

By calling especially upon small and medium-sized enterprises to make better use of existing human resources, the project makes a contribution to the implementation of the 'Small Business Act' for Europe and thereby also to the 'EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region'.

The different pilot initiatives and good practices developed and tested by the partners are tailored to the particular needs of the partner regions, but they can easily be transferred to other European regions. After all, it is the whole of Europe which has to meet the challenges of demographic change and its impacts on the central goals of the Lisbon Agenda - growth, employment and competitiveness.

Funding

The Best Agers project is co-financed by the INTERREG IV B Baltic Sea Region Programme 2007-2013 (European Regional Development Fund), which aims to make a contribution to European territorial cohesion and promotes the strengthening of the Baltic Sea Region as an attractive and competitive region for capital investments, work and life. In addition, the project is supported by the Federal Transnational Cooperation Programme of the German Federal Ministry for Transport, Building and Urban Development which supports German project partners in European projects of strategic federal relevance.

Best Agers is scheduled to last from February 2010 to December 2012 and has a total budget of 4.4 million EUR.



PROMOTING GENERATION 55+

Partners

- Germany** 01 Academy of Economics Schleswig-Holstein GmbH
- 02 County of Pinneberg
- 03 University of Rostock, Rostock Center for the Study of Demographic Change
- 04 Research Association Mecklenburg-Vorpommern
- 05 The Paritätische Welfare Organisation in Schleswig-Holstein
- Poland** 06 Institute for European Initiatives
- 07 Gdansk University of Technology
- 08 West Pomeranian Business School
- Lithuania** 09 Šiauliai Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts
- 10 Šiauliai Branch of the National Regional Development Agency
- 11 KTU Regional Science Park
- Latvia** 12 CONNECT Latvia
- 13 Stockholm School of Economics in Riga
- Sweden** 14 County Council of Norrbotten
- 15 University of Gothenburg
- Denmark** 16 Green Network
- 17 University College Lillebælt
- United Kingdom** 18 Norwich Business School at the University of East Anglia
- Estonia** 19 Estonian Association of SMEs EVEA



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Meeting demographic change as a key challenge in Europe

In the light of demographic change and the current economic crisis it becomes more and more important for cities and regions in the Baltic Sea Region to uncover and use their economic potentials in a creative way. One of these potentials are people aged 55 and older - the so called "Best Agers".

Each individual defines his or her "best age" differently, and subjectively. But in economy and society, an age above 55 years is often not viewed as a productive age. Despite the fact that the members of this generation are well-educated, motivated and healthier than ever, they are often treated in a discriminatory way. The 55+ are, however, the growing part of the working-age population, and the cities and regions should capitalize on their readiness to share their experience and skills. Seen from this perspective, the 55+ remain of "best age" for economic activities for many more years, sometimes well beyond retirement age.

The Best Agers project wants to show how an increased inclusion of older people in the area of business and skills development can help to strengthen competitiveness in the Baltic Sea Region.

In order to achieve this, the Best Agers project:

- analyses good practice examples,
- tests their efficiency and transferability to other regions,
- develops new cooperative transnational solutions,
- recommends courses of action for the improvement of economic and social regulatory frameworks.



Objectives

The project aims to sensitise public and private employers, policy makers, the general public and not least the best agers themselves to the manifold potentials that this age group possesses.

Therefore, the project partners jointly develop proposals for improving the integration of best agers into the labour market, innovation processes and entrepreneurial activities. A longer and more flexibly arranged working life, better strategies for generation change within businesses and senior expert and consulting services offered to SME can help to preserve the best agers' know-how for the long term while also benefitting employers. Exchange of knowledge and co-operation between old and young employees and employers, between senior citizens, students and pupils helps to strengthen cross-generational solidarity.



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|------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Best Agers as... | Analysis | | |
| Actors | Employers | Experts (e.g. for SME) | Mentors (e.g. for students) |
| Target groups | Employers | | New entrepreneurs |
| | Pilot initiatives | | |

Activities

The first step for the project partners is to analyze and compare the current labour market situation and participation in innovation and entrepreneurship activities of best agers with their specific abilities, motivation and needs. Subsequently the project identifies the causes of the – sometimes very significant – differences in the countries of the Baltic Sea Region: Why, for instance, is the employment rate of people aged 55 to 64 so much higher in Sweden (70.1%) than in Poland (31.6%) or in Germany (53,8% - Source: Eurostat 2008)? What are common obstacles that prevent best agers from working in a regular job or as volunteers? What can be done on the regional and local level to improve the integration of best agers into the economy, and what is the role of the national level?

Following this analysis, the partners develop, implement and evaluate 13 pilot initiatives to exemplify and highlight the potentials of the best agers.

These initiatives include amongst others:

- Promoting the coaching of small and medium-sized enterprises by older and retired experts to help them expand and internationalize their business or overcome situations of crisis
- Consulting of students and founders of new businesses by reputable entrepreneurs
- Developing strategies for the preservation of know-how of people approaching retirement from their professional career
- Promoting entrepreneurship among best agers.



To this end, the project builds upon both proven and successful initiatives of the participating partner regions and new, innovative approaches. An exchange of knowledge will not only occur between countries but also between sectors: Local and regional authorities enter into an open dialogue with chambers of industry and commerce, institutions for further education, universities and non-governmental organisations.



European Relevance

The European Commission has identified demographic change as one of four key challenges for European regions. It expects that the diminishing labour force will act as an impediment to economic growth from 2017 onwards. The Baltic Sea Region as a macro region will be particularly impacted by this phenomenon due to the age structure of its population and the large rural areas it contains. For this reason, the Baltic Sea Region Programme has classified Best Agers as a so-called "strategic" project.