

**CREATIVE AGE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES  
FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (SME)  
IN THE BALTIC SEA REGION**

AN EVENT ORGANISED BY THE BALTIC SEA REGION PROJECT "BEST AGERS"

19 OCTOBER 2012, 9.00 – 13.30

*HANSE-OFFICE, BRUSSELS*

On 19 October 2012 the INTERREG-IV-B project „Best Agers“ held a roundtable discussion on „Creative Age Management Strategies for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises“ at the Hanse-Office, the Joint Representation of the German Länder Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein to the EU in Brussels.



Participants of the roundtable.

SMEs are particularly affected by the negative consequences of demographic change such as ageing workforces and the loss of skills and professional knowledge of their experienced employees. At the same time they often lack adapted solutions as well as the strategic and personnel capacity to prevent early retirement and the loss of key employees through long-term and age-sensitive human-resources management.

The event highlighted the results of a study which has been commissioned by the project.<sup>1</sup> The authors, consultants Alexander Frevel and Carola Newiger-Bogumil, have collected an inventory of exemplary approaches for age management in companies in different Baltic Sea Region countries and present recommendations for both policy-makers and enterprises.

### Keynote Speech

In his keynote, the Hamburg-based researcher and consultant ALEXANDER FREVEL presented the results and recommendations of the age management study.

He stressed the vast heterogeneity of demographic developments in the Baltic Sea States and regions. He argued that despite diverging trends, a common approach would be useful and that – in order to become effective – policies and actions directed towards SME should be based upon the provision of an excellent (occupational) well-being of the companies' workforce. Thus, employees should be supported to be *able, willing* and *allowed* to work until the official retirement age (and beyond).



Alexander Frevel presented the results of a study on age management for SME commissioned by the Best Agers project.

<sup>1</sup> An executive summary is available on [www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu).

Mr Frevel recommended to emphasize the importance of integrated policies, clear responsibilities and concerted actions based on a social consensus among all relevant stakeholders. Furthermore, national and regional action programmes on workforce ageing and related adaptation strategies with a special focus on SME should be developed. Instead of a unilateral raise in retirement ages Mr Frevel called for a joint reform of pension systems and working conditions which emphasizes the qualitative dimension of working life.

### Roundtable discussion on Age Management Strategies for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

**Moderator:** DR. MARY PAPASCHINOPOULOU – Head of the Association of North German Chambers of Commerce and Industry Representation to the EU

#### Participants:

- DR. JÖRG PESCHNER, seconded National Expert, EU Commission, GD Employment and Social Affairs
- HELEN HOFFMANN, UEAPME, European Employers' Organisation for Crafts, Trades and SMEs
- OLE NORRBACK, AGE Platform Europe – Chairman of Employment Experts Group
- DR. ROLAND KADEFORS – University of Gothenburg, Institute of Work Science
- KATARZYNA REWERS-DAWID, Regional Adviser for Older Professionals, Pomeranian Region



HELEN HOFFMANN (UEAPME) stressed that dismissed perceptions of young and old employees pose a major problem in times of demographic challenges for SME. She referred to the widespread, but factually wrong prejudice that increased employment of older workers poses an obstacle to the employment of younger people. Especially SME, she argued, have problems in recruiting and retaining older workers.

Furthermore, Ms Hoffmann touched upon the issue of framework conditions as a pre-requisite for enhanced efforts of SME to adapt to demographic challenges: Overprotective employment regulations, seniority based pay and insufficient lifelong-learning systems pose major problems for SME.

Dr. Roland Kadefors (University of Gothenburg) and Helen Hoffmann (UEAPME) discussed the special challenges that workforce ageing poses for SME.

DR. JÖRG PESCHNER (GD EMPL) underlined the often too narrow perspective of political decision-makers with regard to demographic developments. In his view, the debates should pay more attention to the future development of productivity in an EU economy with partly decreasing working age populations.

Dr. Peschner argued that that both welfare and long-term dimensions of demographic change should be considered more prominently instead of a reduced perspective on pension reform only. At the same time, the European Working Conditions Survey showed that age discrimination increased in the EU-27, a fact that calls for stronger attempts of awareness raising and information work.

DR. ROLAND KADEFORS (UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG) remarked that macro-economic developments and regulations did not offer enough incentives for sustainable changes at the local workplace level. Moreover he highlighted national initiatives and networks in Germany as a positive example for taking the challenge of demographic change seriously. Last but not least, he underlined Dr. Peschners statements about attitude-related obstacles and ageism as key factors on the way to a more age-sensitive labour market and employment policy.



Ole Norrback (AGE Platform Europe) and Dr. Jörg Peschner (DG Employment) identified obstacles of an improved integration of older workers in SME.

DR. KATARZYNA REWERS-DAWID (CHAMBER OF COMMERCE POMERANIA) stressed the lack of a cross-generational policy agreement on the topic of demography, ageing and working life. She emphasized the need for support structures and elaborated lifelong learning-systems especially in Poland and the new Member States, where such systems and applied toolkits have not been established in a proper way to this date.

OLE NORRBACK (AGE PLATFORM EUROPE) put demographic challenges in the context of the current economic crisis in Europe and the demand for a stronger Europeanisation of economic regulation. With regard to demographic problems, he observed a “demand/supply”-gap: Older workers, he argued, tend to sell themselves at less than fair value, while companies do not ask enough for experienced employees. Furthermore, he diagnosed a lack of stakeholdership in the Baltic Sea Region which could improve the joint coordination of common macroregional problems.

### **Presentations from Åsmund Lunde, Center for Senior Policy (Norway) and Roland Kadefors, University of Gothenburg (Sweden)**

In his presentation “How can the Norwegian concept of Senior Policy help to shape successful Age Management practices?” ÅSMUND LUNDE, former Director of the Centre for Senior Policy in Oslo, demonstrated the “seniorpolitikk” concept which was implemented in Norway in the



Asmund Lunde (Centre for Senior Policy, Norway) presented the Norwegian approach of Senior Policy.

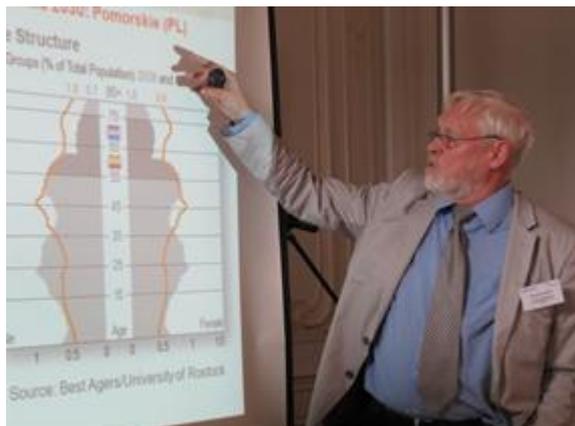


Mary Papischinopoulou, Head of the Brussels representation of the North German Chamber of Commerce, moderated the discussion.

course of the last decade. The Centre for Senior Policy, financially supported by the Federal Government, serves as a body which challenges negative attitudes towards older workers through age management measures, working mainly with representatives from enterprises all over Norway. In recent years, this engagement was valued as a success and has increased both positive attitudes

towards older workers and their respective labor market participation in Norway.<sup>2</sup>

DR. ROLAND KADEFORS, , referred to the Norwegian example in his presentation “Senior Policy – a good practice for EU member states”. According to him, attitude-related barriers towards older workers constitute the main obstacle for a better integration of Best Agers in the labour market and could be effectively counteracted by age management approaches highlighted by the Senior Policy concept.



Dr. Roland Kadefors explained the demographic development of the BSR, using Pomeranian region as an example.

However, the prospects for creation of national platforms for Senior Policy in the Baltic Sea states were judged diversely: whereas in Germany, Poland and Sweden at this time there is a high level of interest in the issue of ageing, the topic is not at the forefront of the policy debate in many other countries, especially those affected strongly by the economic crisis. Furthermore, mobilising stakeholders to participate in a national platform for senior policy might also be more difficult in countries with a contentious history between the social partners. Countries like Denmark and Sweden, where the so-called Scandinavian model for labour market relations was established already a long time ago and where more emphasis is put on negotiation than on conflict, were at a clear advantage in this respect.

---

In the „Best Agers“ project ([www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu)) 19 partners from 8 Baltic Sea countries have developed recommendations and concepts for the economical activation of older people, in the fields of continued employment, mentoring and coaching for SME as well as entrepreneurship. A documentary film produced by the project highlights four exemplary “Best Agers” from Germany, Sweden, Denmark and Latvia who continue being economically active in different ways even beyond retirement ([www.youtube.com/bestagersproject](http://www.youtube.com/bestagersproject)).

The partners of the „Best Agers“ project will continue to address the problem of missing positive examples for age-sensitive human-resources management in SME with a recently approved follow-up project with the title “Best Agers Lighthouses”. Scientifically monitored interventions in selected lighthouse companies will demonstrate the costs and benefits of implementing – and *not* implementing – age management for enterprises and public employers.

***More information on: [www.best-agers-project.eu](http://www.best-agers-project.eu)***

---

<sup>2</sup> For further information see: [www.seniorpolitikk.no/informasjon/english](http://www.seniorpolitikk.no/informasjon/english) & [www.vinnvinn.org/home.en.html](http://www.vinnvinn.org/home.en.html)