

## REGIONS ACTIVE IN DISCUSSING ACTIVE AGEING

### Active Ageing in Open Days

Despite an early start, the conference room for the "Active ageing: Regional responses to the demographic challenge" workshop was filled to capacity indicating the importance of age management in the European Union (EU) regions. The workshop was delivered as part of the [5th OPEN DAYS-European Week of Regions and Cities](#) organised by Directorate General for Regional Policy (DG REGIO) of the [European Commission](#) (the Commission) in cooperation with the EQUAL Unit of the DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (DG EMPL).

The workshop chaired by Ms. Annemarie Särner ([Confederation of Swedish Enterprise](#)) consisted of four presentations delivered by: Mr. Julius op de Beke (DG EMPL) on Active Ageing on the European scene; Ms. Helen Tubb ([GHK Consulting Ltd.](#)) on activities funded by the [EQUAL](#) Community Initiative[1]; Ms. Kamila Jeżowska (Project Manager of "[Alliance for Work](#)") and Mr. Anders Östebo (Coordinator of "[Competence 50+](#)" project) who provided examples of EQUAL projects developing successful age management solutions in the European regions.

### DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE IN EUROPE: FROM CHALLENGE TO OPPORTUNITY

Mr. op de Beke, a socio-economic analyst who contributed to the Commission's [Green paper on demographic change](#), argued that demographic change, supported by the right reforms and policy measures may constitute an opportunity for the people in the EU as they live longer and have more time for self realisation.

Mr. op de Beke identified three main drivers for demographic change in Europe: fertility (how many children do we have?), mortality (how long do we live?) and migration (where do we live?). [Eurostat](#) predicts that birth rates across the EU will continue to rise, albeit slightly, and also life expectancy will increase. The number of people over 80 is expected to triple by 2050 as a consequence of the baby boom that took place after the World War II. In practice this means that there will only be two persons of working age for each citizen aged 65+[2] compared to four today. Mr. op de Beke said one way of avoiding this scenario could be to adjust the retirement age, which has not been changed since it was introduced by Otto von Bismarck over 100 year ago when the life expectancy rate was somewhat lower than today. Immigration could be yet another response to the diminishing size of the EU's economically active population, providing the Union with additional workforce.

- The EU has developed a number of measures to accommodate this expected demographic change:
- The Open Method of Coordination[3] ([OMC](#)) on social protection and social inclusion
- The European Employment Strategy ([EES](#)) which includes an active ageing dimension
- The Green Paper "Confronting demographic change: a new solidarity between the generations" ([COM\(2005\)94](#)), which resulted in the Commission Communication "The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity", proposing a comprehensive approach in response to the challenges of an ageing population in Europe

The [renewed Lisbon Strategy](#), which aims to raise employment rates in order to compensate for the declining working-age population.

Mr. op de Beke argued that employment growth is still possible in the EU until 2020 but thereafter economic growth has to be achieved through increased productivity, saying "We still have time to get richer, before we get old." The key message is that EU Member States have a 10-year window of opportunity to prepare for demographic change by investing in human capital. However, some EU regions require immediate initiatives to promote active ageing as they are presently facing low birth rates or the emigration of economically active persons to urban areas or

elsewhere within EU and therefore may not have this luxury of 10 years to prepare. This is where EQUAL solutions may offer some help.

## **AGE MANAGEMENT WITHIN EQUAL**

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In a presentation which explored the European context as well as projects on the ground, Ms. Helen Tubb (Senior Consultant at GHK<sup>[4]</sup>) provided an overview of the EQUAL Community Initiative, its experience in Active Ageing and examples of publications to communicate EQUAL lessons and good practice in age management.

The EQUAL Initiative is financed by the European Social Fund ([ESF](#)) and co-funded by the EU Member States. The EU support totals some € 3.274 billion distributed to 3,357 EQUAL projects. Projects have been created to generate and test new ideas with the aim to find new ways of tackling discrimination and inequality within and beyond the labour market. Principles constituting the basis of EQUAL projects are partnership-working; innovation; empowerment and mainstreaming.

Funded by the DG EMPL, GHK has been monitoring developments in the Age management sub-theme within the framework of the EQUAL Initiative for the last five years. Some 210 EQUAL projects, across 20 Member States, address the issue of demographic change. Analysis of a sample of these projects showed that EQUAL projects support "older workers" through training, skills audits and validation, fostering their reintegration in the labour market and active ageing in the work place. EQUAL's work predominantly focuses on small and medium-sized enterprise (SME), though a large proportion of the projects also work at the regional, national or sectoral levels. As well as older workers in general, EQUAL projects target senior female workers; unemployed people; and youth. EQUAL's activities include intergenerational learning, workforce-renewal, and preservation of tacit knowledge in "ageing" industries. Raising awareness of the importance of active ageing among social partners and politicians at various decision-making levels is another activity common to many EQUAL projects.

As well as regular updates on the general age management theme and the activities of individual projects published on the EQUAL [website](#), GHK has produced a number of documents to inform and mainstream the results of European events on Active Ageing. Examples include a report on the Agora conference on age and diversity management "[Experience is capital](#)" in June 2005 and the EQUAL [conference Competence 50+<sup>\[5\]</sup>](#) in June 2007, which among other issues, attempted to assess the need for a [European Age Management network](#). Ms. Tubb distributed copies of the EQUAL publication entitled "the Working Life Cycle - EQUAL Develops New Ways of Approaching Age Management" (insert the link to the updated policy brief once it's on-line) and finally, drew the workshop participants' attention to the upcoming European EQUAL conference '*Anticipating Change: effective approaches to lifelong learning and age management*' organised by the Greek EQUAL Managing Authority with the support from DG EMPL and assistance from GHK on 6 and 7 December 2007 in Athens, Greece.

## **ALLIANCE FOR WORK - ALLIANCE FOR EMPLOYEES 45+**

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The *Alliance for Work* project from the Łódzki region (Poland) addresses the needs of the people over 45 facing the risk of unemployment or already redundant due to restructuring in traditional sectors. Ms. Jeżowska reported that employers in Poland still share negative views of people aged 45+ mostly due to ineffective human resources management in the past and are reluctant to employ from this group. However, to complete the picture, older people in the region often have low level qualifications and are reluctant to engage in learning and re-qualification and lack awareness of the importance of lifelong learning (LLL).

By mobilising a wide partnership including trade unions, employer organisations, NGOs, training providers and Labour agencies, *Alliance for Work* is working on retention and reintegration activities for people aged 45 + and has a particular focus on women. To date the project has provided "Job coaching" services to more than 140 people aged 45+ in medical services, the textile industry and NGOs who face the threat of redundancy or have been made redundant.

A personalised "Job coaching" approach which results in a tailored Individual development plan (IDP) is the main assistance tool developed by the project. The Job coaching offer continues beyond the IDP as the approach includes monitoring and evaluation to track IDP implementation and outcomes. The *Alliance for Work* project also provided methodological and soft skills training

for job coaches in Labour agencies and these activities are expected to continue beyond the project's activities.

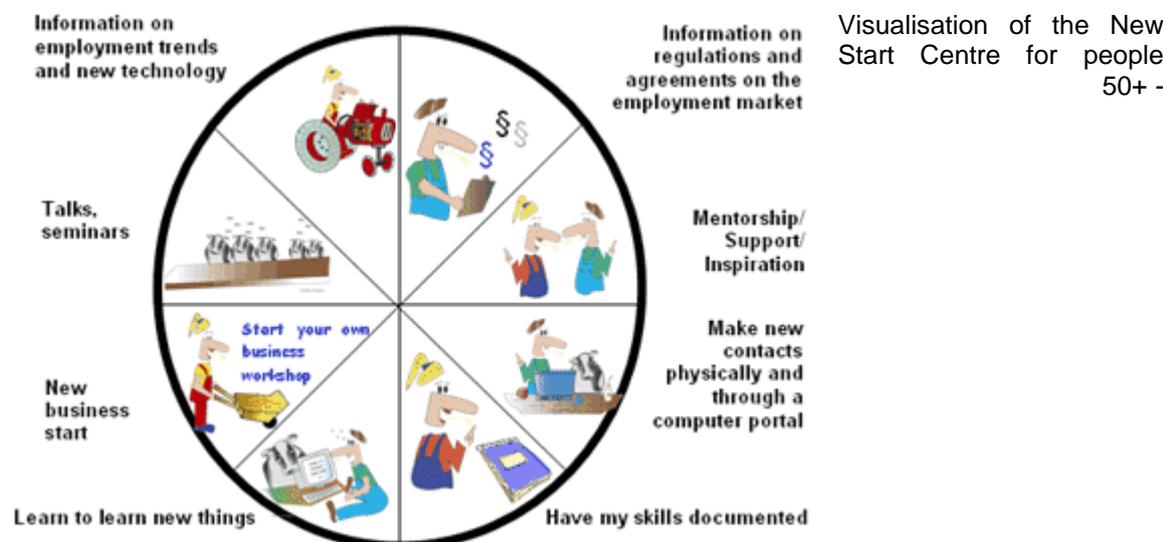
The main result of the project is an integrated training system for sustaining people 45 + in the labour market, based on the job coaching method. In addition, activities have resulted in new training programmes and post graduate studies (45+ career management). Looking more broadly the Job coaching tool has provided a vehicle for maintaining the social dialogue, and has encouraged horizontal mainstreaming of developed practice between social and academic partners.

## COMPETENCE 50+

The *Life Competence 50+* project in Sweden unites 12 partners, in developing new methods so that older people (aged 50+) can work longer or re-enter working life. According to Mr. Anders Östebo, throughout life individuals acquire more and more skills from their work experience, personal life and hobbies. If someone is aware of all of their skills and capabilities then they can "sell" them to potential employers. The *Life Competence 50+* project has developed an instrument to map skills and competencies. The "Life competence analysis" involves a philosophical process of self reflection, over around five weeks and can be used to show the skills, capabilities and potential an individual has to offer, within the workplace or to re-enter work.

To date 65 people have used the "Life competence analysis" tool, with some excellent results. Some users have found new employment in sectors in which they have no previous work experience, but have developed transferable skills through non-work related activities whereas others in work have used the experience to find sustainable and productive positions in the labour market. The project is also planning to adapt the method so that it could be used to validate the skills of immigrants settling in Sweden.

The New Start Centre is a follow up project that the *Life Competence 50+* project has started in cooperation with a group of unemployed people aged 50+. –The centre, described in the figure below, provides a meeting point for job actors, employers and job seekers. All of the services developed for the 50 + age group have been developed by people aged 50+.



Source: [www.livskompetens.com](http://www.livskompetens.com)

Mr. Östebo concluded his presentation by saying that the *Life Competence 50+* project has initiated the creation of Age Management Network (AMN) to facilitate the cooperation on the development of a policy and practice framework facilitating the Active Ageing. The project planned a meeting of academics, company representatives and policy makers on November 7-8 in Brussels to develop this network.

## DISCUSSION

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In response to the presentations, Mr John Walsh (DG REGIO) informed participants that the Commission has recently launched the "Interregional co-operation programme [INTERREG IVC](#)" and that demographic change was one of the challenges covered by the programme. With a total budget of around EUR 400 million this initiative is designed to support regional and urban networks uncover best practice in economic modernisation, particularly those contributing to the Union's growth and jobs agenda, and to disseminate this best practice to stimulate sustainable growth and reduce economic disparities. Interested public authorities have until mid-January 2008 to respond to the call for projects.

Other key messages emerging from the discussion included:

- The importance of engaging employers with the issue of active ageing
- The need to valorise the skills and competences of older workers to allow them to remain in and re-enter the labour market
- The value of intergenerational learning and cooperation as means of increasing older worker productivity
- The need to embrace the life-cycle approach to active ageing by looking at employment and training choices all through the working life
- The importance of stimulating awareness of the opportunities and benefits of the silver economy.

In addition to the presentations and the associated discussion, the workshop provided an excellent networking opportunity.

[1] EQUAL projects are co-financed by Member States

[2] Commission Communication *The demographic future of Europe – from challenge to opportunity* Brussels, 12.10.2006 [COM\(2006\) 571 final](#)

[3] Please click here for [five elements](#) of OMC

[4] GHK Consulting Ltd. is a private, employee-owned company, which provides technical assistance services to the Commission's EQUAL Unit in mainstreaming information, good practice and results of the EQUAL programme's Adaptability themes – Lifelong learning and Adaptation to Change.

[5] This conference was organised by a Swedish project [Life Competence 50+](#)