres to discuss the needs of the 50+, both now and in the future. Aside from this article, there is plenty more information. Within the next few weeks, the conference organisers will be publishing notes of the various seminars and workshops on the event [website](#). There will also be a summary publication appearing on the EQUAL website.

And let's not forget the European Age Management Network! Where does it go from here? In the closing plenary of the conference, several working group members were tasked with making enquiries about national and EU funding - they have already scheduled meetings with potential funders. The finer details and workings of the network will also be developed, with the view to being showcased at DG Regional Policy's [Open Days](#) (October 2007) and the EQUAL event in Greece on "Anticipating Change: effective approaches to lifelong learning and age management" (December 2007). As the network is evolving, the objective is to identify as many interested parties and contributors as possible - the more, the merrier! So if you are interested in finding out more, have some comments or ideas on the network or know of some funding possibilities, then do get in contact with Life Competence 50+ ([info@livskompetens.com](mailto:info@livskompetens.com)). And who knows, maybe with your support, the network could reach the age of 50+!

[1] Communication from the Commission 'The Demographic Future of Europe – from Challenge to Opportunity' COM (2006) 571 final, pp.4-5

[2] Communication from the Commission 'The Demographic Future of Europe – from Challenge to Opportunity' COM (2006) 571 final, pp.4-5

[3] From the average annual growth rate in GDP of 2.4% in the EU-25 over the period 2004-2010 to only 1.2% between 2030 and 2050

[4] Communication from the Commission 'The Demographic Future of Europe – from Challenge to Opportunity' COM (2006) 571 final, pp.4-5

[5] Communication from the Commission 'Green paper - Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations' COM (2005) 94 final; the Communication from the Commission 'The Demographic Future of Europe – from Challenge to Opportunity' COM (2006) 571 final; the first Forum was held in October 2006 and is scheduled to take place every two years

[6] Competence 50+ Programme and Abstract Book, June 2007

[7] Joint Employment Report 2006/2007, 6706/07

[8] The sample comprised all age management projects funded under the Adaptability pillar of the second round of EQUAL