

FINAL REPORT

PRESENTED TO THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION



ELDERS – ELDER EMPLOYEES IN COMPANIES EXPERIENCING RESTRUCTURING: STRESS AND WELL-BEING

Modena, 2009-2010

Consortium

ADAPT – Associazione per gli Studi Internazionali e Comparati
sul Diritto del lavoro e sulle Relazioni industriali

BAuA – Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin

ESADE – Instituto de Estudios Laborales, Universidad Ramon Lull

FIOH – Finnish Institute of Occupational Health

ibw – Institut für Bildungsforschung der Wirtschaft

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The seven-year programme targets all stakeholders who can help shape the development of appropriate and effective employment and social legislation and policies, across the EU-27, EFTA-EEA and EU candidate and pre-candidate countries.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key points

The aim of the “ELDERS - ELDER Employees in companies experiencing Restructuring: Stress and well-being” project is to address the consequences of restructuring and economic crisis in terms of stress and well-being for older workers, and to identify the proper measures in the view to preventing, managing and mitigating such impact. In order to achieve this objective, the ELDERS consortium has set up an interdisciplinary international expert network in psycho-sociology, training, industrial relations and labour law, physical ergonomics and health at work which has investigated the multidimensional facets of the phenomenon by way of combining between research, policy, and practice-oriented activities.

The results of the ELDERS have been:

- dissemination and awareness raising activities;
- the setting up of national seminar series and a concluding conference;
- the organisation and the implementation of an on-line permanent Observatory on New Risks and organizational change on ADAPT website;
- the promotion of material disseminated through ADAPT international mailing list;
- the drawing up of a report presenting the results of desk and field research;
- the drawing up of a chapter containing a set of collected good practices;
- the drawing up of a chapter containing a set of recommendations for policy makers and social partners aiming at promoting memoranda of understanding to develop services and integrative support, as part of a bilateral system, for enhancing well-being of older workers affected by restructuring processes and economic crisis.

The added value and innovative aspects of the ELDERS project are summarized as follows:

- the project develops positive measures with the social partners that will help to reduce stress indicators for older workers and make a contribution to dealing with the employment prospects of older workers. The project is innovative in isolating this potentially vulnerable group for further study and action;
- thanks to the linkage between research, practice and policy-oriented activities, the ELDERS project also adds value to the work of the European Commission, national agencies and social partners in supporting evidence based policy making;
- the ELDERS consortium is featured by a multi-stakeholders partnership, involving representatives of social partner organisations, research centres as well as national public bodies committed to identify effective ways to prevent and deal with workers' health problems faced in restructuring;
- the ELDERS partnership can count on a unique richness of disciplinary and sectoral perspectives, encompassing psycho-sociology, training, industrial relations and labour law, physical ergonomics, and health at work.

Background and context in which the action was carried out

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the experiences of older workers. The immediate drivers have been the European social policy aimed at increasing older people's labour market participation, as well as national government initiatives to close early retirement routes. However, the longer term drivers are steadily ageing populations across Europe, coupled with lowering real retirement ages in most EU member states. Various projects have focused on push and pull factors leading to early retirement including discrimination, pensions, caring responsibilities and redundancy. The Elders project is focused on a particular push factor: the impact of workplace restructuring on older workers' employability, as well as health and well-being. The field of investigation concerned a general review of the international framework and six deep focus/case studies on the following EU countries: Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy, Spain and UK, in order to guarantee an original transnational dimension. The economic sector of investigation was the private sector; the research group was mainly concentrated on those sectors which were most affected by restructuring processes and/or changes in work organisation, as well as marked deterioration in working conditions in the countries of analysis. The analysis took into careful consideration national and regional specificities as well as the fact that restructuring at sectoral level takes very varying forms.

Targeted group

The primary target group of the ELDERS project was composed of older employees (over 40) experiencing restructuring at all level of the company (e.g. managers and workers) in a perspective of gender mainstreaming. A secondary broader

target group was composed of companies which could be affected by restructuring processes or are involved in these processes, social partners and workers associations, which could benefit from the results of the project and particularly from the best practices collected. Finally, a third target group was represented by policy makers and policy advisors which could improve their awareness of programmes to prevent and treat the health problems of workers faced with restructuring.

Aims/objectives of the action

The specific aims of the ELDER project are listed as follows:

- desk research on different industrial relations systems and approaches to social dialogue in the countries of analysis;
- elaboration of a international framework and literature review on the impact of restructuring on older workers in terms of stress and well-being;
- elaboration of a questionnaire aiming to measure stress and well being of older workers and detect the most successful measures which could improve the conditions of older workers experiencing restructuring;
- submission of interviews to social partners and public institutions representatives;
- identification of good practices intended to prevent or treat the negative impact of restructuring on older workers' health and well-being which are indicative of participatory and training techniques that are suitable for implementing preventive measures;
- review of international training policies aiming at easing transitions of older employees;
- formulation of recommendations for policy makers, social partners and practitioners, with a specific focus on the preparation and accompanying measures for workers and managers experiencing changes in the event of restructuring;
- dissemination of results, impact multiplication and awareness raising towards relevant stakeholders through the Set up and implementation of a on-line permanent Observatory on New risks and a newsletter, organisation of national seminars and a final conference;
- dissemination an awareness arising activities through the organization of six national seminars, a training session and a final international conference accompanying them with a proper reporting activity.

In particular the ELDERS project is based on the belief that 'an actively engaged workforce is fundamental to ensuring success of all other interventions on health and safety'.

Results and key findings

The international review suggests that there are three interrelated reasons why the topic is particularly in relation to older people's employability. First, older workers have long been regarded by both employers and the State as a reserved army of labour, brought into and forced out of the labour market as economic conditions require (Riach 2006, Bruginiani et al. 2001). This places them in a precarious position, relative to their younger colleagues during both organisational and economic restructurings. Second, as Blossfeld et al (2006) noted, organisational restructuring can have a particularly strong impact on older workers who find it difficult to adapt to technological change. Finally, older workers are concentrated in traditional industries and therefore adversely impacted in shifts toward service based economies (Quadagno, Hardy & Hazelrigg 2003). The ELDERS project firstly provides a review of literature on the relationship between age, job insecurity and health and well-being. The international analysis, in conclusion, suggests that the job insecurity associated with workplace restructuring does have a negative impact on older workers in terms of the shock of job loss; the imbalance of effort and reward; and loss of job control. The literature suggests that there are particular health risks associated with job insecurity: Mental health risks; Cardiovascular disease; Musculoskeletal problems; Injury; Poor lifestyle habits; Decreased functionality. In addition, attention must be paid to the impact of job insecurity on different groups of workers, particularly by not only age, but also gender, qualifications and job class, and employment status. There are four policy areas which could buffer against precarious employment, increase work reward or increase job control: healthy living to mitigate the impact of job loss on older workers; flexible working hours to enhance work reward; and job redeployment and lifelong learning to enhance adaptability. **Austria.** According to ESWT 2004/05 (Establishment Survey on Working Time), 81% of Austrian companies have employees aged 50 and over (for companies with at least 10 employees). By international comparison (European Working Conditions Survey 2005), about one third of Austrian employees report work-related health problems, which is slightly below the EU-27 average. The most common health problems are backache, muscular pains and stress (with each being reported by about one third of those with work related health problems). Irritability and sleeping problems are also mentioned by about one third of those employees. About half of all employees complain about the intensity of the working process, i.e. high working speed and time pressure. One in three employees moans about monotonous work and repetitive tasks. Compared to EU-15, Austria has a higher share of employees who suffer from work intensity and a lower share of those reporting

monotonous work. One in ten employees over 55 has personally experienced age discrimination, which is the fourth highest share of all European countries. Interestingly, if one conducts a multivariate analysis of work related health problems for Austria, age is statistically insignificant. In contrast, the degree of physical risk, work intensity, amount of non-standard working hours, perception of work-life balance and gender are significant influence factors for the probability of work related health problems. In Austria, the labour market for older employees has some distinct features: Since the seventies, Austria has one of the lowest unemployment rates in the EU, and one of the lowest early retirement ages in the EU. Both facts are connected as early retirement of older employees was an accepted political measure to prevent unemployment and an economic measure to reduce personnel costs over decades of fundamental company reorganisations. This early retirement policy reduced the proportion of workers over 55 in the workforce to a comparatively low level. At the same time, this development supported misjudgements about ageing and ability to work and hindered companies from learning how to adapt their structures to achieve the best results in every age group. Early retirement became a standard way of ending one's working life that was supported by all the social partners. According to the ELDERS-survey, company restructurings consist of mostly changing the management system and the company hierarchy as well as new combinations or separations of units or divisions and/or restructuring of core production or service systems. The consequences for employees are usually a change of work tasks and/or superiors and colleagues. For most of the employees their position, income, responsibility have been left unchanged. For 20-30% of them they improved (only a minority of less than 10% reported an aggravation). Overall, virtually no Austrian respondent felt emotionally exhausted at their current work the whole time ("always").

Finland. In Finland, society expects employees to continue their working careers and maintain their working capacity for as long as possible, preferably right up to their full retirement age. Finland has a long tradition in studying the relationship between ageing and work. Different kind of research, development activities etc. have been conducted to find reasons for early retirement and solutions to support staying at work as long as possible. The revision earnings-related pension system (2005) also primarily aimed at support workers to remain at work longer. In case of organizational change there are several laws related to employees' rights. The Finnish Ministry of Employment and the Economic have organized services to make sure that employees' situation during the organizational change is secured. Also the labour market parties in Finland decided in 2005 to implement "change security" model during restructuring. The aim was to speed up re-employment of redundant employees. At the same time, there are systems which support early retirement. For example, one major reason why elderly employees in Finland quit working due to restructuring situations is the so called "unemployment pension tube" system. This system offers elderly employees a possibility to retire earlier, which they often use. Recently, this system has been made stricter and only those long-term unemployed born before year 1950 can apply for unemployment pension. However, one of the challenges of the system is how to make sure that all those elderly employees who use it, do it voluntarily and not because they feel pressure for example from their workmates. Generally the situation of elderly employees seems good in Finland. Their employment rate has increased during the last decade and the recent financial recession did not have major effect on them. They also are satisfied with their work and feel most equally treated at the work place. It also seems that the changes in the workplace do not have so strong effect on them; to their work tasks and to the way they experience the changes. In fact it seems that the situation of younger workers is more vulnerable. Based on the information and experiences available in Finland, it seems clear that communication, appreciation and co-operation between all parties during the organizational restructuring process are key elements of a successful change. These three elements involve all levels in the society; the way policy makers, ministries, organizations (managers, supervisors, work groups, individual workers), OHS and other parties act.

UK The UK is a liberal market economy and liberal residual welfare system. Compared with those elsewhere in Europe, older British workers have limited social protections to insulate them from job loss during organisational change. However, there are also few institutional barriers to prevent older workers to seek or stay in work. The most notable institutional barrier is the default retirement age (DRA), codified in the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 which allows employers to compulsorily dismiss employees at the age of 65 solely for the reason of retirement. However, the DRA is scheduled to be abolished in 2011. Older worker participation rates in the UK are high relative to Europe and have been sustained throughout the 2009-2010 recession. However, older workers are made vulnerable by both flexibilisation of work (especially after the age of 65) and erosion of occupational pension rights. Regulations to oblige employers to address risk factors associated with stress and job security are relatively weak. Evidence from a survey of privatised employees shows that job insecurity has an impact on older workers health and well being. Both the immediate threat of job loss and the cumulative deterioration of working conditions can impact on older workers' sense of well being, both mental and physical. Further, job insecurity can lead to a loss of sense of control over one's own career. UK employers and trade unions are developing innovative approaches to helping older workers manage the transition processes. These include initiatives to encourage older workers to participate in training, mentoring programmes to enable older workers to make good use of their experiential knowledge, and flexible working to allow workers to transition into retirement. The case of the UK suggests that the following areas would benefit from management and union partnership: Enhanced adaptability, particularly in terms of learning opportunities; Communication and support during periods of organisational change; Flexible working and reduction in long working hours; Age neutrality in terms of career development, learning and support. Restructuring is often leading to changes in performance and quality requirements as well as higher work density. Under these changed circumstances, the company's success is not primarily determined by technology optimisation, but is assured by an optimal adjustment

of the working systems to the physical and mental performance of humans. The consequences of an insensitive dealing with restructuring are among other things:

- counterproductive loss of productivity;
- “Creaming-off” effect of the most productive parts of the workforce;
- loss of innovative capacity and commitment of the survivors;
- low tendency for qualified parolée to return after economic recovery;
- deterioration of the company image with potential future candidates.

Obviously, restructuring is a stressful event for both managers and employees. It involves uncertainty, the reality or the prospect of job loss, loss of support networks, and additional pressure to work long hours and achieve short-term results. Simply the fear of job loss may cause distress as real as actual dismissal. Also after a crisis, many employees may experience symptoms of a post-traumatic disorder, which has already been labeled “survivor sickness”. Some workers that remain experience feelings of guilt (Why was I spared?) and some experience continued uncertainty (Will I be out next?). Employees in post-restructuring context may be wary about the future direction of the organisation and may experience a decline in trust. Survivors often find job has been deeply modified, and increasingly experience role ambiguity. **Germany** generally in Germany older people are described as a labour reserve, when it is notorious that job seekers over 50 years are often told that they are too old for the job, and actually older workers have only little chance to get back into work when they need to leave the company after restructuring. Older people have difficulties to return back into employment after a period of unemployment. However, there is the alternative – unlike for younger unemployed people – of retirement. Older unemployed people are compared to all unemployed longer out of work. They find a new job after an average of 66.9 weeks, all unemployed after 41.9 weeks. 54.3% of the older unemployed have been jobless for more than one year, the share of all unemployed is 39.1%. These data reflect not only the obstacles to reintegration into the labour market. Summarising the available evidence on the connection between aging and the state of health, mainly three categories of occupational risk factor can be identified, which correlate over the occupational career i.e. with longer exposure time or with a high health risk and therefore affect the employment opportunities of older workers:

- excessive physical and psychological demands (e.g. static muscle work, high input, lifting and carrying, high concentration demands, poor working time);
- highly stressful physical-chemical environment (e.g. noise, dust, weather effects).

Poor work organisation, new forms of division of labour and increased performance control (e.g. lack of freedom, time and deadline pressure, responsibility pressure, role conflicts at work) It was found, that older worker have a higher rate of discouragement and loss of reputation, this is called the age typical motivation risk. Their causes stem from age discrimination, such as pass over promotion, exclusion from professional training or the existence of negative age stereotypes with colleagues and/or supervisor. Motivation losses arise from management deficiencies, and thus from the lack of an “age-friendly” corporate culture. An additional gain of age typical risks can also trigger the change of the working world, due to the impact of globalisation, greater cost pressures or labour flexibility, destandardisation of labour time and employment relationships, as well as the increased operational pace of innovation. An international review of published research on the health impact of job insecurity and restructuring/downsizing (Bohle, Quinlan and Mayhew, 2001) deduced that 88% of the compared 68 studies found a measurable adverse effect in terms of least one of a range of indices (including an increased risk of work-related injury, occupational violence, cardiovascular disease and psychological distress/mental illness). The results of a German cross sectional study (BIBB/IAB) based on a large sample of more than 20.000 employed men and women “indicate that a combined exposure to organisational downsizing and work related stress in terms of effort-reward imbalance is associated with an increased risk of work related symptoms that exceeds the risk produced by each exposure separately”. In connection with stress, results from the same survey show that in all age groups a significant number of employees reported an increased level of stress and work pressure, especially older workers in the 45+ age group. In this group reported 47.9% higher levels of stress and work pressure, for all workers was the average 45.8%. As best practices we have to consider the case of Deutsche Bank. The bank offers information on psychosocial topics and how to cope with conflicts. Networks of consultants are available internally as well as externally. Are provided compensations for employees close to retirement age, who choose to work part time. Internal and external advisers are accessible to provide assistance in professional reorientation. Then, job coaching is offered for those employees who will lose their job due to reorganisation/downsizing. Employees who plan to start their own business are offered professional support from the bank’s business start-up experts. It has been developed a start-up kit, and financing may be provided at favourable conditions. As far as possible, Deutsche Bank may become a customer during the start-up phase.

Italy. In the age gap 45-54 the Italian unemployment trend index follows the same trend all over the world, increasing more for men than for women. Even for this particular class of age Italy registers a lower raise than most of the other countries. The share of unemployed people aged 45-64, between 1990-2009, has widely increased, passing from 15.73% to 28.70%. Looking at the evolution over time (Figures 13 and 14) we can see that in Italy the male average exit age increased by 1.5 from 1990 to 2007, passing from 59.3 to 60.8; while in the same period the female one decreased by 1.5, passing from 62.3 to 60.8. In terms of well-being at work, workers Italian older workers seem to be more affected by stress and boredom than the European ones and on the other hand their job-insecurity is much more increasing. From the

regulatory point of view important changes are taking place in three crucial fields: OHS, training policies and pension systems. Firstly the recent approval of a Consolidate Act on OSH introduced more substantial and effective approach aimed at ensuring the efficiency of protection of vulnerable workers, including the obligation to provide a risk assessment based on equal treatment and workforce diversity approach. Indeed the new law risk assessment must take into account all risks of labour safety and health, including those which concern groups of workers who are exposed to particular risks, among which there are those which are connected to work-related stress, pregnant women at work as well as those connected to gender-differences, age, country of origin, type of contract. On the other hand the Italian Government is also working on the implementation of the European framework agreement on work-related stress and the adoption of special guidelines for the assessment of this risk, which should take into account both objective and personal factors, among which work organization, change, turnover and age. It's expected to improve the condition of older workers during change. Guidelines were also recently passed in the field of training remarking the importance of lifelong learning for workers at each stage and improving the implementation of flexible working time patterns and access-to work – contracts, as special contracts for 55 aged workers, in order to avoid discrimination and exclusion within the labour market. Even in the field of pension, Italy is going towards the progressive increase of minimum retirement age up to 65, for men and women, as a natural consequences of the transition from the inactive ageing system to the active ageing and inclusion of older workers approach. Further best practices concern: the development and the increase of workers participation, both at individual and collective level, in the OSH management; the mandatory introduction of the issue of work-related stress in OSH training programs and the introduction of a system of qualification and selection of companies, within the labour market, based on the level of training opportunities and methodologies.

Spain. In Spain older workers are encouraged to switch from activity to retirement by means of public unemployment aid and compensations are given to companies that in the process of restructuration in various sectors have allowed expelling all more than 50 years old from the labour market. An implicit imposition for cessation of work was actually created. Spanish society perceives those older than 50 as having certain stereotypes. In terms of employment, it is believed that older workers enjoy stability and protection so demanded by the young ones: fixed full time contracts versus temporary contracts, well defined economic benefits versus mobility and flexibility, acquired professional level and various rights versus uncertain and nomadic trajectories. Another aspect of the social image of elder workers is presenting them as opportunists and individualists, more preoccupied with their future pension than the present activity. Their attitudes and behavior represent adjusting themselves for improving payments, choosing the right moment to leave or obtain additional advantages. These perceptions are reflected in the results of SHARE (The Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, 2005), a survey which split up the questioned employees in two groups (workers under and over 50), among those older than 50: Spain is the first with regard to desired resignation age as early as possible with its 67% and Netherlands are the last with 31%, demonstrating the growth tendency from the north to the south of Europe. At the same time, the percentage of enterprises that have developed strategies for maintaining older employees after they reach the retirement age or to recruit new older employees is the lowest in Spain, as a European survey has shown. The changes in organizations did not result in changes in employment contracts, number of working hours for most respondents from both groups, neither they have moved into a new work team or received addition people reporting to them (which is logical considering the position composition in the samples). However, about 30-40% in both groups reported changes in work tasks and superior has changed for majority of elder employees. Elders employees are somewhat more positive with regard to evaluating the role or ability of supervisor in sharing information, employee involvement, providing support, solving problems, but were more negative in judging his/her career advice and support. Both groups (young and old employees) were negative with regard to implementation of reskilling training. Yet, younger workers felt to a larger extent that they can ask for help from their co-workers or counting on them when things become more difficult in their work. Still, both groups (young and elder employees) perceive similarly being appreciated by their co-workers, being well-informed about the decisions made at work that affect them, the presence of stereotypes or prejudices with regard to elder employees in their organizations and being able to participate in the decision process when changes are made that directly affect their work. Furthermore, older respondents agreed more than younger ones with the statement that elder employees can better enjoy their work since their children depend less on them. Not surprisingly, less younger than elder people responded that they would like to remain in their current job until retirement, but more of them would like to move jobs within their present organization, learn a new skill or trade, seek promotion at their current workplace, but only marginal share of both groups would like to change their career or type of job. Both groups consider that it is easy for them to stay in their current job until they want to retire, and elder people are much more negative with regard to easiness of finding a job as good as their current one but at the same time they think that it will be easy for their employer to replace them if they left. The study has shown that elder employees are not happy with the way they are treated in organizations and tend to be concerned about the future. While they consider organizational restructuring and changes as having a high importance, they perceive and react to them in rather negative way. They worry about often perceived little use of their experience and skills, but are reluctant to professional training and acquisition of new skills. Knowing that finding a job as good as their current one is difficult they apparently get less career advice from their supervisor, while thinking that it will be easy for their employer to replace them if they left. Elders tend to have higher level of anxiety than their younger colleagues and certain factors out of the mentioned above appear to be related to the levels of burnout and depression among elder employees. The pilot study has shown that

notwithstanding the hitherto advantageous position on the labour market elder employees are not happy with the way they are treated in organizations and tend to be concerned about the future. While they consider organizational restructuring and changes as having a high importance, they perceive and react to them in a rather negative way. They worry about often perceived little use of their experience and skills, but are reluctant to professional training and acquisition of new skills. Yet, they agreed more than young employees with the statement that elder people can better enjoy their work since their children depend less on them. Spanish companies don't have strategies to retain elder workers or recruit ones, which complicates the picture. On the other hand, in Catalonia especially the state support to the enterprises is high and effective, such as business incubators. So, companies should feel encouraged and supported to provide more vocational training to their employees.

Implications for relevant stakeholders

The evidence suggests that policy makers have to respond to these challenges by producing guidance material; revising legislative provisions and codes of practice and changing the administrative/enforcement practices; such as establishing special workers' compensation premiums for agency labour and targeting areas of non-compliance and inspection protocols. In addition, restructuring must form part of a long-term vision of the development and direction of the economy in order to ensure that the changes really are a way of strengthening its competitiveness. NGOs should support older workers in making awareness raising activities. Social partners and employees have to support the preservation of older workers employability and facilitate their transition to another job or to equivalent quality. More specifically employees should safeguard the health and wellbeing of their workers when undergoing restructuring or downsizing. Along these lines, there is a need to identify best practices, draw research and policy attention on stress and well-being of older workers undergoing restructuring processes. Thanks to the support of trade unions and workers' representatives committees, both at national, local and enterprise level, organizational changes, should be also accompanied by transparency and information campaigns.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are targeted at social partners, policy makers, practitioners and companies to improve health and safety and employability of older workers and social benefits for companies, in terms of productivity:

- studies on health risks in the workplace;
- organisational health reports and working groups on health;
- the use of health experts to provide support in organizational terms;
- employee surveys;
- employee participation and education;
- regular health checks;
- training supervisors and key workers in health management techniques;
- ergonomic workplace (re)design;
- preventive redeployment;
- health-promoting working time arrangements;
- training promoting forms of contractual relationships targeted at over 50 workers;
- preventing, managing and/or mitigating stress at work and related psycho-social issues (as a consequence of restructuring);
- rethinking the organisation of work, the division of tasks, and the use and availability of information technology;
- adapting working time schedules;
- providing adequate training;
- informing and consulting workers prior to a restructuring process;
- providing individual support such as coaching or mentoring;
- foster research and policy advice on work-related stress;
- support the implementation of the European Framework agreement on work-related stress.