



EUROCOMMERCE AND UNI-EUROPA COMMERCE Voluntary guidelines supporting age diversity in Commerce

Long-term demographic trends, particularly falling birth rates, means that the workforce is ageing across the EU. This will have major implications for economic growth and social expenditure. In response to these trends, the need to adapt employment policies and practices to the ageing workforce has become a major concern of the EU institutions and Member States.¹

In response to the Employment guidelines, which invited the social partners to develop a policy for active ageing, the social partners for Commerce, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa, have decided to promote and recommend best practice concerning mature workers.

Commerce employs a large number of ageing workers, often with a long work history in this sector. Their professional experience constitutes an asset, which should not be neglected. Sharing experience between generations adds value to the quality of work and to job satisfaction. Structural and technological change is particularly important in commerce, which must react rapidly to changing consumer demands, as well as to both internal and external competition. Major business benefits may also be derived, by reflecting the customer base and understanding customer needs. Workers on their side expect good working conditions along their working life. It is therefore particularly important for companies and for the social partners to consider how these changes will impact upon all staff

In a working life where structural and technological changes are increasingly common, older workers may need special consideration and support which helps them with dealing successfully with their situation. Working with new technology and particularly in knowledge-related functions, the ways of older people to approach their tasks may differ from those of their younger colleagues. Accepting age diversity in working life also means to accept the related diversity in ways of solving problems and approaching tasks.

From an employment point of view, policies and measures concerning ageing workers must take into account different time perspectives, bearing in mind changes in their life and any difficulties that may be associated with social security. Job opportunities for young people can be created, by making it possible for ageing workers to retire earlier. However in the longer term a declining population, as has been predicted, may cause labour shortages and there may be a need to promote the possibilities for ageing workers to remain in active working life.

There is not a conflict between these approaches and suitable incentives can help to attain the policy objectives. However, attention should be paid not to jeopardise job creation opportunities for younger people, when promoting incentive measures aimed at maintaining or reintegrating older people in or into the labour market.

EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce agree that there needs to be a focus by governments, social partners and enterprises on the age aspects of human resources management. Governments must ensure that appropriate legal frameworks are in place to assist the social partners and enterprises in developing flexible and appropriate working arrangements, which are adapted to supporting age diversity and to responding to the perhaps different needs of various age groups and individuals. As European social partners for commerce, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce, for their part, are committed to developing a European framework for working life and labour relations in their industry through a voluntary social dialogue, through concluding European Framework Agreements and through issuing Guidelines. In approaching this task, they will give full consideration to age diversity.

¹ EC 1999 communication "Towards a Europe for all ages – promoting prosperity and intergenerational solidarity"; The 1999, 2000 and 2001 Employment guidelines invited Members states and Social partners to develop a policy for active ageing, encompassing life-long learning and flexible working arrangements; Article 13 of the Amsterdam treaty forbids discrimination on the ground of age; Council's Directive establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.



In order to promote a dynamic commerce industry, where flexible enterprises provide secure employment under good conditions to qualified workers, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa agree that the following guidelines are recommended for the benefit both of enterprises and employees when approaching the age aspects of human resources management.

1. For the purpose of these guidelines, 'ageing' or 'mature' workers are workers who are defined as such in legislation, agreements or codes of practice, where they exist on European or national levels.
2. According to national law where that exists and European law, ageing workers shall not be subject to discrimination at the workplace. An age-neutral approach should be adopted as regards employment relations. Recruitment, vocational training and the distribution of positions within the enterprise should depend on skills and abilities, regardless of the age of the person concerned. The social partners have a special role to play in abolishing age stereotypes at the workplace.
3. Employers and their older employees should jointly consider any mutually beneficial options whereby they might remain longer in active working life or retire earlier. This may be achieved through flexible retirement schemes during the last active years, during which the needs of individual workers, enterprises and societies can be reconciled.
4. Modern technology and ergonomics can in many cases increase productivity, while promoting quality of work. So wherever possible, age should be taken into account in designing jobs.
5. The social partners have a special role to play in finding new forms of work and training, to facilitate the continuous integration of ageing workers. Incentives should encourage workers of all ages to take up learning and training opportunities. It is important for older workers to have equal access to training opportunities and should benefit as far as possible from programmes, courses and seminars, taking into account their initial skills and capacities, especially in regard to the introduction of new technologies or work processes.
6. Easily adaptable mutually agreed schemes should, where relevant, pay attention to the specific requirements of older workers. Working time, for example, could be adjusted in accordance with existing legal provisions where this is mutually beneficial to meet the changing needs/capacities of workers. Voluntary part time work and voluntary flexible work scheduling can be encouraged, to allow ageing workers to retain their health and to continue their active participation in working life until retirement. Potential negative effects of such arrangements on the future pension of the worker should be considered.

Bearing in mind the need to avoid any new kind of discrimination at the workplace, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa are committed to improving the employment and employability of all workers, and in this way are helping to support European Community policies in this area. They will continue to explore measures aimed at giving ageing workers the possibility to remain in active working life.

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