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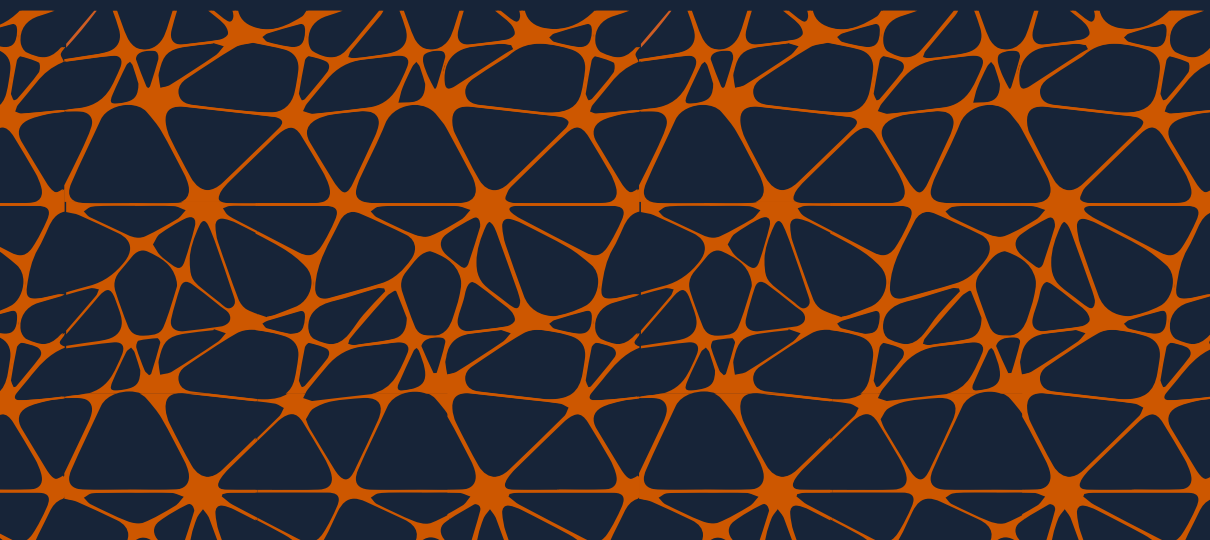
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# Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations

edited by  
Olga Jubany and Fabio Perocco



**Edizioni**  
Ca' Foscari



Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations

## **Società e trasformazioni sociali**

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2



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# **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation  
of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by  
Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

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Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco (eds.)

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

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## **Vulnerability of Young and Older Workers Across Europe in Times of Crisis**

Olga Jubany (Universitat de Barcelona, Espanya)

Fabio Perocco (Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italia)

**Abstract** The current social and economic developments in Europe provide us with much of the rationale to understand how our contemporary society has reached the current situation of highly polarised social and labour inequalities. In this context, debates on the current labour market are centred on the worldwide economic crisis and emerging inequalities, exploring the underlying causes that stem from labour market transformations, which for decades have weakened the situation of workers in positions of high risk. Emphasis is placed on labour precariat – where both unemployment and employment interact to define vulnerability, particularly of those not fitting within the expected ideal-type worker, in Europe, such as the workers at either end of the labour age spectrum, the older and the younger workers. This volume, adopts a dual lens that incorporates the diversity of social dialogue outlooks, to critically expose the situation of these two vulnerable groups; the younger and the older workers. A context in which trade unions' representation of such workers' interests and rights is fundamental in ensuring opportunities for workers of all ages throughout the lifecycle. Through an analysis grounded on an innovative empirical study conducted across Europe, the volume exposes how beyond these two age groups workers, vulnerability of non-ideal type workers – including migrant workers, women workers and the intersectional range of social constructions that place workers in these high social risk situations, is the core for their enduring vulnerability, particularly in times of crisis in Europe. Moreover, the several contributions included expose how the condition of these non ideal-type workers not only places them in a constantly precarious labour situation, but also renders them invisible to those mechanisms of support, protection and prevention of their working rights and opportunities.

**Summary** 1. Introduction: Age and the Crisis. – 2. A Qualitative Approach to Age and Vulnerability. – 3. Economic Crisis, Transformations of Work, New Inequalities. – 3.1. Transformations of Work and Consequences on Inequalities. – 3.2. Old and New Inequalities. – 3.3. Active Ageing: a Critical Perspective. – 4. The Present Volume.

### **1 Introduction: Age and the Crisis**

The current intersection of long-term economic restructuring and demographic developments across Europe, have been producing significant changes in the patterns of inequality in the labour market. One of the most

Olga Jubany is the author of paragraphs 1, 2, 4; Fabio Perocco is the author of paragraph 3.



distinctive features of the different periods of employment crisis over the course of the last three decades has been its uneven impact on workers, depending on their age. The simultaneous dismissal of older workers together with the blockage to occupational integration of young people has resulted in a dramatic decline of labour market participation rates at both ends of the age spectrum. In the ‘greying’ of the European workforce, we find an increasing amount of older workers not in employment and neither eligible for access to a pension – a phenomenon that has spread in Europe over the past two decades, to a large extent due to the pension reforms in many member states. This trend has become exacerbated in recent years as a consequence of corporate restructurings resulting in massive layoffs affecting senior workers with higher labour costs.

Current attempts aimed at extending the working life of older workers and the concurrent increase in unemployment rates among younger generations risk further entrenching the historical generational imbalances in the labour market. Recent changes affecting entry and exit transitions in the labour market are raising trade unions’ concerns regarding the risk of substitution of senior workers for new (younger) entries with degraded employment conditions in certain sectors and occupations. On the other hand, although the promotion of Active Ageing has become a key priority on the EU’s social agenda and in the context of the 2020 strategy for inclusive growth, pension reform processes are being implemented under strong austerity pressures and will translate into further inequalities in the access to adequate pensions. This calls for increasing awareness of discrimination of older workers, especially those in long term unemployment or in low qualified jobs who may find it increasingly difficult to meet tighter eligibility criteria for pension benefits.

In this context, trade unions’ representation of old and young workers’ interests and rights is fundamental, as it is only through ensuring the access and opportunities for workers of all ages throughout the lifecycle that social dialogue may become stronger as an inclusive institution. Furthermore, taking into account the fact that traditional bargaining strategies are no longer feasible due to the implementation of pension reform, the question raised is to what extent social dialogue and trade unions are actually dealing with the issue of age and vulnerability in a more inclusive way. In this regard, there is a need to avoid ‘zero-sum games’ in the redistribution of employment risks and opportunities between generations.

To this aim, the present book analyses the extent to which trade unions are addressing the interests and needs of young and older workers in the context of changing dynamics in the labour markets of six European countries. In addition, it responds to a need for highlighting policy proposals from the ground, and unravelling innovative strategies and practices for labour market inclusion of vulnerable age groups.

In order to depict the background to the transnational research study<sup>1</sup> on which the book is based, this introductory chapter starts by expounding the study's qualitative approach to age and vulnerability, then delves into the social and economic context of the research – taking a closer look at the recent global economic crisis, as well as the new forms of labour division and work organization and the new inequalities stemming from this – to then continue with a critical examination of the debate on active ageing, while finally briefly describing the structure and chapters of the present volume. The social and economical context is also further explored in the subsequent chapters, in relation to the specific themes of each individual chapter.

## **2 A Qualitative Approach to Age and Vulnerability**

Stemming from the empirical findings of a cross-comparative research project, this book explores to what extent trade unions are representing the interests and needs of workers potentially vulnerable on the labour market due to their age, in a context of economic recession and challenges posed by changing dynamics in declining labour markets and social policies in Europe. It presents an in-depth analysis of the current interactions between unions and the intergenerational dynamics in the labour market to reveal key insights that help us understand young and older workers' experiences and the positions that unions adopt towards age discrimination. By emphasising the impact of the crisis, it exposes the extent to which actors and institutions involved in social dialogue manage major restructuring processes related to the involvement and participation of those age groups most affected and their representatives.

One of the main specific questions dealt with in this volume is to assess the impact of welfare retrenchment policies concerning young and older workers and to what extent a zero-sum approach – by which one person's employment means the unemployment of another – is being applied as a cost-distribution strategy in the labour market across Europe. In this regard we also analyse what measures and strategies are undertaken by unions and employers' representatives to tackle multiple discrimination related to age and gender and to what extent 'active ageing' is recognised and promoted in employment, as well as included in collective bargaining agendas.

Since the nature of the questions is mainly qualitative, findings in this book rely on a range of qualitative methods from an ethnographic perspective, including in-depth interviews with young and older workers, along with trade unions and employers' representatives as the main actors in

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1 LinkAge (2014), *Labour Market Integration of Vulnerable Age Groups through Social Dialogue*. LinkAge Project, Final Report for the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

social dialogue, in order to fully understand the dynamics, experiences and stances towards the phenomenon of age discrimination and intergenerational imbalances in the labour market across Europe.<sup>2</sup> Hence, the arguments presented here reflect experiences gathered from the ground and have been contrasted with the views of other relevant stakeholders in the field of social dialogue and collective bargaining. This includes the perception of unions on discrimination based on age intersecting with other factors, while also evaluating the extent of the actions unions take to combat this discrimination. The recent economic crisis has been accompanied by a reappraisal on behalf of national governments of their provisions for a range of social goods previously enjoyed by younger and older groups in society. The impact of tightened welfare spending, rising unemployment and new state interventions in the areas of pensions and workfare schemes, however, has received little attention considered the disproportionate impact these are likely to have on these vulnerable age groups.

In this regard, the present book also delves into the specific experiences of younger and older age groups as the likely sufferers of discrimination by different agencies positioned as employers, service providers or advocates of these vulnerable groups. In exploring age discrimination in terms of labour market access for both sets of age groups it raises questions on the different ways that age discrimination interacts with other factors of inequality such as origin and gender: Is age discrimination simply a way of masking these other forms of discrimination or is there something specific we might call age discrimination? If so, can it be understood in the same way for both age groups?

The specificity of female workers' integration into the labour market is recognized to have an impact on their pension's entitlements, as they are being sanctioned for the time they spent out of the labour-market on caring tasks of children or other family members or dependants. Reconciling work and family life is therefore still challenging for women, whatever their age, due to the male-dominated life-cycle model that still rules the European job market. Despite all the progress made, these have not entailed deep changes in the forms of work organization, such as the reorganization of

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2 A total of 191 in-depth interviews with social partners' representatives were conducted during 2013, distributed as follows: 79 with relevant social partners' representatives at different levels in the six countries considered (Austria, Belgium, Italy, Poland, Spain and United Kingdom) and also at European level. In a second stage of the research, a total of 112 interviews – between 16 and 20 interviews in each participating country – were conducted with young (under 25) and older persons (over 55).

With regard to the coding of interviews, the first fragment of the code refers to the country (standard EC acronyms, SP = Spain), the second refers to the type of informant (TUR = trade union representative; ER = employers' representative; EXP = Expert; PO = policy officer; YW = young worker; OW = older worker; ST = stakeholder), the number at the end refers to its chronological order within the research.

working time. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that measures aimed at balancing work and family life may aggravate gender inequalities in the labour market, as it is mainly women who 'benefit' from the implementation of such measures (paid leaves, part-time work and flexible working hours, etc.), which tend to put them aside from the standard norm of employment and may harm their future career prospects.

The above observations lead us to the following question: to what extent are social partners able to successfully identify specific issues concerning the vulnerable age groups of workers, to represent the interests of those groups, and to introduce those issues into collective bargaining agendas in particular countries? The labour market position of women and also young workers is also reflected in their membership levels and involvement in trade union activities. As a consequence, vulnerable groups of workers facing discrimination may not be adequately represented in collective arrangements. Therefore, the form taken by labour market programs targeting these groups will depend on their representatives' priorities concerning the different groups of workers competing for scarce employment opportunities and trade-offs in the quality of jobs.

Social dialogue has played an important role in the allocation of labour market risks between different generations of workers through the regulation of age-specific transitions in the labour market. The impact of changes in these institutional settings should not be evaluated only through looking at the employment levels of distinct age groups of workers, but also in relation to their employment prospects from a life-course perspective, as these changes account for long-term effects on the labour market trajectories of different cohorts of workers. As a matter of fact, the introduction of non-standard forms of employment, such as fixed-term and part-time contracts targeting the inclusion of mainly young people and women in the labour market has resulted in the extension of employment precariousness to later stages of their working life. On the other hand, policies for reducing the social exclusion among a particular age group or labour force categories, such as young people, need to be considered against overall patterns of labour market organization and the opportunities for the rest of the groups. A good transition of one group may be achieved at the expense of other groups. In this regard, a crucial question is addressed at the intergenerational imbalances in the labour market as a result of population ageing and economic restructuring. Furthermore, is there a substitution dynamic between generations being fostered by new policies tackling youth unemployment in a general downward spiral of lower wages and deteriorating employment conditions?

A major aim of the present volume is to collect real-life stories from those age groups experiencing discrimination and inequalities on the labour market, or exclusion from the labour market. The focus is to acknowledge how vulnerable age groups experience these situations of disadvantage and

how they perceive themselves in relation to other age groups and the rest of the workforce. We were also interested in their assessment of the action of trade unions and social dialogue institutions regarding such situations and to gain understandings of the role of collective action in their strategies for overcoming these situations. While European institutions recommend placing equal importance on the promotion of mutual cooperation and interchanges between generations, as well as better understanding and new forms of coexistence, this may not always be the case in relation to labour market and social dialogue. Young and older workers may have different understandings of the concept of work and life plans, but they also tend to be segregated on the labour market, that is, they tend to be employed in different sectors and occupations and enjoy different degrees of employment protection on the basis of the action of certain institutions regulating the employment relationship.

The causes of vulnerability of young and older workers are closely related to changes in the structure of the labour market in the last decades, an issue which is further discussed in the next section of this chapter «The social background: economic crisis, transformations of work, new inequalities». This is leading to a shift in unions' perception of age discrimination. Unions have traditionally been concerned with the situation of young people on the labour market, as they account for higher unemployment rates than the general workforce and suffer more precarious and worse employment conditions. In contrast, specific attention to workers over 55 years has not been focused on keeping them in employment, but rather on bargaining the best possible conditions for early retirement. This is the main reason why social partners' proposals concerning working life extension of older workers have much lower intensity than those related to the labour inclusion of the young generations.

This book aims at improving expertise in industrial relations in European and comparative terms and at sharing information and experience among parties actively involved in industrial relations. Based mainly on the experiences of workers, we have gathered a set of illustrations of actions and measures addressing the needs and demands of young and older workers in relation to their active inclusion in the labour market. Thus, this work has a further goal of promoting the development of industrial relations in Europe by putting forward a set of recommendations addressed to different target groups involved in the study. The identification of best practices adopted by trade unions or employers' associations to enhance an active inclusion of vulnerable age groups of workers in the labour market and in the whole society is also an objective of this research in order to recognise and disseminate new approaches and measures that improve work opportunities and working conditions.

Linked to this, in regard to specific policy recommendations that best support labour inclusion of vulnerable age workers and protect their rights,

current union actions and discourses have been assessed towards a range of guiding themes dealt with in each of the sections of the book. These themes include main topics that play a key role in the dynamics between trade unions and vulnerable age groups of workers within the general debate of unions' protection of workers' interests in the new European context.

### 3 Economic Crisis, Transformations of Work, New Inequalities

A number of social, political and economic events shape the general framework within which vulnerable age group dynamics have developed over time. In this introduction only a selection of these events (intertwined with a cause-effect relation, in a circular retro-action fashion) will be analysed, namely the recent global economic crisis, the new forms of labour division and work organization, new inequalities, and active ageing.

This study on vulnerable age groups, like all studies carried out in recent years, took place in the context of a worldwide economic crisis, a time of enormous social transformations and significant unrest. This economic crisis has its own particular characteristics and has had many consequences, including the worsening of conditions of young workers and older workers.

The current economic crisis is a systemic crisis, a structural crisis of capitalism affecting all aspects of social life and all spheres of social organization.<sup>3</sup> It restructures the whole society, as during the great economic crises the capital restructures itself leading to a general social transformation. It is a very deep crisis, affecting acutely the economic, social, political and even cultural structures of many countries. It is a 'big crisis', it is not a 'small crisis' as those occurred in the past years in single countries or in specific geographic areas (Asia, 1997; Argentina, 2002) or limited to a few specific fields (productive, financial, currency). It is also a long-lasting crisis. And the longer it goes on, the more widespread and acute it becomes. But above all it is a crisis of 'two halves': the first one deeply affected the United States (2007-2008), while the second one mostly affected Europe and particularly the Euro (2010-2012).

This crisis is a global and unified process. It is uneven and internally differentiated, it has national peculiarities and differences between countries or areas of the world, however it is an overall global crisis, necessarily global due to the processes of economic globalization occurred in recent decades. At the same time, this crisis is asymmetrical, highly asymmetrical, since it has hit the countries and the regions of the world

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3 There is a vast literature on the recent economic crisis. Here: Bauman 2013; Callinicos 2010; Gallino 2011, 2013; OECD 2013a; Roberts 2009; Vaughan-Whitehead 2011.

in a differentiated way. So far some countries have been only ‘partially’ affected, and somehow they managed to cope with it limiting the damages (the BRICS, for example); on the other hand, other countries have faced harsh backlashes: the Southern European countries come out substantially defeated, with serious economic losses and heavy social repercussions.

The crisis has worsened and reshaped the inequalities, both between countries and within countries. In particular, it has accelerated the globalization of internal social polarization existing for at least two decades – with the consequence, in the first instance, of general decline in real wages (ILO 2008). An example of the increase in internal polarization is the United States, where the economic crisis has drastically reduced the incomes of middle-class and working class families, further increasing the wealth concentrated in the hands of the rich families.<sup>4</sup> Another example is Germany, which has strengthened its position in the European industrial system, in the global market and in the financial system, affirming itself as a powerful export economy: today it presents a marked inequality among social classes (with an urban ‘western’ upper class distancing itself increasingly from the rest of society), among territories (with the presence of a ‘German South’ represented by the Eastern regions), and within the working class itself (with the institutionalized rift between employed and unemployed, between well-paid and low-paid workers) (Bertelsmann Foundation 2011; Sablowski 2011).

The current economic crisis has resulted in a restriction on social rights. Very often the dominant discourse, the policies of governments and multilateral institutions have identified in the guarantees and rights of the workers and in the welfare state the fundamental causes of the crisis, promoting as its solution the narrowing of rights and the wage compression, the narrowing of social citizenship and the amputation of the welfare state;<sup>5</sup> all of this has produced a further worsening of inequalities, poverty and social difficulties. The causes of the crisis have often been identified and presented as remedies to the crisis itself, to the point where a resurgence and a radicalization of neoliberal policies has occurred on a worldwide scale, worsening the global and the internal inequalities and adding new inequalities to previous ones.

This economic crisis has had multiple effects on the functioning systems of many countries and on people’s lives. If we consider only Europe and its

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4 In the 2007-2009 period, the decrease in the wealth of US households was an expansive phenomenon, affecting especially the first four quintiles of the population, and particularly the African-American families. In particular, there was the record of the concentration of wealth in the fifth quintile, came to own the 87.2% of the entire national wealth: the wealth of the 1% of the richest families grew 225 times more than the average (Allegretto 2012).

5 According to Crouch (2011), the recent economic crisis has accentuated the dominance of corporations on the economic and political system, and in general on public life, supporting in this way the process of narrowing of social citizenship.

working environment, apart from the growing unemployment, the reorganization of work aimed at increasing the productivity, following the general principle ‘working more with less workers’ has been accelerated. The precariousness has increased, working conditions have worsened, the unions were required to be accommodating and adhere to the national interest. The most affected by the economic crisis were immigrants (OECD 2013b), but also the young and the older workers, in particular young and older male immigrant workers.

With the arrival of the economic crisis the workers’ vulnerability has been accentuated, but in a specific sense: we moved from growing precariousness to growing unemployment, with a restriction of the margins of precarious employment. We moved from a fixed-term employment to work-vouchers, from precarious work to shortage (not absolute) of work; with the economic crisis we switched to the mass occasional jobs, or rather from precariousness to discontinuous employment. With the arrival of the economic crisis the meaning and the phenomenon of vulnerability has changed.

### 3.1 Transformations of Work and Consequences on Inequalities

The vulnerability of these age groups is connected first of all to the economic changes, and to the transformations of work occurred in the last two decades, and secondly to the advent of the economic crisis. There are underlying causes that for decades have weakened the situation of young and older workers; these long-term permanent reasons have exposed these two age groups to a higher degree, and later on the economic crisis has exacerbated their situation.

The underlying causes of the vulnerability of young people are represented mainly by the replacement of skilled labour with machines: the third industrial revolution has simplified difficult work, clerical work, the same design and programming. The hardest hits to the qualified work of young people were given in some way by the same information revolution, so that unemployment of qualified youth is a worldwide phenomenon, present also in China for several years now. In recent years there has been a very strong expansion among young people of jobs that have no correlation with their studies.

The main underlying causes behind the growing vulnerability of older workers are also several. A first reason relates to labour productivity: a productivity obsession with speed is already deep-rooted and widespread. In this case it is about an element related to the organization of work, inherent to work, a material element so to speak. A second reason relates to youthfulness, i.e. the exaltation of the physical form, beauty, youth (together the depletion of physical capital that hits older workers). It is about a cultural element; this ideological trend has penetrated deeply into busi-



ness organizations. A third reason is linked to the fact that older workers are 'more expensive' (in terms of contributory benefits and rights), less open to blackmail and less flexible. A fourth reason is related to pension reforms, which have supported the deterioration of these workers' condition. Therefore we are facing a double disadvantage of older workers, which has been exacerbated by the economic crisis.

To grasp fully the centrality and impact of the new forms of work organization, they shall be analysed thoroughly and delved into as the cornerstone of the global social restructuring of the past few decades is precisely the transformation of work and labour market organization (together with changes in finance and politics). Such re-organization is characterized by: production processes shattering, labour relations casualisation, increase in the labour market segmentation, creation of the largest reserve labour army in history with the development of a world labour market, production of mass unemployment and under-employment at international level.

The new forms of labour division and work organisation have further subjugated workers to the needs of private companies and public bodies (which are increasingly working as private companies); in particular, they have intensified labour exploitation, by means of accelerating labour rhythms, increasing working hours, production and employment flexibility, and the de-skilling of several jobs. The increase in exploitation has affected, at first, those workers on the lowest steps of the professional pyramid, yet it has reached, even though in different forms, all organizational levels, even medium-high levels, as this was a global demand no private or public company could escape.<sup>6</sup>

The new forms of labour division and work organization have inevitably modified social stratification, deepening long-time inequalities and creating new ones.<sup>7</sup> In the restructuring and re-segmentation of the world labour market, from macro to micro,<sup>8</sup> work transformations have re-allocated and re-designed inequalities, disproving the thesis according to which in today's society labour has lost its centrality: on the contrary, now more than ever inequalities mainly originate, though not only, in the labour sphere.

6 This is due to the fact that the working logic of private and public companies has integrated world market demands, applying them in a top-bottom and bottom-up fashion to their whole employed staff.

7 In the relation between (new) labour market and (new) social stratification, other factors have to be taken into account, such as: salary levels in the North and in the South of the world, the deterioration of labour conditions, both as regards salaries and working time, health and rights.

8 Such restructuring has come about through the reorganization of production activity and labour deregulation, but also through the increase in off-shoring and migrations from the South of the world. Off-shoring and international migrations, and their interaction, are the keystone of a world labour market whose hierarchy follows the line of nationality and gender.

Production flexibility and working (and social) time acceleration, professional deskilling and marked segmentation of the labour market are the pillars of this work transformation process. In this paragraph we will examine these topics and their consequences on social stratification and inequalities, on the wake of works by Antunes, Gallino, and Head. This analysis starts from productive flexibility, articulated by the use of new technologies in automation, information and telecommunications, together with the implementation of lean production.

Lean production is not a new production-organization paradigm in itself, it is rather the application of taylorism in a stricter fashion, so as to reach a maximum saturation of the working time, to intensify its rhythms, to make operations, machines' and workers' movements multifunctional (Head 2003).<sup>9</sup> According to Head, lean production is an updated version of taylorism, marked by sharper and more pervasive standardization, measuring and control processes, and by acceleration in production processes thanks to the application of new workplace practices such as ERP and re-engineering (made possible by information technologies). Thus, on the production-organization side, 'new economy' sounds like old wine in new bottles, as it is the application of models and methods of the 'old economy', but with a difference: such application is stricter and more controlled, more binding and pressing, with a higher degree of control and speed, also thanks to a certain use of information technologies. An example is the ErgoUas method, a work measurement method breaking down a worker's work hour into 100,000 time units during which the worker has to carry out hundreds of operations lasting a few seconds.

In the wake of Bravermann (1974), Head has highlighted the marked acceleration of the process of industrialization of white-collar and service work, through the transfer, from the industrial sector to the service sector, of management systems, of 'times and methods' already in use in factories, and by means of accelerating work thanks to new information technologies. After experimenting lean production and 're-engineering' in the 'new' car assembly chain, such techniques have been extended to other industrial branches (electronics, chemistry, food processing, metal working) and other functions of industrial companies (sales, administration, storage, transports) and, lastly, to a large part of the service sector, from telephones to health, from advertisement to banks. Such colonization of the service

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9 There is not only continuity between fordist industrialism and flexible production, between Taylor's scientific management and Ohno's total quality, but also discontinuity and diversification elements; yet, the basic model of mass production has not been replaced by a new production model, but rather fine-tuned and renewed. Such renewal is allowed by the extreme simplification of work: in assembly lines, work has been reduced to simple tasks and workers have been asked to present suggestions to improve the production process, at best (mainly to accelerate it).

economy by lean production and scientific management has taken place thanks to the specific role carried out by information technologies, which have facilitated the renewal of industrial methods and their transfer to hospitals, medical practices, insurance and phone companies, and which have achieved the continuous flow in the production process of these sectors.

The introduction of these new work organization elements has been matched by a clear portrayal and application of technique and new technologies, according to which technological and organizational innovations would reduce precariousness, improve job qualification, increase salaries, and reduce psycho-physical stress. As a matter of fact, this is not always the case as such social effects depend on the way and the context in which technologies are applied and used; thus, though lean production has extended 'cognitive work', indeed manual work and work intensity have increased.

In traditional and new sectors alike, the achievement of a constant production flow has taken place on computerized assembly lines employing a workforce subdued to factory discipline by means of new automation and control systems provided by information technologies. This 'digital proletariat' includes several skilled workers, who are though called to perform a repeated routine work with a high risk of deskilling (Huws 2003). In this regard, Antunes has highlighted that toyotist flexible production, received and applied in different ways in European countries according to the economic, political and cultural context, was based on multidimensional flexibility (in terms of salaries, time, functions and organization), which, on the organization side, has taken place by means of mechanisms of 'organizational freeze-drying' and 'multifunction de-specialization' (Antunes 2003, 2013).<sup>10</sup>

This takes us to the second point: deskilling. The use of scientific management, digital style, and the application to all sectors and production levels of industrial methods has not brought about a large skilled, independent workforce, gratified by their job, such features are (partly) reserved for managers appointed to carry out re-engineering, to control tasks and orders implementation, to monitor work and the production process and to check its results. The change in technology and organization occurred in the workplace has turned out to be, on the contrary, hostile to qualified work, as it has depreciated the experience of blue-collars and white collars, it has decreased their role in industrial and 'immaterial' production. This circumstance is one of the factors which have led to the trend decrease in real wages in the US and Europe over the last few decades and thus is a keystone of today's processes of redefinition and escalation of social inequalities.

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10 Mechanisms which have entailed a marked intensification of work rhythms, time and processes, both in the industrial and in service and agricultural sectors.

Customer satisfaction (tailor-made customer-oriented production) for instance, could have introduced an element of variability and de-standardization of work, instead it was carried out by means of a pre-set offer of products (the customer chooses within pre-determined series, possibilities and combinations of products) and a just-in-time approach, which makes sure that car parts or any other product (tangible or intangible) arrive at just the right place at just the right time so as to reduce any variation in the working routine determined by the installation of specific components. As Head highlights, the implementation of lean production, thus, has not taken place through the qualification and professional growth of the workers, but rather through other elements: the acceleration and optimization of each single movement, repeated over and over again, especially with workers' adaptation to the machines or computer, as an attachment of the assembly line and the continuous work flow; the identification of workers with the company; the importance attached to the control function of managers and supervisors.<sup>11</sup>

The much-acclaimed work revolution in the car sector, or other sectors, was actually the achievement of 'participative taylorism', which had little to do with participation: the increase in production is based on simplification and standardization of workers' activities and movements, distorted by the ideology of total quality, of *kaizen* (continuous improvement to achieve more efficiency), of the company as a community of interests and goals; the organization of tasks and functions converges on the management, while all workers can propose are functional suggestions (ultimately leading to the staff reductions entailed by an increased efficiency in the employment of the workforce). Such new taylorism applied to white-collar jobs, knowledge work and 'intangible' work, has shifted towards today's service economy, a sector in which the above-mentioned features are crystal-clear. Indeed, in this context it is possible to see first-hand the elimination or reduction to minimum levels of the human element, of living labour, in particular of their variability and 'unreliability'. As Head underlines, this has happened, in theory, when taylorism applied to white-collar work (times and methods applied to office management) met re-engineering and toyotism, and took place, in practice, through the marked impact of information technologies on work tasks, work structure, work control and monitoring systems. A

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11 As for identification with the company, the passage to continuous production flow (in its features and speed) has taken place based on one of the main new features introduced by toyotism: the involvement of the workers in permanent commitment inside (and outside) the workplace to improve production in quality and quantity. Such constant involvement tension, sought for by new human resources theories based on staff 'enhancement', has implied a sort of horizontal collective mutual control between workers, in favour of production increase. The weakening of trade unions, sometimes mere company trade unions, has been a further element paving the way for the increase in workers' exploitation, with their participation: this is the speed-up. See also Basso 2003; Ohno 1989.

prime example of the multi-dimensional impact of computers and information flow is given, according to Head, by call-centers: here, tasks and duties match and reproduce industrial processes, work is broken down into several small operations split between workers, then clocked and synchronized; the monitoring of the work flow (modes and contents) and output controls by the management are very strict.

The Western countries has long supported the idea that flexibility and technological and organizational innovations would be the means to reduce low-skilled and labour-intensive jobs. In fact, such jobs have not disappeared, on the contrary; furthermore, flexibility is one of the cornerstones of the process of enlargement of the lower layers of the job pyramid. This last feature has seen a marked increase in the years 2000s all over Europe, though in different ways. Gallino (2001, 2007) has highlighted the effects of flexibility on professional paths in different work systems: rationalized work, labour-intensive and medium-low qualifications, semi-independent work with predominant control functions, high-qualification work. In all these sectors, workers are extremely likely to be fired because they are considered too old, to be unemployed because specific roles and functions may be eliminated, to experience a sudden reduction in their wage, to undergo gradual deskilling as highly-educated workers often have to accept low-skilled jobs or as skilled workers are set aside by technological innovation.<sup>12</sup> For such reasons, flexible work (in performance and contracts) is an element which has polarized the mass of workers downwards and upwards, differentiating both wages and professional knowledge, thus creating an 'hourglass-like' situation.

These processes of deskilling are particularly linked to the development and decline of old and new professional sectors: the growth of the IT market, of new communication technologies, of the culture, mass communications and leisure industry, has entailed the increase and growth of professional roles responsible for the research and development, design and production of products (IT experts, specialized technicians, journalists, advertisers, communication experts), and at the same time the downwards shift of the staff responsible for executive functions of distribution, administration and control (staff in parks, fast-food restaurants, call centers, video stores, etc.). In addition to the marked enlargement process of the lower layers, the group of workers excluded from production activity has broadened, and it includes mainly three profiles identified by Gal-

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12 Within the low-skilled work layer there has been a gradual worsening of work and wage conditions. It happened mainly in the service sector, which has become the 'poor' tertiary, in which there is a prevalence of workers assigned to low skilled jobs (generic tasks, low wage and poor trade union protection), which are at the moment one of the lower segments of social polarization. In this sector there is a majority of young people, less-educated women and immigrants.

lino (2000, p. 38): workers with a medium-low professional qualification (unskilled workers, day labourers, etc.), who cannot find a job due to the impact of the automation of the majority of production lines; workers with medium-high and high professional qualification who have lost their job and have small chances of finding a similar one, due to the impact of the technological progress or to a sectorial crisis; younger workers with high qualifications, no longer requested by the labour market, who have stopped searching for a job.

The development of the 'new economy' (which, as we have seen, is less 'new' than what is normally expected) has been led by new management systems and information technologies, which have markedly increased the influence, power and salaries of managers, while having the opposite effect on workers: wages have decreased, power relations have taken an unfavourable turn. In the meantime, as Gallino highlights, the work pyramid has been further segmented, with the result of increasing precariousness and unemployment at its base and thus the 'excess' or fluctuation of workforce; at the centre of the pyramid a hybrid zone has come about, which in the past included skilled work but which in this new context is bound to become under-employed or unemployed work. A new current aspect thus arises, with a striking impact on the processes of work and social stratification: flexibility, the focus of policies and public debates for at least the past 20 years.

Work deregulation and the destructuring of the different forms of work protection have set the bases for neoliberal policies, then enlarged to other social contexts. This turn of globalization has determined a new socio-economic framework, country- and social class-specific, characterized by the institutionalization of precariousness in all sectors of social, work and economic, psychological and existential, individual and collective life. Turning precariousness into a keystone in workers' life has brought about the most important transformation of neoliberal globalization, and it was the main instrument for the intensification of work exploitation. In this regard, Antunes (2003) has observed that the introduction of precarious work forms (part-time, shared, on-call, voluntary, outsourced, subcontracted, false self-employment, false cooperative work) has had a pivotal role in producing more, working more and employing fewer people.

The combination of flexibility and precariousness has turned into an adaptation process of workers' lives to the needs of production organizations (private or public), which has reduced the direct and indirect cost of work, together with the implicit entrepreneurial risk within the production of global goods chains. The spread of precariousness has had several effects, some strictly economic, others typically social, from the creation of

a dual hypersegmented labour market,<sup>13</sup> to the enlargement of the reserve labour army, to the scattering of work rights, to the restriction of social citizenship.

To avoid a reductive view of the matter, it is important to underline that even though the need of the companies to make production more flexible and decrease entrepreneurial risks has been satisfied by means of enlarging the layer of workers excluded from production activities, by increasing the degree of precariousness and exploitation of employed people, such actions by public and private companies are deemed objectively inevitable given the processes of globalization and economic competition. Indeed, flexibility and precariousness are not only instruments used by companies to cut down the cost of labour, but also key elements in the process of labour's global loss of value and of resetting the balance of power between companies and workers. Thus, in addition to the main goal of the neoliberal production reorganization (which is to remove as much of the production process as possible from the prevailing conditions in industrialized countries), something deeper and broader has happened: there has been a fully-fledged turning point characterized by the resetting of social relations in the field of production, of the balance of power between social parts.

The resetting of the balance of power can be noticed in the gradual and radical commodification of labour, which has taken place through the spreading and multiplication of atypical and precarious contracts, and is liable to bend the workforce to production needs and the configuration of a society moulded on such needs.<sup>14</sup> On-call, intermittent, shared, in lease contracts and all other forms of job precariousness (with its paradigm: undeclared work, and its extreme form: forced labour) are all ways to fragment and disconnect the workforce, by means of which it finally becomes what (according to neoliberal theories) it should be: a mere commodity at full disposal of market needs. This trend, which has been ongoing for at least three decades, goes beyond commodification: indeed, this is a blunt loss of value for work and workers, their denial within the production process and social life reproduction. This is not simply commodification of

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13 The couple 'flexibility/precariousness' has implied not only the transfer of entrepreneurial risk and economic instability to workers, or workforce and workers fragmentation, but also the creation of a specific dualism in the labour market: the presence of a small area of 'decent work' (stable, well-paid, gratifying) and a large area of 'noxious work' (precarious, ill-paid, frustrating), composed by precarious workers 'for life'. According to Antunes, these reorganization processes are the pillars of a fully-fledged 'new morphology of work' whose features and effects are, besides work structural precariousness, the creation of a small group of skilled workers, stable and with plenty of work, and a large layer of under-employed, deskilled, ill-paid workers (employed in the ever-expanding undeclared work sector). Cf. Antunes 2008, 2011.

14 Neoliberal globalization is not a mere economic matter, but rather a discussion on forms of social domination and on the type of future societies (Chesnais 1996).

work; it is a thorough process of annihilation of the worker. They do not, and shall not, have any guarantees, as immigrants in racist portrayals, they shall have no rights. The news is in the extreme feature of the process of commodification of living labour; so much that public speeches often pinpoint the cause of the current global economic crisis in workers' rights (especially when public workers are concerned), in their own presence and in living labour, and often propose as a solution to eliminate all guarantees and living labour itself.

We shall conclude highlighting, as does Antunes (2008), that the alteration and broadening of work exploitation mechanisms and forms, which have taken place within the structural change in production processes, are mirrored in several aspects of workers' social life, entailing both a change in social stratification and redetermination of social relations in terms of production, gender, generation and race. These new mechanisms, which have given important inputs to value creation and profit increase, have had a dramatic impact and several consequences on workers' lives, as they have reduced living labour and broadened dead labour, at the same time they have limited to the utmost the social control on production by workers and social movements.

### 3.2 Old and New Inequalities

Over the last few decades, the world economy has unified and global wealth has increased. Yet, such events have developed in ways that have deepened the existing inequalities between different areas of the world and within single countries. Today, the world is more unified and polarised, in a more composite way, as 'historical' polarisations have been matched by new polarisations.

As for 'historical' development inequalities between the North and the South of the world (generated by colonialism), economic globalization, based on a marked industrial concentration and an equally marked financial concentration, have increased global wealth. Such increase, though, was concentrated in crucial development centres (i.e. in 'centres' and in 'peripheries' centres), among the leaders of the global economy, in particular in the managing levels of corporations, in the upper strata of Northern and Southern countries that benefited from globalization, in what is widely known as transnational capitalist class (Sklair 2001) - now fully internationalized and global. In the meantime, this round of globalization has worsened the quality of life of the majority of Southern and Eastern world populations, deepening the divide with the North and polarizing the distribution of global wealth: selective actions by the global capital, free trade agreements (from GATT to NAFTA, to WTO), the development of the agroindustrial sector in the country, interventions by multilateral



organizations (WB, IMF), the debt mechanism, have all destabilized whole local economies in the South of the world, dispossessing millions of farmers and craftsmen of their land and production means, producing mass unemployment and poverty, generating the largest reserve army of labour in history - constantly fostering international migration and industrial delocalization (where 'peripheries' work for and on behalf of the 'centres').

Such trending worsening of life and work conditions has started in the South and gradually moved up North, and it lies at the basis of the polarized distribution of national wealth within single countries both in the South and in the North of the world. With respect to new polarisations, two phenomena have deeply modified, at a global level, the inequality scenario:

- 1) The divide between the North and the South is only partially described by the image of the 'upside-down goblet', elaborated by the UN at the end of last century, owing to the growth of a number of countries in the South and East of the world. We are referring to the position obtained by Brazil, China, India and Russia in the world economy, together with the recovery of countries from South-East Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, which has led to a reshaping of global inequalities and their abatement in a number of countries;
- 2) Internal inequalities within each country have sharpened in most parts of the world, from North to South, from East to West, in old rich countries and in new growing countries, in poor countries from the South of the world and in declining Western countries. The increase in internal social polarization is a fully-fledged global phenomenon, both in terms of geographical extension and in terms of connection with the economic globalization process (Therborn 2006), so much so that it is possible to talk about of a globalization of internal social polarization, which on one hand adds up to and combines with the 'historical' polarization North-South, and on the other hand entails the creation of two global social classes corresponding to the upper class and the working class on a global scale (Sassen 2006; Therborn 2011).

This global class bi-polarisation process, together with the previous trends, has modified the inequalities scenario compared to a few decades ago, with what we may define a double twist. On one hand, BRICs and smaller countries that have increased their industrial development, have partially bridged the economic gap that divided them from richer countries, but they have marked internal social and local inequalities originating the largest internal migrations in history: these countries, with China at the forefront, have grown considerably, but are now way more unequal than 30 or 50 years ago. On the other hand, rich countries - including most of Europe, which in its recent past was an example of limited social polarisation - have seen a marked sharpening of social inequalities, whereas

countries like Greece have even experienced a process of striking impoverishment of the society.<sup>15</sup>

Based on such conditions, it is possible to state that on a global scale, there has been a convergence both on development levels, as a number of large countries or areas from the South have come closer to rich countries, bridging their gaps, and on the sharpening of internal social polarisation, involving the majority of the planet. These are the overall global social consequences of neo-liberal policies: on the one hand the concentration of wealth in the hands of few people, on the other hand, large-scale spreading of poverty and precarity; on one hand relative reduction of international inequalities (again, this applies to a few countries only), on the other hand general worsening of internal inequalities.

Within such general trends, a number of specific points and phenomena are to be highlighted, though in a concise way. First, the sharpening of global inequalities in income between wealthy and poor social strata is a fully-fledged 'disparity march', which has been going on for at least three decades (Atkinson 2008; IMF 2007; Milanovic 2002; OECD 2008). A telling example of such sharpening is given by the United States: for each dollar of growth of real income taking place between 1976 and 2007, 58 cents went to the 1% richest families (Rajan 2010). Such increasing inequalities find their origin, first and foremost, in the labour market (not only in economic policy choices, as Piketty highlighted in 2002 [Piketty 2002]); they generated a long-standing trend, as observed by Bihr and Pfefferkorn twenty years ago, on the social origins of the reversal of a multi-decadal trend of inequality reduction, taking place more or less gradually in the 20th century:

Ce retournement de tendance ne doit évidemment rien au hasard. Il a été l'œuvre des politiques de plus en plus néolibérales de gestion de la crise économique [...] Politiques récessives, partant de l'idée que la crise serait essentiellement due à une insuffisance de l'offre, à cause d'un coût salarial trop élevé, elles ont pour objectifs: le développement du chômage, de la précarité et de la flexibilité de l'emploi, la baisse des salaires réels, un démantèlement rampant des systèmes publics de protection sociale destiné à en alléger le coût financier; mais elles ont aussi entraîné une évolution du partage de la valeur ajoutée plus favorable

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15 A note on the internal social polarization in the West: even though global wealth is higher in Western countries, it is concentrated in the hands of well-off classes, corporations, financial holdings, bank and insurance groups, whereas the processes of impoverishment and precarization of the working class and of a part of the middle class are advancing. The Western working class does benefit somehow, indirectly, of the concentration of global wealth in the North of the world, and in general, Northern workers' life conditions are better in average than those of Southern workers, but it is incorrect to talk about a rich happy Western world in general terms, as in the West, too, social polarisation has increased and there has been a process of downward levelling of life conditions.

au capital, un envol des taux d'intérêt réels, des bénéfices spéculatifs fabuleux, une déréglementation progressive ou brutale des différents marchés, propice à cet épanouissement de la liberté des plus 'forts' qui a pour contrepartie un asservissement accru des plus 'faibles'. (Bihr, Pfefferkorn 1995, pp. 14-15)

Second, this sharpening of inequalities is characterized by the intertwining of old and new inequalities, which are not mutually exclusive but rather add up to each other. A case in point is provided by the working poor in Europe, a constantly-growing phenomenon: the report *Working poor in the European Union* of 2004 (Eurofound 2004) highlighted a significant presence of working poor in Europe (6% EU15), whereas the report *Working poor in Europe* of 2010 (Eurofound 2010) presented an even more concerning picture, as in 2007 (i.e. right before the burst of the economic crisis) working in poverty was a condition concerning 8% of the EU27 population (with differences according to gender, age, working sector, company size, family structure, geographical area), with significant peaks in Greece (14%), Poland (12%), Spain (11%), Italy, Lithuania and Portugal (10%). In particular, the report highlighted that the risk of being working poor was higher in Southern Europe and in new member countries from Eastern Europe, and this condition affected mainly young and older workers (especially in Southern Europe). Other factors related to the risk of becoming working poor are low levels of education, a part-time or, even worse, a temporary contract, belonging to a single-parent family.

Third, the sharpening of inequalities is characterised by the polarisation between working class and upper class. The radicalisation of inequalities in different countries does not concern primarily differences in income within the working class and middle class (which are present), but rather the chasm between the income of upper classes and lower classes, now symbolized by the ratio 400:1, 500:1, existing between the income of the CEO of a corporation and the salary of a worker. This fact was also highlighted by the annual report *Executive Paywatch 2012*, according to which in 2011 the income of US managers had reached the astronomical amount of 12.9 million dollars, i.e. 380 times that of workers and employees.

Fourth, given the processes of differentiation, segmentation and stratification characterising mature capitalist societies, today's inequalities present a larger set of strongly intertwined dimensions (from employment to market income, from fiscal withdrawals to available income, from consumption to free time, from housing to school conditions, from health to social aid); such dimensions, mingling and assembling, produce different social configurations and categories. Not only is there an increase of inequalities between social classes, there is also a differentiation of inequalities within social classes.

Fifth, notwithstanding the increase in size and variables, in the process

of production and reproduction of social inequalities the importance of social origin is still considerable, especially in countries like Italy or Spain.

Sixth, the increase of inequalities taking place at a global level, in all its forms and dimensions (wealth, income, health, access to culture and information) proves wrong the neo-liberal theory according to which the market, when free to operate, would level the sharpest inequalities and spread welfare at a general level, but also the social theory (from Sorokin to Rostow) according to which contemporary societies (from the most 'advanced' to the most 'underdeveloped') would reach, sooner or later, a low degree of social stratification and a moderate lack of economic equal distribution. These theories had spread the conviction that the contemporary society would become a social structure composed almost exclusively by the middle class, with, at most, a few excluded individuals and very rare extra wealthy people, but it did not happen.

Last, but not least, internal social polarisation is a global process involving emerging countries too (where the middle class has grown in size and functions), not only mature capitalist countries or Third world countries. Asia is an excellent example, in particular China, as it presents a sort of living summary of current inequalities. The important social transformations that have taken place in the country over the past few decades, in particular the privatization of companies and (though still at its beginning) of land, welfare, school, together with the commodification of a number of areas of social life, have created marked economic inequalities between the new well-off urban classes (composed of entrepreneurs, managers, self-employed people, high public functionaries who capitalised on the Chinese economic miracle) on the one hand, and working urban class (that partly improved their level of life, but at the same time endures a higher level of exploitation) and rural class (drenched in poverty) on the other (Anon. 2011). Social inequalities in China are deeper between coastal and internal regions, between town industry workers and farmers: the 80s saw the start of the deepening of disparity in income, as symbolised by the increase in Gini's coefficient, moving from 30 points in 1982 to 45 points in 2002; the income gap between country and city increased, from 1.8 in 1984 to 3.1 in 2009; salaries decreased and their quota in the composition of the national income has considerably reduced, too (Lu, Gao 2011). Such disparities are mirrored in equally deep education (Mok, Lo 2007) and health inequalities (Pavolini 2009).

To conclude these general remarks, we can say that inequalities and their deepening are a pivotal phenomenon in current social transformations within the framework of neo-liberalism, which may thus be defined as a process of enlargement and exacerbation of inequalities among nations,

classes, gender and generations.<sup>16</sup> It is exactly in this general scenario that new inequalities shall be considered, including those relating to age, which now more than ever have specific features, in particular on the labour market, as shall be seen in the following chapters. In the next paragraph, the topic of older workers and active ageing will be considered, from a critical perspective.

### 3.3 Active Ageing: a Critical Perspective

For over two decades, a number of actors among which important international organizations such as the WHO, have developed an overall reflection on the concept and policies of 'active ageing'. As we know, the WHO defines active ageing as the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age (WHO 2002). This approach supports the realization of people's potential for physical, social, and mental well-being throughout the life course; in particular it supports older workers' participation in society, according to their needs, desires or abilities. In this sense the word 'active' does not refer only to being physically active or participating in the labour market but rather to a full participation in social, cultural and civil life. The concept of 'active ageing', thus, overtakes the concept of 'healthy ageing', as it includes a number of factors that, besides health, determine and affect the life of older workers and the elderly. It abandons a welfare approach based on needs, which portrayed and presented the elderly as passive subjects, privileged beneficiaries of institutional interventions, and embraces instead an emancipating approach, supporting equal opportunities and treatment in all aspects of social life.

Based on these assumptions, the main goal of new social policies is to maintain independence and self-sufficiency, which shall be pursued by means of integration of the concepts of interdependence and intergenerational solidarity. The WHO underlines that maintaining good health, preventing or delaying ageing-related disorders and diseases, also reduces human, social and economic costs weighing down on each individual, family and health system. It also calls for the adoption of policies and programmes in the field of employment, training, health to apply such approach, with positive results. Such approach considers the elderly a pivotal resource for families, communities and economies, as they may collaborate actively with their families, peers, neighbourhood, country; yet, to do so, a stronger institutional and social response is needed for the growing demands of

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<sup>16</sup> Helped out by the revival of racism, sexism and ageism, both in terms of ideology and in terms of policies and practices.

acknowledgement of the active, productive contribution of the elderly in formal and informal work, in household activities and voluntary work. Hence, the policies and programmes of active ageing shall encourage personal responsibility and self-activation, acknowledge the contribution of the elderly, consider that learning and training continue also at an older age, and provide for a welcoming, non-discriminating, non-hindering life context. As for this last point, the WHO has required the transformation and adaptation of cities, whose places, services, policies and infrastructures shall support and facilitate active ageing through a number of actions, such as the acknowledgement of skills and resources among the elderly, with flexible responses to their needs, the respect of their choices and lifestyles, the promotion of their inclusion and their contribution to social life.<sup>17</sup> The WHO also presents good economic reasons to spread this approach: the commitment by the elderly in care and homecare activities may be an important aspect for the economic life and for the very GDP of States; the extension of the working life-span, favoured by a good state of health, would reduce the burden on welfare spending; keeping a good state of health would reduce health expenditure. As for policies and cultural processes, the spreading of a new standard is required, in which the image of old age is no longer associated with retirement (as in quitting), sickness and lack of self-sufficiency, but rather to self-sufficiency, active contribution and development.

The concept of active ageing, previously introduced, is an important, useful and shared idea, yet it has a few critical points, some of which are theoretical while others more operational, some within the adopted logic and others connected to general social processes. First, the proposal does not consider neither, in particular, the impoverishment, social polarisation, destructuring and welfare privatization processes, nor, in general, a number of social, economic and political dynamics aiming at the opposite of what is proposed by the WHO. In particular, it is not clear whether the proposals indicated by the WHO contain and represent a sort of criticism and contrast to neo-liberal thought and policies, or whether they are a functional technical method of organic adaptation to leading trends. In the second case, it is hard to imagine their practical application.

Second, the elderly are considered a 'resource', but in a very specific and restricted meaning: an economic resource, a welfare safety net. In times like these, characterised by a new regulation of production relations marked by the increase in the intensity and precarity of work, by general cuts to welfare and by the worsening of the economic situation, the older population is identified as a useful source of productive and reproduc-

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<sup>17</sup> WHO 2007. A particular attention shall be paid to the sectors of housing, mobility and information.

tive labour, underpaid, free, voluntary, complementary and/or equivalent, functional to the interests and mechanisms of domination of the current historical phase (in which informal work and shadow economy are on the rise). A few examples can shed light on certain ambiguities of the concept of active ageing: the statement according to which active ageing favours the reduction of health spending goes along with neoliberal policies and concepts supporting the dissolving of social protection systems; suggesting work and training policies encouraging active ageing does not consider the actual dynamics of the labour market, in particular those on the management of staff and new forms of work organization (dynamics that tend to exclude from the labour market even middle aged workers as they are considered less productive, stiff, unskilled); the proposal to extend the working life-span has limitations if it does not take into account working time and conditions nowadays, together with managing and organizational practices tending to degrade, exclude, dismiss older workers, as demonstrated by a number of studies (Lain 2012; Karpinska 2013; Marshall 2001; Porcellato 2010; Taylor 1994; Thomson 1991; van Dalen 2014; Walker 1993).

All in all, active ageing, as it is being proposed at international level, seems like a good proposal, but often only on paper, because it is actually feasible only for a few; not only in the countries of the South of the world, but also in the North. Privatizations and liberalizations, with their consequences on the social life of the elderly (from city-planning dynamics to the housing market, from the increase in the cost of life to social inequalities), and the super-selective inclusion dynamics characterizing our era, seem to follow an opposite trend compared to what was previously suggested. This is why active ageing, if it wants to avoid becoming a new social collocation for the elderly marked by the adaptation of neoliberal policies, shall extend its meaning, including the possibility and need for the elderly to keep a stance and active role of resistance against all factors tending to worsen their life, a role of change, in its full meaning, in the final part of their working career and after retiring.

When considering the Italian context and its social policies, a few years ago M. Paci called for forms of active ageing which could be carried out moving from a national welfare based on transfers to a local welfare of services which could «translate into an important occasion of employment growth. This could benefit partly older workers, many of whom show they have the necessary skills to carry out voluntary or civil commitment activities [...] basically we need to start considering our ageing population as a resource» (Paci 2005, p. 43, my translation). The author also called for an increase in the working activity rate of the elderly, which requires, though, an increase in education levels, as the participation in the labour market is increasingly linked to a medium-high education level. This may be agreed upon, but it shall be added that as for active ageing and the increase in activities among the elderly, the main features of the current forms of work

organisation and division shall be taken into account, together with the worsening of the general working conditions, among which the progressive de-qualification of workers has a leading role.

Compared to the traditional social policies for the elderly, over the past few years steps forward have been taken all over Europe (even though to a different extent). There has been a gradual shift from policies based on the idea of a passive and ill older person, a weak subject, to policies based on the idea of the older person as an active subject, a skilled individual, a resource for the community. Yet, there is still a limitation in these new policies, i.e. the lack of connection between the elderly's condition and the global functioning of the society and social relations system. For instance, when considering projects of active ageing especially in Southern Europe, the social workers carrying them out highlighted the poor involvement of elderly women who were «isolated in their homes» or «not very active»: this can but be the outcome if the project is drafted without taking into consideration the actual conditions in which many women live, burdened as they are with care and housework activities and with such little free time. This can but be the outcome if the project is created without taking into account the configuration and dynamics of today's society, in which the elderly are made fragile and passive by economic and political circumstances of a general and systemic kind. The elderly are certainly a differentiated, many-sided, plural social component, yet as a whole they live and suffer from a condition of isolation and degradation. This is a pivotal point to consider when drafting social policies.

As for the working activity, the increase of the elderly component within the total population has taken place exactly when for older workers the job opportunities were decreasing. In Europe, especially in Italy (Morlicchio, Pirrone 2006) and Spain, the average life-span has increased and so has the life expectancy of the elderly, together with a reduction in the age of actual leaving work; in particular, there has been a decrease in the share of active population belonging to older age, in parallel with the ageing of the whole population. This reduction in the age of actual leaving work, which previously affected older workers almost exclusively, has now been involving, directly or indirectly, a number of people in their fifties mainly heading towards the final stage in their work career (at least the 'official' one). Over the past few years, many countries have dealt with this situation by increasing the retirement age, with results that have not always been positive, if not poor, as companies, keeping on their path towards early leaving work, have created a large number of unemployed people without the requirements to have access to retirement (Paci 1996; de Leonardis 1996; Guillemard 1996). This could happen thanks to a new regulation of the labour market marked by precarity and destructuring of the work-retirement path, all processes supported by 'accompanying' policies towards unemployment and the exclusion from the labour market,



such as a large use of pre-retirement plans, disability pensions and many forms of social protection.<sup>18</sup> If social policies today (at international and national level) are largely inspired by the concept of active ageing, as far as companies are concerned, the situation is different: despite the recommendations of the European institutions (Eurofound 1994), often during industrial restructuring, the first to be let go are older workers, and in quite a short time-span, as they believe (and often it is a fact) that they may put more pressure towards productivity on younger workers. During restructurings, pre-retirement is often employed, but it contradicts the very idea of extending active life. More and more often a part of older workers are forced to retire from work under unfavourable financial conditions (which certainly does not encourage a peaceful and active ageing) and they have then to find a new job under worse conditions in irregular activities. This is how, paradoxically, a shadow stretches over the notion of active ageing, the shadow of the use of cheap older workforce.

These processes, particularly hard during recessions and in restructuring phases, have mortified materially and spiritually older workers and the young elderly, resulting in their early leaving of work and increasing their social insecurity. In public representations it is often possible to note an overturn in the cause-effect relationship, so that the elderly seem a burden (it is not by chance that in this sector of studies and social intervention there is a leading role of the falsely neutral notion of 'dependence index'). A social, health, welfare, family burden. A burden not only on the present, but also on the future of society. A burden on younger generations, on children, from whom older workers – as the leading rhetoric goes, scientifically confusing rights with privileges – eat away the present and future welfare. In this sense ageism (Butler 1976) is more than ever the ideology framework supporting and justifying the social de-classification of individuals based on age, which was and is – according to the period – the driving engine for the mobilization or marginalization of older workforce; a social and organizational discrimination which goes hand in hand with other forms of inequalities based on social class, gender, nationality as already highlighted (Graebner 1984; Townsend 1984).

The de-structuring of work relations, the fragmentation of the work-retirement path and the amputation of welfare are processes which, together, affect heavily the whole cycle of life, especially for the elderly and older workers. Specific, local and individual situations may have different characteristics according to the context, yet it is possible to underline a

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<sup>18</sup> Italy, for instance, is characterised by the marked leaving of work by workers aged between 55-64, especially as regards the feminine component. Recently, the employment among older people has increased, due to demographic reasons and to the presence of selective mechanisms in the access to retirement; yet there has not been a change in direction as far as the marginalization of older workers is concerned. (Morlicchio, Pirone 2006).

permanent feature, i.e. the larger disadvantage of women, as they are more segregated and discriminated against by men in the 'ordinary' labour market and as there is still an uneven distribution of reproductive, house and care work. Old age is thus different for men and women, as it follows the lead of sexual division of labour and the uneven distribution of work burdens. The more idle and free it is for the former, the more busy and wearing it is for the latter – who often also have to provide for their children's families and/or elderly parents.

#### 4 The Present Volume

The present edited volume depicts contemporary debates of age vulnerability and social dialogue in the current social context and aims at improving expertise in industrial relations in European and comparative terms and at sharing information and experience among parties actively involved in industrial relations. Based mainly on the experiences of workers, we have gathered a set of illustrations of actions and measures addressing the needs and demands of young and older workers in relation to their active inclusion in the labour market. Thus, this work has a further goal of promoting the development of industrial relations in Europe by putting forward a set of recommendations addressed to different target groups involved in the study. The identification of best practices adopted by trade unions or employers' associations to enhance an active inclusion of vulnerable age groups of workers in the labour market and in the whole society is also an objective of this research in order to recognise and disseminate new approaches and measures that improve work opportunities and working conditions. Linked to this, in regard to specific policy recommendations that best support labour inclusion of vulnerable age workers and protect their rights, current union actions and discourses have been assessed towards a range of guiding themes dealt with in each of the sections of the book. These themes include main topics that play a key role in the dynamics between trade unions and vulnerable age groups of workers within the general debate of unions' protection of workers' interests in the new European context, such as the regulation of new forms of work organization, the prevalence of age discrimination, the gender dimension, intergenerational dynamics and age diversity management.

In this regard, chapter two of the present volume deals with the impact of the introduction of new forms of work organisation and its uneven distribution on young and older age groups of workers in the course of the last three decades. In chapter three the focus is on the changing contexts of age discrimination practices and their intersection with other forms of discrimination and labour market inequalities. Meanwhile, chapter four addresses gender equality and the specific problems faced by women in the

vulnerable age groups, while also analysing social partners' awareness of gender and age intersections in the labour market and the activities aimed at improving the situation of younger and older women to reconcile family and working life. Chapter five explores the unionisation trends of vulnerable age groups and to what extent social partners are able to successfully represent their interests in the framework of social dialogue institutions. In chapter six the emerging intergenerational dynamics in the labour market in the context of population ageing and the current economic recession are analysed and discussed. Finally, chapter seven focuses on the implications and applications of the main findings and innovative approaches gathered through case studies, with the aim to contribute to the future design and application of social policies and further development of industrial relations towards a greater inclusion of workers of potentially vulnerable age groups in the labour market.

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

## **The Effects of New Forms of Employment on Different Generations of Workers**

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**Abstract** This chapter aims at enlacing the correlation between new forms of employment and new vulnerabilities in the six countries analysed. In particular, the analysis done has pointed out the effects of new forms of employment on different generations of workers, through analyzing issues such as: the new forms of employment and the policies implemented in order to reduce the risk of labour market exclusion and increasing vulnerability.

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2. The Analysis of the National Frameworks in a Long-Term View: the Labour Market Composition. – 3. National Paths and Main Issues Concerning the Effects of New Forms of Employment. – 4. A Synthesis of the Results of the New Forms of Employment on Younger and Older Workers. – 5. Concluding Remarks on the Impact of New Forms of Employment on Younger and Older Workers.

### **1 Introduction**

The LinkAge investigation has highlighted a correlation between new forms of employment and new vulnerabilities in the six countries analyzed. In this regard the analysis aimed at exploring the effects of new forms of employment on different generations of workers on young and older workers, through analysing issues such as: which are the main new forms of employment and division of labour emerging in the last decade? Which have been the effects of these new forms of employment on young and older workers? Also with regard to policies, what impact have the new forms of employment had, and how have specific policies been implemented in this regard.

In all six national contexts analyzed there are, even if in different terms, common problems in relation to the effects of new forms of employment on young and older workers. These problems are the following: de-industrialisation processes that mostly affect manufacturing industries; the introduction of new technologies and the effects on the labour processes; the de-regulation of labour law and the introduction of new labour contracts marked by a high instability and an increasing precariousness. In addi-



tion, those processes have combined with other dynamics such as: ageing of population; the increase of the educational level among the younger generation; reductions in welfare provisions, especially for labour policies; and social shock absorbers.

The LinkAge investigation has also allowed the collection of actions and measures addressing the needs and demands of young and older workers in relation to new scenarios shaped by new forms of employment. These actions and measures are focused on the active inclusion in the labour market of different generations of workers dealing with the risk of exclusion from the labour market and increasing vulnerability.

## **2 The Analysis of the National Frameworks in a Long-Term View: the Labour Market Composition**

In order to deepen the effects of new forms of employment on younger and older workers it comes relevant to analyse the general transformations of the economy and labour market policies in the six countries in a long-term view. In the last decades all the six countries analyzed have experienced some transformations in the labour market composition and more generally in the economic structure. These transformations occurred have been involving the workforce as a whole but their impact has been more relevant on younger and older workers even if with many differences between the six countries. The analysis of the labour market re-composition shows that the changes of the national economies have substantially reduced the employment in the manufacturing sector and enlarged that one in the tertiary sector. This dynamic has implied the growth of the female participation to the labour market but also the increasing causalization of the employment relationship. As a consequence the deregulation of the labour market has produced, as already mentioned, a relevant shift from stable employment positions to unstable ones. Nevertheless, the regulatory framework evidences many divergences between the six countries.

So, considering the results of the LinkAge research, the main new forms of employment emerging during the last decade are the result of basically two main dynamics:

- 1) Restructuring processes: the relocation and delocalisation of a part or the full manufacturing process in order to reduce labour costs; firms closures that produced a huge amount of dismissals; the technological change due to the scientific innovation of products and labour process as well; the intensification of work paces caused by the high variation of markets and just in time work organisation patterns;
- 2) The deregulation of the employment relationship and specifically: the growth of fixed-term contracts due the increase of both standard

fixed-term contracts and so called 'atypical' contracts more and more typical in the labour market; the increase of work discontinuity due to the increasing alternating periods of intense work with periods of unemployment; the spread of underpaid and unpaid jobs (mini-jobs, zero hour contracts, stage); further reductions in protection against dismissal claimed by employers and promoted by some governments.

Along these lines, considering the restructuring processes of enterprises it should be highlighted that the reorganization of production is also due to more articulated dynamics involving the international division of labour which produces delocalization, closures and mergers. Moreover, the six cases analysed evidence how the restructuring of enterprises has caused consequences on work organisation in productive contexts, such as: learning how to use new technological tools and numeric control machines (by means of specific training which should be guaranteed by enterprises, although it is not always so); the intensification of the work pace and the demand for workers to pay more attention towards qualitative standards; increasing difficulties in being able to find a life/work balance due to the gap between working hours/work pace and the timetable of public services and activities destined to consumption. In the countries analysed, the restructuring of enterprises has originated dissimilar outcomes on the labour force, depending on the domestic dynamics of the labour market and on the specific national regulations of industrial relationships and labour policies.

Considering the deregulation of the labour market it should be remarked that during the past decade, by following a global trend, all the national contexts analysed have been affected by the growth of precarious work relationships. However, the outcomes for the labour force have been different in each single nation, depending on the roles played by institutions and social parties in managing the economic crisis. Italy, Spain and Poland have faced the highest levels of job insecurity: especially from the year 2000, these countries' governments have been promoting temporary contracts without however incentivizing labour policies. In particular, in the name of modernisation, the governments of said countries have been acting as follows.

In Austria the most common form of 'atypical employment' is part-time work whilst temporary employment contracts are less common as other employment contracts, such as labour leasing and self-employment. The changes occurred in the economic structure have led to an enlargement of the employment in the service sector that currently employs 70% of the active population, by contrast only 25% of workers are employed in the manufacturing sector. Despite the economic recessions and its results in the economy and labour market Austria has the lowest unemployment rate

of the EU 28 (people aged 15-64). At the end of 2013 it was 5.0% compared to an EU 28 average of 11.0%;

In Belgium part-time work occupies a growing place, especially for women in order to care for children or other dependents. The most relevant changes of the labour market are related to the increase in the employment rate of women (aged 15-64) from 38.1 % in 1986 to 57.2 % in 2013. The employment rate has increased especially among older workers as the rate of youth employment has declined over the past 20 years for both men and women. In same period also the differences between regions have increased. The economic recession has translated with both a slowdown of productivity and a reduction in hours worked by their employees and restructuring processes and job losses;

In Italy the deregulation of the labour market started in the 1990s, then, the emergence of new sources of workforce at lower costs and without protections accorded to workers employed has accelerated the ongoing restructuring, especially as regards the manufacturing industries with low-technological investment and labour intensive activities. In the first 2000s the government strengthened the role of private employment agencies and extended the temporary work, by introducing new types of employment contracts marked by the high discontinuity of job performance (intermittent work, job sharing) and modifying some existing employment contract (apprenticeships, part-time work and collaborations). From year 2000, job insecurity has undergone acceleration due to the issuing of specific measures which have increased the amount of discontinuous contracts with the aim to make work relationships flexible;

In Poland the economy has experienced relevant transformations as a consequence of the political changes of 1989. Following the reforms carried out in 1989 with the Balcerowicz Plan, many public enterprises have undergone privatization, hence causing employment discontinuity and unemployment (see Kowalik 1991). The liquidation of numerous unprofitable state-owned companies, the steady modernization of businesses, and the privatization process strongly contributed to the precarization of workers. Despite the creation of new jobs in the private sector the condition of workers in terms of working and income stability is still problematic. Poland has currently the hugest number in Europe of temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, as shown by Table 7.

In Spain, as of the 1980's, the government has strongly encouraged temporary work contracts, thus contributing in dualizing the labour market with particular disadvantage for the younger generations. Then, since the late 1990's to 2008 Spain experienced one of the most intense economic and employment expansion of the Euro area (with an increase of the total active population of 6 million people in this period). Then, the analysis of the recent evolution of employment trends by age groups shows that major differences emerge between young and older workers. Young workers have

been the age group most affected by increasing unemployment in the current recession: young male workers employed in the construction sector and manufacturing sectors have been the more affected by the economic recession. Labour market reforms implemented since the mid 1990s have been addressed to reduce the labour market duality through the reduction of differences of non-wage costs between open-ended and temporary contracts. The labour market reforms launched in the last two years (2010 and 2012) have been specifically focused on the lowering of labour market duality mainly through the reduction of dismissal costs of permanent contracts.

In UK the economy during the last twenty years has been marked by an ongoing moving in and out of recession. In a long frame view Britain's relatively deregulated labour markets had contributed to a strong economic growth, new employment opportunities and, by attracting immigrant workers, differentiate the labour market. Nevertheless, especially since the neoliberal turn started in the 1980s with Margaret Thatcher in the UK there have been relevant changes in the nature of industrial relations. Since then the rising unemployment and income insecurity have become structural features of the labour market: again, the restructuring processes involving the manufacturing sector and the enlargement of the tertiary sector have produced the destruction of stable job positions and the creation of new jobs marked by a high instability and low wages. In economic phases marked by a limited labour demand the UK policies have focused on encouraging mainly older people to search employment. On the opposite, in phases marked by high unemployment, governments' attention has been focused on younger workers.

In order to deepen the effects of the above mentioned dynamics on new forms of employment one needs to consider different variables: the effects of new forms of employment and the combining effects of the economic crisis; the effects produced by the technological change on workers and firms; different impact on the six countries analyzed; different impact on younger and older workers.

That is to say that there are national features such as the economic structure, welfare provisions (especially concerned with labour policies) the legislative framework and also intergenerational issues to consider for each country analysed. All these different variables make the difference. In any case, by looking at the variations in the number of employees it is clear a strong reduction in the employment rates for all age groups especially in manufacturing sectors. This is very clear for Spain, Italy and Poland as shown by Eurostat data in Table 1.

## Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations

Table 1. Employment in manufacturing sectors (thousands)

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU 28	37,861.6	35,001.6	33,854.5	34,056.0	33,623.8	33,114.8
EU 15	27,974.7	25,905.1	25,231.7	25,306.4	24,861.3	24,361.3
Belgium	707.3	653.4	650.4	638.3	592.0	586.6
Spain	2,971.5	2,536.4	2,396.3	2,340.0	2,213.4	2,108.2
Italy	4,611.0	4,400.5	4,221.1	4,264.6	4,158.8	4,074.9
Austria	638.8	605.3	619.5	648.4	656.1	646.5
Poland	3,217.4	3,046.5	2,860.3	2,904.8	2,886.5	2,948.0
United Kingdom	3,271.3	2,731.2	2,780.2	2,775.9	2,810.9	2,839.2

Source: Eurostat, LFS

Considering the employment rates Eurostat data shows a general decline of them among young people aged 15-24. This decline is mainly due to the increasing access to the tertiary education in all countries and the consequent unavailability of youth generations to cover permanent or fixed-terms positions in the labour market. Nevertheless it is also true that the unemployment has involved mainly young people as shown in Table 4.

Table 2. Employment rates by age group (%)

	2000	2005	2010	2013
	15-24	55-64	15-24	55-64
EU 28	:	:	35.9	42.2
EU 15	39.9	37.5	39.9	44.2
Belgium	30.3	25.0	27.5	31.8
Spain	32.2	36.8	38.5	43.1
Italy	26.1	27.3	25.7	31.4
Austria	52.5	29.2	53.1	31.8
Poland	24.1	29.0	22.5	27.2
United Kingdom	55.8	50.4	54.4	56.8

Source: Eurostat, LFS

Assuming the dynamics connected with the international division of labour involve all the six countries analyzes data shows that the effects of these dynamics on the labour market composition have been different. Divergent economic structures only partially explain the existing heterogeneity. The different trends can be explained considering the combination of different variables: economic structures, labour protections, main features of the labour supply and demand, technological investments, work organization, industrial and economic policies and welfare provisions.

Eurostat data shows relevant differences between the six contexts analyzed about the employment rates of young people aged 15-24 on the basis of the level of education attained, as shown in Table 3. Italy is the country with the lowest employment rate of youth people with tertiary education, followed by Spain; by contrast, Austria and United Kingdom are significantly above the European average (EU 28 and EU 15). Comparing data in a diachronic view it is observable a general reduction in all the six countries analyzed, with the exception of Austria. The existing differences are mainly due to the rising mismatch between labour demand and supply and specifically to an imbalance between the demand and supply of educated labour that shows cross-country differences in the incidence of overeducation. Assuming that overschooling does not necessarily imply overskilling it is noticeable that the entry in the labour market for more educated young people is still problematic. Along these lines, the economic recession seems to have increased existing difficulties of young people: as highlighted by Eurofound (2014b) the labour market for young people is still very poor. As a consequence of the economic crisis, young people who have concluded full-time education are less likely to move directly into full-time permanent employment. Along these lines, extended school-to-work transitions are compromising lifetime earnings, future employability and, in more general terms, the transition of young people into adulthood.

Table 3. Employment rates of people aged 15-24 with tertiary educational level<sup>1</sup> (%)

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013</b>
EU 28	59.7	60.2	56.8	54.7
EU 15	59.7	60.0	58.1	56.9
Belgium	80.8	63.7	53.8	44.2
Spain	45.5	56.4	45.8	35.8
Italy	49.3	27.3	25.3	23.1
Austria	64.8	73.3	63.3	67.4
Poland	53.9	56.3	52.5	43.3
United Kingdom	82.6	79.1	72.6	71.6

Source: Eurostat, LFS

1 Tertiary level relates to short-cycle tertiary, bachelor or equivalent, master or equivalent and doctoral or equivalent (levels 5-8). See also metadata Eurostat, available at [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY\\_SDDS/EN/lfsa\\_esms.htm](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ITY_SDDS/EN/lfsa_esms.htm) (2014-07-20).

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Considering Eurostat data on unemployment rates (Table 4) from 2000 to 2013 it is clear the existing divergence between the six countries analyzed. During this period the unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 has been increasing almost in all countries (except in Poland) but with relevant differences. The unemployment rate among this age group has grown by 8.5% in Belgium, Italy and United Kingdom, by 30.2% in Spain.

The analysis of the unemployment rate among older workers shows also different trends: from 2000 to 2013 it has increased in all countries (except in Austria and Poland) but with relevant dissimilarities. Among the workers aged 55-64 the unemployment rate has increased in Belgium by 2.2%, in Spain by 10.2%, in Italy by 1% and in United Kingdom by 0.3%.

Table 4. Unemployment rates by age group (%)

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013</b>
	<b>15-24</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>55-64</b>
EU 28	:	:	18.7	6.4
EU 15	16.1	7.6	16.6	6.4
Belgium	15.2	3.2	21.5	4.4
Spain	25.3	9.8	19.6	6.3
Italy	31.5	4.7	24.0	3.5
Austria	6.3	6.7	10.3	3.6
Poland	35.7	9.7	36.9	10.8
United Kingdom	12.0	4.5	12.8	2.7

Source: Eurostat, LFS

In this direction the analysis of the labour market composition reveals, as definitely shown by data, not an inverse correlation between employment and unemployment rates rather than divergent paths. This dynamic is mainly due to the recent transformations occurred that have produced both the reduction of the inactivity rate among the population over 55 and the increase of the temporary employment, especially among the youth population as shown by Tables 5 and 7. Data shows a strong reduction of the inactive population among people aged over 55 as consequence of the impoverishment of the household budget, due to the growing casualization of the workforce, and also of pension reforms that postpone the retirement age and forced many people to increase the seniority in the job. Data shows that in all six countries analyzed during the last fourteen years the inactivity rate has decreased hugely: by 18.2 percentage points in Belgium, by 13.3 in Spain, by 16.7 in Italy, by 15.1 in Austria, by 11.9 in Poland and of 10 percentage points in United Kingdom. This dynamic has been mainly involving women, as shown in Table 6, also as result of the declining of the male breadwinner model and the spread of dual-earner families. In

this direction since 2000 older women have been experiencing also the effects of both the reduction of welfare provisions and the precarization of the labour contracts: on one hand the cut on welfare state services and transfers has increased the care burden for women as unpaid work for dependent people in the household or in the enlarged family network; on the other hand the increasing precarization of the labour contracts has implied a growing instability of the employment position of other member of the family both in terms of a reduced income and also a reshape of the working times. In these terms, even if the family size has been progressively reduced in the last decades, the cut of welfare provisions justified by austerity measures launched for the need of fighting economic inefficiencies and providing fiscal consolidation are contributing to dismantling the social welfare although not all countries are affected in the same way. Particular intensive effects have been experienced in Mediterranean countries, such as Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain where the restructuring processes have combined with the lack of new job opportunities and the reduction of welfare provisions (traditionally very limited in these countries in comparison to other countries of EU 15).

Table 5. Inactive population as a percentage of the total population, by age group (%)

	<b>2000</b>	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2013</b>
	<b>15-24</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>15-24</b>	<b>55-64</b>
EU 28	:	:	55.8	54.9
EU 15	52.5	59.4	52.1	52.8
Belgium	64.3	74.1	65.0	66.7
Spain	56.9	59.2	52.1	54.0
Italy	61.9	71.4	66.2	67.4
Austria	43.9	68.6	40.8	67.0
Poland	62.5	67.9	64.3	69.5
United Kingdom	36.6	47.2	37.7	41.6

Source: Eurostat, LFS

However, gradually, both in relation to social changes occurred and pension policies enacted, a growing number of women with more than 55 years is now active in the labour market. In particular, the increasing destandardization of labour contracts has made discontinuous and also precarious the working conditions of many female workers close to retirement. Old female workers, especially those ones with low skills, are now caught between the dependence on the care of others and the work instability.



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Table 6. Inactive population as a percentage of the total population, by sex (%)

	2000	2005	2010	2013
	M	F	M	F
EU 28	:	:	44.9	64.3
EU 15	48.6	69.8	43.1	62.1
Belgium	63.7	84.2	56.6	76.6
Spain	39.7	77.5	37.1	70.1
Italy	57.8	84.1	55.7	78.5
Austria	55.5	81.1	57.0	76.5
Poland	58.9	75.6	59.1	78.5
United Kingdom	36.7	57.4	31.7	51.1

Source: Eurostat, LFS

Considering the transformations occurred at socio-economic level during last decade and data about the temporary employment is noticeable that the working (and living) condition of young people under 25 is most exposed to precariousness. Among young workers aged 15-24 the percentage of temporary employees on the total number of employees is relevant, with many differences between the six countries analyzed. The most paradigmatic cases are those one of Italy, Poland and Spain: in those countries young workers under 25 years old are mainly working with temporary contracts, as shown by data in Table 7.

Table 7. Temporary employees as percentage of the total number of employees, by age group (%)

	2000	2005	2010	2013
	15-24	55-64	15-24	55-64
EU 28	:	:	40.0	6.6
EU 15	39.4	6.2	41.2	6.2
Belgium	30.9	4.6	32.1	4.4
Spain	68.9	13.0	66.3	14.1
Italy	26.2	6.0	37.0	6.5
Austria	33.0	2.3	34.6	3.3
Poland	14.2	8.5	65.1	16.0
United Kingdom	13.2	6.2	12.3	5.4

Source: Eurostat, LFS

Nevertheless, as in Spain the temporary employment was spread since the 1990s, in Italy and in Poland it is a recent trend, mainly due to the labour market reforms. Along these lines, during last decade Italy and Poland have been experiencing a common path.

Since the 2000s in Italy the structure of Italian labour law has been gradually undermined: the Legislative Decree 276/2003 has strengthened the role of private employment agencies and extended the temporary work, by introducing new types of employment contracts marked by the high discontinuity of job performance (intermittent work, job sharing) and modifying some existing employment contract (apprenticeships, part-time work and collaborations).

In Poland young people under 25 usually have fixed-term contracts with low salaries, totally lacking any social protection, the so called 'junk contracts'. These contracts fail to ensure job security and in many cases they have also clauses allowing the employer to give only two weeks' notice for dismissal, and without obligation to give a reason. People employed with these contracts are not covered by the Poland Labour Code and do not have the right to paid leave or the minimum wage (see the analysis on junk job contracts made by Pańków 2012).

In these terms also a position in the labour market does not guarantee an adequate living standard and in many cases, on the basis of the kind of labour contracts, it may contribute to enlarge the risk of in-work poverty, as shown by Table 8. Additionally for the most vulnerable groups, a full-time job does not provide a solid pathway out of poverty: the workers included in these groups could experience critical economic privation during the current economic downturn, especially if their working hours are reduced because the worsening of the economic conditions. Recent measures addressed to make the labour market more flexible have translated into the precarization of the working conditions of many workers: data shows that the spread of low-paid employment even it has increased the number of people employed it has also amplified in-work poverty. Some people are more or less likely to be among the working poor: specific characteristics such as gender, age, education, household composition (single person, households with dependent children or without) and working conditions (average of yearly worked days, wage level, professional status, full-time or part-time work, type of employment contract) (see Eurofound 2010). It has been proved that women are more likely than men to be employed in low-paid jobs, working part time or in temporary employment. Single mothers and women working as employee or as self-employed with low incomes are also more likely than men to be at particular risk of poverty. Then also other variables such as education and age matter: considering the two age groups analyzed it should be considered that for both younger and older workers the risk of poverty is high: the first ones cope with the lack of working experience even if they may have high educational levels

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whilst the second ones face with low-skills and difficulties to access to IT knowledge. Nevertheless, data shows that in-work poverty risk is higher for young people because they are often forced to start their careers with low-paid jobs. Younger workers under 24 years old are experiencing increasing obstacles in accessing to a condition of economic empowerment: the access to formal labour market in a permanent position is getting more and more difficult and it is easier for them to get caught in the trap of precarity and as a consequence they may stay in this condition for many years.

Table 8. In-work at-risk-of-poverty rate by age group

	<b>2005</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>
	<b>18-24</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>18-24</b>	<b>55-64</b>	<b>18-24</b>
EU 28	:	:	10.9	7.3	11.2
EU 15	8.7	7.4	10.5	6.9	10.5
Belgium	4.9	3.1	4.5	4.2	6.6
Spain	8.1	11.3	15.9	12.7	10.8
Italy	9.8	6.8	13.2	6.2	14.7
Austria	6.0	5.8	5.4	4.0	5.1
Poland	15.0	11.9	12.2	10.4	11.0
United Kingdom	11.1	8.4	5.6	6.2	9.2

Source: Eurostat, SILC

Trends in temporary employment are very similar to those ones of unemployment. Data shows that in Italy, Spain and Poland the work discontinuity often translates in unemployment, especially for young people. With direct effects in the growth of NEETs, young people not in employment and not in any education and training. Again NEETs decrease in some countries such as Belgium, Austria and Poland and increase in Italy, Spain and United Kingdom.

Table 9. Young people neither in employment nor in education and training aged 15-24 (NEET rates)

	2000	2005	2010	2013
EU 28	:	12.7	12.7	13.0
EU 15	11.3	11.9	12.6	12.7
Belgium	17.7	13.0	10.9	12.7
Spain	12.1	13.0	17.8	18.6
Italy	19.1	17.0	19.1	22.2
Austria	7.9	8.3	7.1	7.1
Poland	:	13.9	10.8	12.2
United Kingdom	10.9	8.4	13.7	13.3

Source: Eurostat, LFS

### 3 National Paths and Main Issues Concerning the Effects of New Forms of Employment

As highlighted by Supiot (1999) the analysis of changes occurred in employment relationships in Europe requires a multidisciplinary and comparative view in order to consider the evolution of the labour law in a diachronic approach. Nevertheless inter-country comparisons are difficult to manage because the variety of national experiences. Supiot underlined that a relevant proof of this difficulty is the fact that since its building, in the second postwar period, the European Community has not still found a common definition of the concept of ‘wage employment’.

In contrast with many theories, belonging to the neoliberal tradition, the overcoming of the Fordist age has not implied the abandonment of the Tayloristic organization of work or the rigid hierarchical subordination of employees in the employment relationship. Along these lines the LinkAge investigation has mapped different trends in the labour regulations among the six European countries analyzed which are the results of the above mentioned variables and their combination in a long frame view.

Considering the mapping of the six countries, by analyzing employers’ and unions’ attitudes it was clear that in some cases, the notion of ‘new forms of employment’ resulted to be very broad and generic. Employers’ representatives and unionists interviewed gave diverging interpretations in this regard. Then, there is often wide divergence between the opinions of the entrepreneurial organizations’ representatives and those of the workers’ representatives about the restructuring processes and the effects produced on working conditions. The former state that, due to the economic crisis and the increasing difficulty in foretelling the market’s demand,

enterprises need to use discontinuous employment contracts, otherwise businesses would collapse. Instead, the latter state that the increase in job insecurity is one of the main causes for the enterprises' loss in productivity since the labour force employed with discontinuous contracts has no interest in investing in the work activity. Trade unions have expressed their widespread concern as regards youth unemployment; whereas, less attention has been given to the future employment workers aged more than 55, obliged to remain longer in activity due to the rising retirement age. At the same time, though, said age bracket is particularly exposed to the risk of social exclusion due to the enterprises' processes of reorganization.

More specifically, as regards the consequences of the restructuring of enterprises, trade unionists interviewed have identified the following aspects as problematic:

- 1) De-professionalization and wage differences among workers: Both aspects are spread in the enterprises originated by processes of outsourcing that, in actual fact, affect the labour force employed in enterprises that work in a mono-commission regime and often do not have their own market. In addition to these elements, it is also necessary to take into consideration low wages as well as reduced perspectives both of career and training for those workers employed in outsourced enterprises;<sup>2</sup>
- 2) The increasing detachment between the enterprises' property and the territory where the labour force is employed: The new international division of work, which took place in the 2000's, entailed the dislocation of the entire productive process, or of some phases of the same, especially in the manufacturing sector, in extra-European countries at a lower labour cost. This process had direct consequences on negotiations and social dialogue because it eases the confrontation between those who organize the enterprise with its related work, and those who represent the workers' interests. The restructuring of enterprises are closely connected to the de-regulation of the labour market, and specifically to the introduction or extension of contractual typologies characterized by employment and wage discontinuity. As regards this specific field, the interviews carried out with trade unionists highlighted the two following aspects. On one hand the effects of the current changes on the labour market: all of the contexts analyzed, although at different levels, are characterized by a segmentation of the labour market which, at first sight, seems opposing younger and older workers. In fact, unpaid internships and temporary contracts are more widespread among the youth (regardless of their educational level),

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<sup>2</sup> These issues have emerged from the interview carried out by ZSI (Austria) to the trade unionists.

whereas workers aged over 55 suffer from increasing precarious life and work conditions due to the many processes carried out for the restructuring of enterprises. The social risk for unemployed people aged over 55 is high but the perception of this problem is not present among workers' and entrepreneurs' representatives.<sup>3</sup> According to those interviewed, even the issue of youth unemployment has been underestimated by the social partners, with the effect of reducing the pressure for the implementation of adequate governmental policies. On the other hand the effects on the welfare system: employment (and income) discontinuity in the contexts analyzed produces the risk of social exclusion and poverty among the active population. However, such effects weigh upon the future generations because employment discontinuity reduces the national insurance contribution, and at the same time prejudices retirement revenues for the generations that will be retiring in the next decades. Along these lines the increase in the retirement age affects the employment stabilization of young generations hence, causing social hardships to become widespread.

#### **4 The Impact of New Forms of Employment on Younger and Older Workers**

The main issues observed in the six countries relate to the results of the different combination of socio-economic issues on the labour market and specifically on younger and older workers.

Considering the analysis of the condition of workers aged 15-24 the following issues have emerged.

There is a positive correlation between the over-education and the increasing mismatch between labour supply and demand. This is particularly due to the fact that in some countries (Spain, Italy and Poland) the labour demand is very poor while young people are more and more educated. As a general trend in the six context analyzed the correlation above mentioned is also the result of a long-established gap between education, training and working activity paths.

Facing job losses there have been great difficulties in the job creation: many findings testify that the creation of job needs a combined mix of ideas, funds and policies. During the recession the creation of new jobs is very difficult, especially in countries, such as Spain, Italy and Poland where industrial policies have lacked and the technological investment in enterprises is still low.

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<sup>3</sup> Eurostat data highlights that women and immigrants over 55 are the ones more exposed to such risk.

The widespread (ab) use of contractual typologies such as internships, apprenticeships: it has been proved that unpaid and underpaid jobs are expanding precarity. Among this kind of jobs there are internships: they are often unpaid, on the basis of the assumed low productivity of young people involved but it is arguable that internships really contribute to gain working or professional experience. In most cases young people accept these jobs instead of being unemployed but then they risk to be entrapped in the precarity. Formally, these contracts provide for young people a job and some training. Actually, though, many enterprises use this kind of contract to save on labour costs and to substitute seniority workers. This contractual abuse creates a disadvantage for workers because it lengthens their permanence in the trap of job insecurity without the possibility to acquire particular benefits in terms of specialization (see also Perlin 2011). The increase in the use of new discontinuous contractual forms, such as: the zero hour contracts in the United Kingdom, the so-called 'junk contracts' in Poland, the different typologies of temporary contracts in Belgium, and even more so in Spain and Italy. In Austria there has been an increase in the amount of self-employment contracts. In all of the contexts examined, although with different levels of diffusion and temporariness, the increase in the use of these contractual forms has produced a general slackening of life projects of people aged under 25 and a decrease in the contributive revenues for the payment of retirements.

The absence of employment perspectives in addition to the hardships that the economic crisis is worsening in the various national contexts: There has been an increase in the amount of NEETs, particularly in Italy, Spain and in the United Kingdom, as shown by the data in Table 9. The increase in NEETs, especially when observing the trend with reference to the beginning of the economic crisis, indicates that in some of the contexts examined, for a series of variables, the population aged under 25 is particularly at risk of social exclusion.

Considering the analysis of the condition of workers aged over 55 the following issues have emerged.

Technological change and educational gap: this is due to both the lack of training activities in the workplaces and the low educational level of older workers. In the six contexts analysed, the technological change has occurred with different modalities, essentially due to the workers' level of education and to the enterprises' financial investments (both in technology and training). In quantitative terms, it is difficult to estimate the entity of the job loss caused by the technological changes; it is also difficult to estimate the career and pay advancements connected to a higher technological investment. However, it is possible to identify the greater difficulties that workers aged over 55 have to face, also on the basis of the interviews carried out. The introduction of new technological devices

has caused the intensification of the work pace and greater employers' pressure as regards qualitative control, with consequent difficulties for those workers who are not skilled and highly educated. Moreover, the difficulties met by workers aged over 55 in adapting to a new language and technology are exposing those workers to new forms of discrimination and the risk of being fired.

Job losses and increase in the retirement age: almost in all countries analyzed the retirement age delay has been achieved but in some countries this has been associated with massive dismissals that make more difficult for over 55 to join the pension. The interruption in advance of the work career and the difficult re-collocation increase the diseases of workers belonging to this age group. For the workers aged over 55, the termination of the employment determines, especially for unskilled workers, a difficult management of the transition from a stable employment to the research of a new job. The above mentioned difficulty is particularly evident in Spain where, at the end of 2013, the rate of the unemployed aged between 55-64 reached almost 20%, unlike the other contexts analysed. The Italian situation is more articulated: in fact, it is possible to assume that the social security system has prolonged the existence of many employment relationships mainly without any form of indemnity so to anticipate the dismissal.

Outplacement initiatives cope with long careers in many sectors involved in relocations. In most of the six analyzed countries there is not a deep-rooted tradition in outplacement actions. So the job search contrasts with long careers of older workers mainly developed in one firm or in one sector and it is mainly based on the individual effort of the worker affected by a dismissal procedure.

The restrictions and costs-opportunities connected to the workers aged over 55: Workers over 55 have a high seniority and a consolidated experience in a typical work relationship that on the one hand support a productivity increase but on the other hand oblige employers to apply contractual regimes adequate to the experience matured and skills acquired. Moreover, workers over 55 are often members of trade unions, and thus with a high average knowledge of their rights. These elements, as highlighted in the interviews carried out with the trade unionists, often influence employers in the way they manage their enterprises, especially during this economic phase, giving more attention to the saving of labour costs to the detriment of workers with higher seniority.

## **5 Conclusion**

Young people in the six national contexts analysed are experiencing an increasing precariousness. Accessing to a stable employment position is becoming more difficult for many young people, especially for those who



live in countries affected by a structural economic crisis such as Italy and Spain where youth unemployment has reached the top in the European Union (28 members). Since the 2000s in the six national contexts analyzed, permanent positions in the labour market have reduced while fixed-term contracts have hugely increased. As a matter of fact, the request for flexibility, in order to reduce labour costs and increase firms' competitiveness, has produced growing difficulties in accessing to a regular employment position among young people. In addition, their staying in the precariousness trap is preventing their emancipation from the family of origin, with many consequences also for the postponement of their adulthood. Young people interviewed have also pointed out the difficulties in accessing to the labour market with fixed-term contracts, and moreover their lack of confidence in their future, especially in Italy and Spain.

In order to explain the impact of new forms of employment on younger workers one should consider also the increasing mismatch between labour supply and demand: younger people are better educated in comparison to past generations and in many cases they are overeducated in relation to their country's economic structure and firms' requirements. As a consequence, many young people interviewed are searching for any kind of job, notwithstanding the lack of career opportunities or the impossibility of gaining a stable position. This issue should activate governments in order to increase the skills required by firms: policy makers interviewed are aware of this issue but in times of crisis the state financing is converging on income support mechanisms rather than on industrial policies.

In the six national contexts analysed, the restructuring activities, mostly involving manufacturing industries, are damaging, even if in different terms, older workers, especially those with low skills. Among older workers the risk of vulnerability is increasing because of the dismissals that produce the loss of permanent positions and the scarcity of opportunities to re-enter in the labour market. For older workers interviewed - those who have lost their job as a consequence of the current economic crisis or the restructuring of companies due to business strategies mostly related to financial activities - the perception of their replaceability is discouraging the search for a new job. Furthermore, the introduction of new technologies, especially in the field of IT, has radically modified the work organization of some industries e.g. the graphics industry but also many sub-sectors of the metal industry where the loss of jobs is due to the elimination of human labour. Especially after the 2008 the economic recession has produced direct consequences in the construction industry and less innovative manufacturing sectors. In the sectors above mentioned job losses are mostly unavoidable while the creation of new jobs requires firms' investment and national policies as older workers need to be supported by special programmes of training activities, in order to acquire new skills addressed to re-enter in the labour market.

Among policy makers interviewed, the main issues to cope are connected to the difficulty in anticipating and managing current changes. Present difficulties are also related to the deep-rooted features of the national economic structure: in countries such as Italy, Spain and Poland, small sized and family-based enterprises have played a crucial role in the economic growth of the past decades that can no longer be played in the present situation. Among unionists interviewed, these countries are experiencing a structural loss of jobs which will be not regained when the recession will end. In these terms, this perspective has emerged also during the interviews with the policy makers who have highlighted the dilemma due to the reduction or lack of financing to create new jobs and the need to support older workers too young to retire but too old to be employed again. In more general terms it should be highlighted that social partners of the six national contexts analyzed are still more focused on the implementation of public policies rather than considering their effectiveness. Along these lines the economic recession and the austerity measures have exacerbated a contingent approach towards policies and measures to reduce the vulnerability among the two age groups considered in the analysis rather than promoted a long-lasting approach addressed to plan policies for next years.

Interviews with workers have pointed out different perceptions about the effects of the measure taken, on the basis of the existing perspectives in the national framework. Among all people interviewed has emerged the perception of a growing instability connected with the new forms of employment: this perception is particularly spread in Italy, Poland and Spain. In these countries also the evaluation of public policies is more critique due to the fact that, according to respondents, the governments are representing more the interests of firms rather than focusing on social inequalities. Among Belgian and Austrian workers the critiques have risen in relation to the specific conditions they are experiencing in the workplaces rather than to public policies implemented. Then, especially in Belgium young people are worrying about the increasing unemployment. The workers interviewed in United Kingdom have criticized zero hour contracts, even if with relevant differences in their opinions, regardless of their age.

The analysis of the effects of new forms of employment on young and older workers in the different contexts analyzed reveals that the national framework still matters. As a matter of fact despite the existing EU legislation the national labour law plays a key role in determining the regulation of working conditions and the implementation of public policies is still marked by traditional paths followed by the governments whilst the combining effects produced by the growing unemployment and the enduring restructuring activity of firms would require leader classes often lacking in national states. Then, it should also be highlighted that the socio-economic structure of the six contexts analyzed requires specific policies focused both on the reduction of inequalities and the enhancement of national strategic

economic sectors. In order to achieve these goals the contribution of social partners is necessary: during last decade the social dialogue to manage the transformations occurring in the economy and in workplaces has been experiencing a swinging trend. The lack of a stable debate about these issues has prevented the promotion of a permanent monitoring activity on the ongoing transformations and the implementation of effective policies to reduce the negative effects produced by the economic crises and by the transformation of work organization patterns as well.

In times of economic crises social partners demand different responses to governments: on the one hand, trade unions ask for investments in training and jobs instead of austerity policies and a balance between the flexibility claimed by the employers and the need of protection against social risks asked by workers; on the other hand, employers' representatives ask for the reduction of labour costs in order to keep the competitive levels of firms. The analysis made testifies that the effects of the new forms of employment - combined in some cases with the consequences of the economic crisis - have not caused the same outcomes in the six countries observed: one must take into account the different economic and social structure but also national governments' responsiveness and the attention paid by social partners to balance opposite interests.

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

## **Age Discrimination and Age Diversity Management within the Vulnerable Age Groups**

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**Abstract** Age discrimination legislation is coming into force across EU member states, but the context is now very different to when this legislation was first conceived prior to the economic crisis of 2008. Older workers and younger workers are both vulnerable, but it is far from clear that age discrimination legislation offers them any protection. In this chapter we explore what is meant by age discrimination and what forms it takes, from the perspective of older and young workers as well as various social dialogue agents, experts and policy makers in this area. The paper finds that older workers are still finding themselves frozen out of employment once they become unemployed and younger workers are facing, in many cases, impossibly high barriers to entry. For vulnerable workers in both age groups, there is a sense in which they are deemed to be failing to match up to the middle-aged ideal-typical worker. The authors suggest that this is perhaps a new basis for solidarity between these vulnerable age groups; in stark contrast to the reductionist view of 'intergenerational conflict'.

**Summary** 1. Introduction: the Changed Context of Age Discrimination. – 2. Findings from the LinkAge Study: an Overview. – 3. Perceptions of Age Discrimination: Younger Workers. – 4. Perceptions of Age Discrimination: Older Workers. – 5. Access to Training. – 6. The Organisation and Allocation of Work Tasks. – 7. Active Ageing and Age Diversity Management Strategies. – 8. Employers, on the Other Hand, Think That it is Slowly Bearing Fruit. – 9. The Utility and Relevance of Age Discrimination Legislation. – 10. Conclusion.

### **1 Introduction: the Changed Context of Age Discrimination**

The issue of age discrimination is not a new one, but it is one that has experienced something of a revival in recent years (Macnicol 2010). And, of course, discrimination can be felt and play out differently in different spheres of life – in communities, in families, in the work place, and in institutions of welfare. In recent years, however, a number of pressures associated with globalisation, population ageing and welfare state re-trenchment, particularly in respect of pension provision, are said to necessitate the extension of working life. Coupled with these supposed trends is

also the demand that older people have made for the right to extend their working lives and to retain a useful identity through what has come to be known as ‘the third age’ (Gilleard, Higgs 2010). Economic necessities and cultural demands thus conveniently coincide. Among those inciting older people to redefine themselves as active workers until well into their later years were organisations like World Bank, the OECD and the World Health Organisation (Moulaert, Biggs 2012). Article 3 of the Lisbon Treaty made active ageing the basis of solidarity between the generations as it is a key goal of the EU 2020 growth strategy (European Commission 2012). This international emphasis on active ageing has served to place the issue of age discrimination in the labour market and in the workplace more centrally on policy agendas, and has given rise to a number of efforts to legislate against age discrimination in the labour market. In the European Union, the Treaty of Amsterdam made a general commitment to achieve a high level of employment (O’Connor 2005) and the prevention of age discrimination in the labour market has been tackled by means of the Employment Framework Directive of 2000. European anti-age discrimination legislation is said to recognise that «both younger and older workers have rights to age equality» (O’Cinneide 2005, p. 5) and, moreover, is not just concerned with formal equality (i.e. that individuals in a similar situation should be treated equally) but, in theory, is also «concerned with combating age-based disadvantage and upholding basic rights». Member states have progressively implemented age discrimination legislation in national laws. Many have also lifted their default ages of retirement (see Table 1).

## Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations

Table 1. Adapted from Age Discrimination in Europe, Ius Laboris

	<b>Austria</b>	<b>Belgium</b>	<b>Italy</b>	<b>Poland</b>	<b>Spain</b>	<b>UK</b>
<b>Date legislation was introduced</b>	The Equal Treatment Act and the Federal Equal Treatment Act came into force in 2004.	The Act Against Discrimination of 10 May 2007 entered into force on 9 June 2007.	Italy implemented the EU Directive on 9 July 2003.	General equal treatment provisions came into force in June 1996. Detailed age discrimination introduced by Labour Code of 2003 became binding in January 2004.	The Spanish Constitution of 1978 forbids all forms of discrimination. The Workers' Statute of 1995 prohibits discrimination in employment. The EU Directive was implemented in Spain December 2003.	The Employment Equality Regulations of October 2006 implemented the EU Directive. The main laws are now contained in the Equality Act 2010.
<b>Who is covered</b>	All employees with private contracts, self-employed people with regard to access to self-employment, and civil servants of the federal government are covered.	All employees, candidates for jobs, independent workers, civil servants, partners, trainees, voluntary workers and affiliate members of supplementary social security schemes.	Main groups covered are: employees and contract workers in both the public and private sector.	Employees including temporary workers, job applicants and graduates are covered by age discrimination law. The provisions do not apply to the self-employed, persons working on contracts and other civil law contracts.	Protection extends to all Spanish nationals and foreigners. Only employees who work under ordinary or special employment contracts are protected by the employment courts against direct or indirect discrimination.	All employees, contract workers, office-holders, partners, persons applying for training, persons using employment agencies and students.
<b>Provision for direct/indirect legislation</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Default retirement age</b>	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Age</b>	65 for men and 60 for women.		65	65 for men and 60 for women. Additional groups also able to retire earlier		



The current recession and concomitant contraction of employment, however, creates a new context for age discrimination in the sense that older workers are vulnerable to layoffs but also face worsening levels of social protection in retirement. Extended working life is fast becoming an economic necessity (not just a means of remaining socially useful or of bolstering ailing productivity) at the very time when economic recession is rendering forced early exit more likely. Where 'early retirement' was arguably a convenient mechanism for employers to shed older workers, now equalities legislation, in theory, removes that facility. Further, one significant concern about anti-age discrimination legislation is that it will enable employers to discriminate more, but now «on the 'rational' grounds of productivity» (Macnicol 2010, p. 7). It remains, therefore, to be seen whether anti-discrimination legislation like the removal of the default age of retirement will help or hinder older workers seeking employment and whether age-blind productivity demands will make it harder for older workers to remain in employment. Furthermore, it is clearly not just older workers who are facing discrimination in the labour market. One key characteristic of the current economic crisis and recession is the extraordinarily high level of youth unemployment, particularly in Southern European countries. Younger workers are facing excessively high barriers to entry into the labour market and, as our findings show, this could be said to add up to an emergent pattern of disadvantage and indirect discrimination. So, while initiatives like the EU's 'Youth on the Move' policy and national policies towards enhancing young people's employability through education and training at least recognise the crisis of youth unemployment, we need to ask whether training and experience requirements may themselves add up to a pattern of indirect discrimination against the young. For this vulnerable age group, it is far from clear that the age discrimination legislation, which at least gives a minimum of protection to vulnerable older workers, has any relevance for younger workers at all.

There is also the long-standing question of whether age discrimination in employment is even the reason why older people tend to withdraw from the labour market before formal retirement age (Macnicol 2010). Indeed, across Europe the trend has been (Walker 2005), and continues to be, early exit from the labour market. In 2012, across Europe, the employment rate of older workers aged between 55 and 64 was less than 50%, although there are significant variations between member states (Sinclair et al. 2013). From a review of the literature, McNair (2006, p. 485) concludes that, in Britain at least, decisions to withdraw from the labour market before the mid-50s are «almost entirely health related» and, for women in particular, caring responsibilities often precipitate labour market exit. Of course, this is not to say that anti-age discrimination legislation will have no effect, but it does raise questions about how much can be achieved without policies and strategies that are sensitive to lifecourse

issues. This brings us to the second theme of our chapter – age diversity management strategies and practices. So far as the EU’s 2020 strategy is concerned, age discrimination is supposed to be accompanied by more pro-active strategies for ensuring life-long access to training, ensuring healthy working conditions and, crucially, «adapting careers and working conditions to the changing needs of workers as they age» (Council of the European Union 2012, p. 8). Indeed the Employment Framework Directive allows for positive action to compensate for disadvantage and to protect disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (O’Cinneide 2005). But again, in a context of rising levels of unemployment and austerity, how much of a priority is active age management likely to be?

In summary, then, concerns about age discrimination and the management of a diverse work force were conceived in a context of relative economic prosperity when, for a variety of reasons, the chief concern was to retain the older worker. Age discrimination legislation is now coming into force across EU member states, but the context is now very different. Older workers and younger workers are both vulnerable, but it is far from clear that age discrimination legislation offers them any protection. In this chapter we explore the following questions from the perspective of older and young workers as well as various social dialogue agents, experts and policy makers in this area:

- What is meant by age discrimination? What forms does it take in the new economic context of recession? How do those differ between younger and older workers?
- What formal, legal efforts have been made to remove age discrimination? How effective are these measures in combating discrimination and disadvantage for both vulnerable age groups?
- What evidence is there of active promotion of age management practices?

## **2 Findings from the LinkAge Study: an Overview**

Within this theme, we were interested in exploring age discrimination in terms of labour market access and experience in work for both sets of vulnerable age groups. Of particular interest is the question of whether there is something specific we might call age discrimination that is meaningfully addressed in equalities legislation. In age discrimination legislation, a distinction is drawn between direct discriminatory acts and indirect discrimination where practices, although perhaps not discriminatory in their intention produce discriminatory effects. Among our individual workers, there were perceptions of both direct and indirect discrimination, but there appeared to be a hesitance on the part of social dialogue partners to label certain practices in relation to the hiring and dismissal of workers in

vulnerable age groups as direct discrimination. There was, however, a certain sympathy among employers' representatives, policy organisations and trades unions that certain practices can be discriminatory in their effects. For older workers the persistence of the well-documented misconceptions and myths still abound across all countries in the study. There seems to be an almost universal assumption that older workers are more prone to sickness, are less productive, that they will expect higher wages and are over-aware of their statutory rights.

For younger workers, stereotypes are perhaps less in evidence, but this does not mean that they do not face the discriminatory effects of a whole raft of practices such as the general casualisation of labour and the escalating demands for experience and skills that are out of all proportion to the actual demands of the job.

### **3 Perceptions of Age Discrimination: Younger Workers**

Prejudice against younger workers on the part of older employers and employees is not new. We came across some evidence of age-old myths about younger people expecting too much, being poor time keepers and time wasters, having low motivation and not showing enough loyalty to their employers. But these myths and prejudices are somewhat secondary to what seems to us to be a clearly emergent pattern of indirect discrimination. For vulnerable young workers the key aim is first to secure employment that will enable some sort of independent life and, ideally, to access employment that is commensurate with qualifications and that can be a starting point for progression along a career path. For older workers the aim is to re-gain access into work following either a period of forced unemployment, or the revision of an earlier decision to retire for financial or social reasons. Put perhaps somewhat simplistically, the different discriminatory effects these age groups face are polar opposite. This was neatly summarised by one Spanish younger worker:

They (older workers) have the experience but lack qualifications; we (younger workers) have the qualifications but lack the experience. (SP-YW4)

For many younger workers the entry bar to employment is simply set too high. Employers' high requirements in terms of work experience effectively rule them out of even applying for many jobs. As one Austrian younger worker put it:

As young person you are often confronted with a lack of work experience. And if you read a job application, [employers] prefer to hire some-

one who is 25 years old but who has 30 years of experience. At least this is my impression. (AT-YW4)

Employers' expectations are often out of line with what training programmes can realistically deliver. As one Belgian policy maker stated:

Employers are more and more demanding. Young people should have a very good education and specific training, two to three years of work experience, a driving licence, and be perfectly be-lingual in Brussels. Existing training often does not match companies' needs, however, which are evolving very quickly. (BE-TUR8)

The lag between employers' requirements and the capacity of training programmes to deliver them is one source of disadvantage for younger workers. However, across the board there is a sense in which employers are differentiating between younger workers with similar qualifications on the basis of acquired experience and training, often irrespective of the level of skills and experience actually required for the job. Hence the feeling often expressed by young workers that the gap between what they can offer and what is expected of them can never actually be bridged. A feeling of sheer exasperation at what employers now expect was felt by many of our young interviewees. As one Polish worker stated:

The employers' expectations often go beyond their needs and abilities. A college graduate, for instance, is expected to have 5-6 years of professional experience, which, with the current system of education in Poland and the condition of the labour market, is unrealistic. (PL-TUR2)

These unrealistically high expectations then set in train a series of other practices, which produce indirect discriminatory outcomes. For example, to acquire the necessary experience, younger workers are often forced to take on unpaid or very low paid work. Voluntary work, internships and what are often labelled as apprenticeships, but which in fact display none of the features in terms of essential preparation for eventual entry into a profession or career, are now commonplace across the countries of study.

However, not all young workers can afford to do this, particularly where family support is lacking or where social security rules make the take up of unpaid or very poorly paid positions prohibitive. Neither do all have the social capital which is often necessary to access such opportunities in the first instance, particularly for internships that are genuinely a route into profession. For others, with the financial means and the social capital, there are internships and apprenticeships available which may translate into perhaps more meaningful career opportunities. In this way, then, what

begins as indirect age discrimination spills over into indirect class, or social discrimination.

Effects on levels of social mobility are keenly felt across all countries. For the Southern European countries and Poland there are real concerns that exit from the country is an option for those who are socially mobile and staying put and relying on extended family support is the option that remains for those who are not. But, even in the UK, where youth unemployment is relatively low, there are still real concerns about falling levels of social mobility and rising levels of inequality which will be felt for years to come. In the words of a representative of one UK policy organisation:

One of the things that we've seen very clearly over recent years is the inequality gap has got wider. That people who are disadvantaged, who have less skills, poorer education are actually being denied opportunity. And so we're seeing an increase in the gap in both life expectancy and healthy life expectancy of those groups. Social mobility has gone down and so for us it is very much around those people who are most disadvantaged and the people who are being most critically affected by this. (UK-PO1)

So there is a widespread sense that employers' demands with respect to the skills that young workers should have on entry into work are unrealistic; that in the absence of training, these compel younger workers to seek low paid or unpaid work to gain the experience which then embeds a pattern of inequality and falling social mobility. The unions, for their part, perhaps, though, display a certain ambivalence on the question. On the one hand, they can see that 'apprenticeships' are an important means of acquiring necessary skills and experience; on the other hand, they fully recognise that these can be vehicles for exploitation. This ambivalence is neatly summarised in the words of one UK trade union representative:

Well there's a big issue I think about people getting access into work at the moment generally, but the lack of work experience... I mean one of the important things to say is, although we criticise the government for a complete inadequate response to the youth unemployment crisis, we also say there is a genuine need to increase training and apprenticeships; I mean we have to be careful when we go down that line because there are a lot of opportunities for young people to be exploited in a way which is not appropriate, but at the same time we want to be in there talking to employers about decent schemes that do provide those opportunities for people. (UK-YW2)

The question is where the line is drawn between 'apprenticeships', internships and voluntary placements that are additive and those that are exploitative.

There are, of course, notable exceptions to the trend towards ever increasing barriers to entry for young people. Some sectors, such as the financial and insurance sectors highly qualified workers are very much in demand and younger workers in these sectors did not communicate the same sense of vulnerability. However, what we also encountered, and somewhat counter-intuitively were perceptions that more highly qualified younger workers (notably graduates) may face additional discriminatory effects as a consequence of state policies. In Belgium, for example, youth employment policies are aimed primarily at the very low skilled and, in the perception of more qualified workers, insufficient attention is paid to their needs. In the UK, those with higher skills reported that they were finding it difficult not only to find work that matched their skills, but also in persuading employers to let them take on work that is deemed to be beneath their capabilities. The perception among the more highly qualified workers was that those with low skills could get low-paid entry-level jobs more easily than them. In Belgium and Austria too, similar observations were made. As one young Belgian worker put it:

I could not find a job in my field. So I looked for a job in a restaurant. But employers told me that I did not have enough experience, even though all the jobs I had held when I was a student were precisely in restaurants! I have decided to return to university and I am sure I will find a job easily, even in a restaurant because I will be a student. Employers pay lower social charges for student jobs. (BE-YW7)

As another Belgian worker put it to us:

I was pretty disgusted because I have actively sought work and was told that I was not experienced enough. Many employers have also told me they could not take me because I do not fulfil the eligibility conditions to benefit from the regional employment policy in Brussels that favour certain types of job seekers. I had a few interviews, but in the end I got no offers because I was overqualified. Employers receive subsidies to employ less qualified people. (BE-YW3)

There is then clearly a need to understand more how current employment and engagement practices produce different discriminatory effects within the same vulnerable age group, and to explore further the insight that it is not necessarily those with the lowest skills and qualifications that face the greatest challenges. Policies designed to help the very low skilled may, in fact, disadvantage those with higher skills.

Another alarming trend has been the rise of the so-called 'junk contract', which appear to be particularly prevalent and rising in the UK and Poland. These can take a variety of forms, but include the so-called 'zero

hours contract' in which employees make themselves available but are not guaranteed work from one week to the next. These are used in the retail, hospitality and elderly care sectors. While numbers are relatively low such types of employment are on a steep upward trajectory (Guardian Newspaper, August 4th 2013). In certain cases, these can also contain exclusivity clauses, whereby employees are expected to be exclusively available to one employer without guarantee of work. Junk contracts may also include civil law contracts, lacking the protection of employment law and without the possibility of building up entitlements to social security, and in some cases, employment-based health insurance. In Poland, the union, Solidarność, has consistently campaigned against such junk contracts and estimates that some 5 million workers in total were on such contracts and that some 70% of workers between 18 and 35 were on contracts beyond the scope of labour law. In October 2012 Solidarność launched its largest campaign yet, aimed at bringing public interest to the issue by stressing the scale of the problem, along with its effects upon both the employees and the entire economy. The motto of the campaign was: «I don't want to start from scratch each day. End junk contracts now». Again, such contracts may be regarded as a means of gaining experience in the short term, but there are fears that they trap especially younger workers in temporary work. For the most part, however, where younger workers had experience of junk contracts, their views were mostly negative:

A lot of my friends have experienced that [...] Company X, I have about five friends I know who have been employed over the last year by them, they've had a couple of hours and that's it, no contact again about shifts and they've heard nothing back, and they've been out of work ever since. (UK-YW7)

The last job I had I was on zero contract hours, so that didn't help me at all and that was kind of a killer because sometimes I would get hours where I'd do two to four hours and then I wasn't in for three days, and then I'd do another two to four hours [...] but like I said a job is a job and I didn't want to turn it down because money is money, I few hours here and a few hours and it all adds up. [...] But in the same sense it would be beneficial to have a straight nine-to-five job being paid the minimum wage to get your average salary at the end of the week just so you know you're being paid. (UK-YW1)

Young people also noted the complexities and inconvenience of zero hours working and claiming out of work benefits:

At the moment I feel much better as I know that I will be paid every week and I've got work, but when I was on zero contract hours everything was

up in the air, I never knew how much I'd be getting paid each week, I never how many hours I had each week and it was just hard.

Sometimes between working on signing on and the zero contract hours I had to tell them [the jobcentre] how many hours I did a week so they would take it from my jobseekers allowance and some weeks I didn't even make enough so just got my job seekers. But like I said before work is work and I didn't want to turn it down because out there are people with less than me. (UK-YW1)

#### 4 Perceptions of Age Discrimination: Older Workers

Trends towards early exit from the labour market, it is asserted, have generally served to devalue older people in the labour market and to reinforce age discrimination (Walker 2000, 1997). An EU-wide survey carried out by Walker (1993) in the 1990s revealed that all age groups believed that older workers faced discrimination. Common stereotypical views in the UK, for example, were that «older workers are hard to train; do not want to train, lack creativity; are too cautious, cannot do heavy physical work; have fewer accidents and; dislike taking orders from younger workers» (Walker 2005, p. 691). While our study is not a systematic survey of attitudes towards older workers, it nevertheless reveals that many of those long-held stereotypes still persist despite national and international policy efforts to alter perceptions of older workers.

Our study shows that well-worn prejudices abound. There is a common perception among employers that older workers are: less adaptable; more prone to ill health and absence; will demand higher wages; and are (too) well informed of their rights. Even in cases where workers have offered to work for lower wages and on a more casual basis, they are often told that they are over-qualified. Conversely, they may face discrimination because of a perception that the skills they have acquired in one work environment are ill-adapted to a different work, particularly where IT skills are demanded. There was some evidence that practices that could be deemed to be discriminatory against older workers applied also to workers who were significantly younger than 55. In Austria, for example, older interviewees reported that they had faced difficulties in regaining access to the labour market because they were deemed to be overqualified, to be demanding higher wages or to have too many accumulated entitlements, even as early as 45. Similar observations were made by older workers in Spain. As one older worker put it:

In the current situation of the market, once you are over 40 to 50 years old, it's almost impossible to get hired unless you're highly qualified. (SP-OW6)



We even encountered instances of direct and overt discrimination:

At the beginning, I was offered the position I applied for, but suddenly a negative reply followed. I wanted to know exactly why this happened, firstly accepting me for the position and then rejecting. The [person responsible for human resource] replied «I can get 1.5 18-years old workers instead of you». (AT-OW6)

The most recent Belgian barometer of diversity, implemented by the Centre for Equal Opportunities and Opposition to Racism, shows clearly that workers over 45 are exposed to a high risk of age discrimination when interviewed for employment. More than half of human resources directors say that the age is a decisive criterion in the final choice of a candidate. Organizations from three states invest in the training of people aged over 45 and Belgians tend to think that a company with mostly older employees will be less efficient.

One of the most common obstacles to re-employment faced by older workers refers to their lack of educational qualifications when it comes to the formal selection processes in most companies, especially the larger ones. Most of the skills and competencies of older workers have been achieved through long years of service; most of them are very specific to one company but not attested by formal qualifications or diploma and are not readily transferable to other sectors or occupations. On the other hand, most of the skills of qualified older workers who do not regain employment quickly become obsolete in a context of deep technological change, particularly digital skills. Moreover, it is not just in applying for new jobs that digital skills become a barrier, they can also be a factor in retaining work once acquired. As one UK young trade union representative put it:

As far as obtaining jobs, you'll give you an example of one of branch members, who is a fifty year old who has been laid off from the construction industry, his come into a call-centre and his being taken through disciplinary hearings because on the job application it say you must to be numerate, you must understand how to use office and these can of things, they was an automation assumption that he would be a hundred per cent completely computer literate against his colleagues who are primarily young, they is an expectation that you will be able to utilise different programmes for example. So whilst he fits the criteria, against his younger counterparts it looks as if he's fallen behind, but again it comes back to education there's still a stigma against anyone who isn't eighteen or nineteen in college, we had a forty old woman who came on a course and she was too embarrassed to continue it for the stigma of failing rather than further learning. (UK-YW3)

This also reveals the stigma and shame older workers feel at their lack of digital competence relative to younger workers.

We encountered instances of felt discrimination for both vulnerable age groups, particularly in respect of: access to training opportunities; the organisation and allocation of work tasks – the latter, as we will discuss paradoxically being a consequence of a lack of discrimination between age groups.

## **5 Access to Training**

A perception of a general reduction in levels of in-work training is pervasive. It must be said, though, that there are differences between countries and between age groups here in perceptions of employer training. In Austria and Belgium, our younger worker respondents seemed to be broadly happy with work training, although in Belgium there was also a perception that older workers had fewer opportunities to engage in work training.

Training is mostly for young people. After age 50, access to training is more complicated. Officials are involved in external seminars and make a report back. This is the way we are kept informed. (BE-OPg).

In Poland, the observation was made that those on fixed-term contracts are not taken as seriously by employers, or given training opportunities, compared with those on permanent contracts. In the UK there was a pervasive feeling that employers were scaling back on in-work training which affected younger and older workers alike. In Italy there was a widespread perception that levels of training have been persistently poor and worsening across the board.

Certain employers are of the view that it is a cultural deficit on the part of older workers that they have been complacent and have failed to refresh their skills and knowledge. This was notable in Poland, for example. Previous research carried out in the UK has suggested that for older workers a lack of training may be as much due to the refusal of employees as to discrimination on the part of employers (McNair 2005). However, this may, in turn, feed prejudices on the part of employers. Some older workers in our research reported that they feel that they are sometimes excluded from training, since employers believe that they are unwilling to participate. There was also a perception among younger workers that it tends to be younger employees who seek out training courses, as they consider them an opportunity to gain new skills, while older workers tend to operate primarily on the basis of their experience and practice.

Notwithstanding these possible generational/cultural effects, given that, as noted above, lack of experience and training are oft-quoted reasons for differentiating between workers, declining levels of training may serve to compound processes of indirect discrimination. For young people facing

such high performance expectations it means fewer opportunities to enhance their performance to expected levels. For older workers, lower levels of training and support may hamper their ability to adapt to changes in technology and IT. The discriminatory effects of myths and prejudice are, thereby, compounded by lack of training.

## **6 The Organisation and Allocation of Work Tasks**

Our research has found that there are issues related to what we might term insufficient differentiation between workers of different ages, or to put it another way, insensitive, or lacking, age management practices. For example, older workers may find it hard to negotiate reduced working hours or may be expected to continue to carry on with the same demanding shift patterns into older age. This is particularly so where companies have undergone restructuring and layoffs and the work is redistributed among remaining workers. As one Belgian worker put it to us:

I think the pressure for the over-50s is the same as for others. Working time is not adapted to their age and they are required to produce the same results. (BE-OW9)

Older women appear to be particularly vulnerable to insensitive age management practices and find it difficult to negotiate flexible or part-time hours to accommodate caring responsibilities. In the perception of one policy maker in the UK, women find it difficult to even broach the subject with employers which reinforces the mistaken perception that there is no problem. (These points are taken up more fully in the chapter on gender issues.) Younger people, on the other hand, often find themselves being judged in the work place by the same standards as older workers with much longer experience. Their performance may be seen as lacking relative to more experienced workers.

Some younger people were, though, of the opinion that when it comes to allocating shifts and deciding holiday schedules, older workers are treated more favourably by employers. This is illustrated in the quotations from two younger workers in the UK:

I find that employers don't want to offend the older people but with the young people they don't care about how they treat them. (UK-YW4)

Erm yeah I would say so because they call them the full-timers; majority of the full-timers are older and they do get more opportunities or if they need holiday because they work 5 times a week because they technically need to benefit more, that's the sort of consensus. (UK-YW5)

There are, however, notable exceptions to this pattern. In Italy, for example, we were told that craft enterprises regard workers over 55 as a crucial element of the labour force. Senior workers are regarded as an asset as they are the holders of the company's know-how. In particular, this dynamic concerns small enterprises, widely present in Italy, in which a small staff base necessitates the retention of all workers.

In summary, a lack of recognition of different capabilities and capacities results in a certain disadvantaging of both vulnerable age groups. While older workers may have certain advantages in terms of seniority when it comes to the organisation of shifts and holidays, there is still a strong sense in which workers are not thinking seriously about the different needs of younger and older workers. This brings us to the question of the active management of an age-diverse workforce.

## 7 Active Ageing and Age Diversity Management Strategies

For Walker (2005, p. 685) «the term 'age management' may refer specifically to the various dimensions by which human resources are managed within organisations with an explicit focus on ageing and, also, more generally, to the overall management of workforce ageing via public policy or collective bargaining». It is an idea that has been around for some time and coincides with the growing international interest in the extension of working life, as discussed above. Given that, we wanted to know what kind of active ageing policies are in place and how salient they are in the current context. Although, again, this is not a systematic survey, we found little evidence that active ageing is currently a prominent issue for social dialogue partners. The UK is illustrative here. A public policy programme entitled '*Age Positive*' which is about providing advice and guidance to employers on the active management of an age-diverse workforce has seen its resources dwindle to such an extent that, at the time of our research, was being managed by just one person within the Department for Work and Pensions. This is quite staggering for a country that has recently removed its default age of retirement, is progressively raising the state pension age, and recently strengthened its equalities legislation to take greater account of age discrimination. In the minds of many commentators, the primary interest of the UK government currently is to remove bureaucracy and regulations which are seen as hampering growth. The Age Positive campaign, seen in that light, represents another instance of, so-called, 'red tape'.

Similarly, in the Spanish context, the *Strategy for the Employment of Older Workers 2012-2014*, concluded by social partners in 2011 had several objectives: to increase the employment rate of older workers (over 55); to assist in maintaining jobs for this age group; to improve working conditions; and to foster the incorporation of older workers back into the labour

market; and to combat age discrimination. Despite the advances of this active ageing strategy, its effective implementation is at risk not only because the current economic crisis presents new labour market priorities, but also because it was approved just before the change of government in 2012.

In Poland, the State Programme to promote the Activity of Older People has the aim of an activity level of 50% over people over 50 by 2020. It has two key employment objectives – to educate older people; to promote integration within and between generations – and two key social objectives – to promote older peoples social inclusion and to improve social services for older people. During the first two years of the programme (2009 and 2010) some 14,000 people made use of the training, apprenticeships and subsidies to business start ups offered. Unions, for their part are highly sceptical of the programme’s benefits.

None of the government’s 45+ or 50+ programmes has ever worked. The same goes for the programmes that target young people. (PL-TUR-1).

## **8 Employers, on the Other Hand, Think That it is Slowly Bearing Fruit**

Belgium and Austria have arguably the most comprehensive age diversity programmes in place. In Belgium, the three linguistic regions have different diversity policies, but all have diversity counsellors to mainstream the diversity issue at workplace level. These counsellors have been supported financially from regional government funds. In the Brussels Region, their main task is to develop diversity action plans within companies together with employers and unions’ representatives and in cooperation with the region’s Territorial Employment Pact.

However, according to several trade union interviewees the real impact of diversity plans on hiring of persons from vulnerable groups is very low. The main interest of this instrument, they say, is to give trade unions the opportunity to access information on the composition of the company’s staff. It then helps open dialogue on the issue of diversity, including age issues, and asks for facilities for older workers if needed. As one trade union representative explained:

Workers have become aware of the diversity issue [...] The diversity plan breaks taboos and tears down some walls but it does not reach the heart of the matter: diversity is not yet equal to the hiring and retention of employees. (BE-TUR3)

Another innovative instrument was recently adopted in Belgium in order to keep older people working, is the National Labour Council agreement on «the implementation of a plan for the employment of older workers in companies» (CCT 104). Its main objective is to make it possible to hire

or keep workers aged over 45 years, as it has been observed that people over this age are already exposed to age discrimination. CCT 104 requires private employers with more than 20 employees to establish an annual or perennial plan that must contain at least one employment measure in several areas, such as skills development, including access to training, career opportunities in the company, possibilities of adaptation of working hours and conditions and a system of recognition of acquired skills.

Social dialogue actors are involved in the process as the plan must be submitted to the consultative bodies, including union representatives, who may suggest changes or additions. Where proposals are rejected, the employer must justify its position. Social players are, however, ambivalent about this new instrument. They recognise that plans based on age can be helpful in establishing dialogue on the topic, as the diversity plans do. As one trade union representative pointed out:

The interest of the plan is that it contains basic information on the company; it could be helpful to initiate a preventive policy based on age, by reflecting the age of ALL workers, including younger workers. (BE-TUR2)

However several union representatives also clearly see the initiative's limits. In the words of another trade union representative:

Older workers are accused of not knowing how to adapt to new technologies compared with younger workers, of being too expensive, etc. and at the same time we want to increase the participation of workers over 45 in the labour market. CTC 104 is not going to solve all the problems. It opens the dialogue on these issues, but no penalty is provided against an employer who fails to file a plan in time. Recalcitrant employers can present a minimum of proposals and subsequently reject proposals from unions while remaining within the law. (BE-TUR3)

Since this instrument was adopted at the beginning of this year, it is too early to assess its impact on older workers. According to several interviewees, the main impact, as with the diversity plans, will be more on keeping older workers at work rather than on hiring people over 45.

In Austria, the policy aspiration is to increase the activity rate of men and women to 78%, and the activation of older workers is a central element of this. Its Productive Ageing programme was introduced in 2007 with the support of the European Social Fund (Objective 2). This has resulted in a number of measures at regional level including a pilot study in Styria which focuses on cross-generational competence management in small and medium-sized enterprises. Companies are carrying out and the respective results create the basis for further steps towards the implementation

of cross-generational competence management in Styrian SMEs. In collaboration with the human resource development (HRD) managers and stakeholders, this should result in detailed plans and strategies covering, for example, mentoring, work ability coaching and cross generational collaboration (see: <http://www.ce-ageing.eu/index>).

Across our six countries, there is scant evidence that age diversity management strategies are a priority for social dialogue partners. Belgium and Austria are the exceptions here, but even there, these are voluntary programmes and, in the case of Austria, with uncertain funding mechanisms.

## **9 The Utility and Relevance of Age Discrimination Legislation**

In the apparent absence of meaningful age management strategies for integrating an age diverse workforce across most of the countries studied, age discrimination legislation is one of the few public policy levers for protecting vulnerable age groups. It is worth, then, considering whether, it is likely to offer that protection. Here we draw upon relevant academic literature as well as observations from our research participants. The objective here is not to offer a comprehensive comparison of the legal provisions of each of the countries in the study: that is clearly far beyond the scope of this chapter. Rather, the aim is to get a sense of the awareness of age discrimination legislation on the part of younger and older workers and the social dialogue partners. Is there a sense in which age discrimination is being vigorously applied in the interests of vulnerable age groups?

As already noted, the impetus for age discrimination legislation across the EU member states was the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1999. Article 13 «... discrimination on the grounds of sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, age, disability and sexual orientation». (Bell 2004, p. 242) This quickly gave rise to the Framework Employment Directive, which outlawed both direct and indirect discrimination on a number of grounds including age. A majority of countries incorporated the Directive into national legislation by the 2003 deadline but a number were granted extensions - Denmark, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and the UK (Walker 2005), partly due to the «inevitable complexities inherent in age discrimination legislation» (O’Cinneide 2002). For a summary of national legal provisions see Table 1. For age discrimination specifically, Skidmore (2001) has argued that this is the slipperiest of equalities of all and individual Member States were given considerable freedoms to be flexible with the law. Article 6 of the Directive permits differential treatment on the grounds of age in the pursuit of legitimate policy aims - including legitimate employment policy, labour market and vocational training objectives - provided that the means of achieving those aims are ‘appropriate and necessary’. Article 6(1)(a) lists the kind of special conditions that may be permissible including special

conditions on access to employment and vocational training, employment and occupation, for young people, older workers and persons with caring responsibilities in order to promote their vocational integration or to ensure their protection (O’Cinneide 2002). Article 6(1)(b) allows the fixing of minimum conditions of age, professional experience or seniority in service for access to employment or to certain advantages linked to employment. Article 6(1)(c) allows the fixing of a maximum recruitment age which is based on the training requirements of the post or the need for a reasonable period of time before retirement. So, to the extent that national legislation is motivated by European law, the grounds for exceptions are very wide indeed. Faced with such legal opacity, there would need to be a certain determination on the part of social dialogue partners to use these legal provisions and it is far from obvious that is the case.

As we have already noted from our research, there is a general hesitancy on the part of social dialogue partners to label what appear to be ageist attitudes as instances of discrimination. As one Austrian social dialogue partner freely admitted, s/he was unable to state categorically that what s/he was seeing could be called discrimination:

I am not sure whether you can call it age discrimination, but the high requirements to youth are unrealistic, some can hardly be met. (AT-TUR4)

As we noted in the previous section, unions are ambivalent on the issue of apprenticeships and internships and so on: whether one should be grateful at any kind of job opportunity for young people or whether the excessive requirements placed on young people and the degraded forms of employment they have to accept in order to gain experience amount to a pattern of indirect discrimination against the young. Young people themselves, although they clearly feel a certain discriminatory effect are themselves unclear about whether this constitutes age discrimination. A common perception was that younger workers are less well informed of their rights than older workers, but as we noted above, the idea of the over-informed older worker is itself, of course, a common stereotype. As one Austrian younger worker put it:

You are not discriminated because of your age, but because you are an apprentice. You are in a certain hierarchy within the company, you have a clear position within the company [...] it is not related to age, but to the position. (AT-TUR4)

Employers, for their part, appear to be ill-equipped to meaningfully adhere to the spirit of equalities legislation. As we noted in the case of the UK, while there may once have been a will on the part of government organisations to actively promote a more positive attitude to the employment



of older workers and to promote an awareness of ageism more generally, that effort seems to have been hugely scaled back in the light of public sector cuts. Similarly, in Poland, despite an espoused policy commitment to combatting ageism, some thought that the policy had failed. As one trade union representative put stated:

None of the government's 45+ or 50+ programmes has ever worked. The same goes for the programmes that target young people. (PL-TUR1)

Others were more optimistic about future prospects though, and in particular government measures to co-finance employee training, job creation, and the system of paid internships.

In Italy, there was a sense that human resources departments were poorly resourced and simply not in a position to support the implementation of equalities legislation. In the UK, ACAS (Advisory Conciliation and Arbitration Service) reports that there had been a dramatic increase in age discrimination cases being brought to industrial tribunals by dismissed older workers and that the average award for successful claims now amounted to some £30,000 (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=3627>). It is, however, hard to draw any firm conclusions from this regarding the effectiveness of age discrimination legislation. On the one hand, it indicates a certain strident attitude among older workers, but on the other hand, also indicates how widespread discriminatory practices are, and how ill-informed employers are of the implications of the legislation.

So, for younger workers, it is far from clear that age discrimination legislation would have any role to play in combating what we have argued amounts to unrealistic expectations on the part of employers regarding entry level skills and experience and the degraded forms of employment contract that they are routinely forced to accept. For older workers, age discrimination legislation may be a means for older workers to gain compensation in cases of unfair dismissal on grounds of age, but whether, in the absence of more active policies to promote a positive attitude towards the older worker (Walker 2005), it will have any effect on encouraging them to remain in the labour market, as was clearly the objective of the original European legislation, is far from clear. The assumption that removal of discriminatory practices will encourage older workers to stay in the labour market has been challenged. Roberts (2006, p 71), for example, argues that the continuing trend towards early exit from the labour market has more to do with the changing nature of the work place as a consequence of «processes of global capitalism» (Roberts 2006, p 71). In particular, these have resulted in a social failure to reproduce what he calls the 'collective worker'. Without overly romanticizing the past, what he refers to here is the kind of solidarities between generations within the workforce

that offered protection both protection for new and experienced entrants who could be ‘shown the ropes’, as well as protection for older workers who could work at a slower pace or do less physically demanding work. Intergenerational understandings about the distribution of wages were also a feature of the work places in which this kind of ‘moral order’ was observed (ibid). While such spontaneous and bottom-up intergenerational networks may well be lacking in the current workplace, it seems that it is something of this spirit that lies behind calls for age diversity management strategies and practices.

## 10 Conclusion

Our research clearly does not add up to anything like a comprehensive survey of attitudes to and experiences of age discrimination, but from our small sample we can discern the persistence of old myths, prejudices and stereotypes, despite the raft of European and member states legislation to outlaw age discriminatory practices as well as the emergence of new patterns that are discriminatory in effect. Older workers are still finding themselves frozen out of employment once they become unemployed and younger workers are facing, in many cases, impossibly high barriers to entry. These, in turn, are forcing them to take on degraded forms of work contract – ‘junk contracts’- and reinforcing a trend towards taking up low paid or unpaid work to gain experience. Depending on levels of social and financial capital, some are able to seek out and take up these opportunities better than others, and what begins as a form of age discrimination ramifies into a form of social or class discrimination. Clearly these mechanisms amplify in their discriminatory effects according to the level of unemployment in each country, but it is noteworthy that in the UK, where levels of unemployment are generally much lower, younger workers are also experiencing discriminatory effects in relation to labour market access and in respect of a stark diminution of the quality of jobs (for example, the prevalence of internships and zero hours contracts). For vulnerable workers in both age groups, there is a sense in which they are deemed to be failing to match up to the middle-aged ideal-typical worker. As an Austrian policy worker put it:

The ideal-typical employee is a high-performer between 28 and 40 years; or let’s say between 30 and 40 years. And this is the reference against which all others are assessed. (AT-OW4)

This is perhaps a new basis for solidarity between these vulnerable age groups. This would be a better basis for intergenerational solidarities than the rather reductionist view of ‘inter-generational fairness’ that stalks Eu-

European countries in economic crisis. So far as the EU is concerned, the promotion of 'active ageing' is already about meeting the needs of younger people since it is assumed that equipping older people to finance their own social contingencies through wages will free up fiscal resources for younger generations: hence the emphasis on 'active ageing' and 'solidarity between generations' (European Commission 2010). This thinking is also evident among member states in this study, most notably, the UK and its championing of 'generational fairness' (see House of Lords 2013). Moreover, such a laissez-faire, and arguably passive approach – rhetorically championing age diversity and hoping that age discrimination legislation will of itself eliminate age barriers – is ill fitted to the current economic context in which two sets of vulnerable age groups are increasingly forced to work to ensure their social security but face an uncertain economic future.

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

## **Gender Equality Among Young and Older Workers The Role of Social Dialogue**

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**Abstract** the role of social dialogue Summary The objective of the article is to examine to what extent the issue of age ties in with the issue of gender equality. The crucial issue of work life balance and family has been very important in union culture in recent years but as such measures are applied only to women, they also bring about damages making women lose opportunities for promotion in companies and contributory bases for retirement. There is a need to formulate policies to effectively deal with issues of gender and age as part of a comprehensive strategy addressing demographic change and to reflect the great diversity in the group of younger and older women.

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2. Vulnerable Age Groups and the Labour Market: Specific Issues Encountered by Women. – 2.1. Young Female Workers and the Issue of Pregnancy. – 2.2. Older Women and Work: an Inadapted Environment. – 3. Young and Older Women: an Active Participation In the Life of Unions? – 3.1. Increasing Unionisation of Women but Without Clear Information About Their Age. – 3.2. Limited Representation of Women in Trade Union Decision-Making Bodies. – 4. What Tools to Better Reconcile Family and Working Life Along the Whole Life Cycle? – 4.1. Scarcity of Implemented Measures Especially Since the Economic Crisis. – 4.2. A Difficult Understanding and Acknowledgment of Older Female Workers' Needs. – 5. Conclusion.

### **1 Introduction**

The Special Eurobarometer 393 on Discrimination in the EU (2012) highlights the ongoing problem of age discrimination as the most prevalent ground of discrimination for older people. 54 per cent of Europeans believe that age is the most common factor that can put applicants at a disadvantage when a company is hiring. Along with the ageing of the EU population, the number of people facing multiple discrimination is on the increase (Age Platform Europe 2012). Younger as well as older workers are both confronted with difficulties in accessing and stabilising their work position. Since the beginning of the crisis the situation has led to more precarity for both age categories. In this context, multiple discrimination based on age and gender should be seriously taken into consideration as gender seems to reinforce precarity linked to age.

All gender inequalities emerging during a career – such as difficulties for young women entering the labour market, part-time jobs, flexibility, etc. – have had an impact on pensions: older women are recognised as a vulnerable group that will fall victim to a gender pension gap. They are penalised for time spent out of the labour market caring for children and other family members or dependants.

Reconciling work and family life is therefore still challenging for women, whatever their age, due to the male-dominated life-cycle model that still rules the European job market. A recent study shows that gendered path differences that emerge during active life have an impact on the extension of working life (Rosende, Schoeni 2012). In some European countries, this extension mainly concerns women but equality policies between women and men do not take this evolution into consideration. The fight against discrimination based on age should nevertheless be at the heart of social policy in the context of high unemployment among young people and longer working hours for older workers.

In the light of all the above, it can be argued that the situation of older women will be even worse with the adoption of current reforms in social protection systems, particularly with regard to pensions. Indeed, pension reforms will affect women more than men because of the raising of the retirement age and the reduction in pension benefits. This is due to the specific patterns of women's careers, as they are more likely than men to have had an irregular working life, part-time contracts or undeclared work. This is particularly the case among migrant women. While most countries are increasing the number of years of contributions required to obtain a full pension, little is done to compensate for the career breaks taken predominantly by women to care for dependent relatives.

The specific needs and problems encountered by female workers related to age are rarely taken into account by trade unions and policy makers, except in recent studies from the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI) focusing on the issue of occupational health of women (Vogel 2003; Tieves 2012). Eurofund also studied working conditions differentiated by gender and age in the fifth European survey on working conditions. This study sheds light on the differentiated gendered quality of work and employment for older workers (Vendramin, Valenduc 2012). The issue is thus slowly attracting interest, especially for older women, mainly due to the demographic situation and new legal obligations to stay on the job longer, which also concern women.

The objectives of this article are to examine to what extent the issue of age ties in with the issue of gender equality. How does the fight against discrimination based on age intersect with the issue of gender equality? Are work and family constraints recomposed at different stages of the working life of women? Is a gender perspective included in social dialogue related to age issues, for both younger and older workers?

This article will examine the issues of the identification of the specific problems encountered by women belonging to vulnerable age groups and of the activities undertaken to address gender inequalities related to age (Chap. 2).

The process of unionisation, participation and representation of female workers in trade union decision-making bodies will be also assessed, in the light of the issue of equal representation and participation in decision-making of young and older women within the structures (Chap. 3). In the countries covered by the study, unions do not have statistics combining gender and age. It is therefore not possible to draw a clear picture of membership of young and older women. However, it is possible to identify the broad lines of the issues involved through interviews of experts and young and older workers.

The research project seeks to identify the activities undertaken by social dialogue actors in supporting female workers throughout their working life, such as measures to reconcile work and family life and to examine the mainstreaming of a gender perspective by unions in combating discrimination and promoting opportunities for young and older female workers (Chap. 4).

The study is based on gender results from all fieldwork carried out during the investigation of the LinkAge project, for which various research methods have been applied, such as interviews of union and employers' representatives, experts and stakeholders, as well as interviews of younger and older workers. The point of view of union representatives was particularly useful in understanding how age and gender issues are not linked in unions. Interviews with female and male younger and older workers provided a unique source for recommendations on the representation and participation of younger and older women in unions as well as first-hand explanations of the scarcity of their union membership and participation.

## **2 Vulnerable Age Groups and the Labour Market: Specific Issues Encountered by Women**

The employment rate of women has increased substantially within the EU over the last decade and women now constitute the majority of higher education graduates, representing 59 per cent of those awarded university diplomas. However, women still face numerous obstacles in attaining equal treatment in employment in the EU and they still face serious challenges when entering the job market. Their position suffers significantly and disproportionately when they decide to have children. It is in the 24-54 age group that gender differences in the inactivity rate are most pronounced. This is largely linked to family responsibilities. In 2011, 8.4 per cent of men in this age group were inactive in the EU-27 compared to 21.6 per cent of women. In the EU-27, 9.4 per cent of women aged 25-54 (i.e. al-



most half of the total of 21.6 per cent of inactive women) are inactive for personal or family reasons, whereas only 0.5 per cent of men give this as the main reason (Eurostat 2012). Their employment rate falls by 12.4 per cent when they have children under 12, while it rises by 7.3 per cent for men. Furthermore, due mainly to family obligations and the lack of care alternatives, women are four times more likely to work part time than men.

### 2.1 Young Female Workers and the Issue of Pregnancy

In the light of the above, the study's results show that the difficulty young people (both men and women) experience in finding a job is accentuated for young women. The biggest obstacle they suffer is rejection by employers in relation to maternity leave. This is compounded by the concern that women may leave work definitively: some employers fear that they will be providing training for workers who will leave the company as soon as they become mothers. These concerns on the part of employers affect young women's employability. For this reason, young women have greater difficulties at multiple levels: in accessing employment, obtaining a steady job (temporary employment is less of a problem) and being promoted within the company.

Maternity and parental leave is an issue for all women under 25 as well as for the female group of 26-54 years old. However, specific negative effects on younger women have emerged since the beginning of the economic crisis. Young women entering the labour market seem to have a more acute awareness of the consequences of the crisis on their status than young men, particularly in regard to diminishing social rights. Precarious employment has also expanded. For example, according to BE-TUR9, there is a recent increase in the non-renewal of fixed-term contracts due to pregnancy in Belgium:

Young women are aware of the discrimination already suffered by women in the labour market and fear that the situation may be even worse for them because of the socioeconomic situation. They are less protected because of the proliferation of fixed-term contracts, including when they are pregnant.

In the context of the economic crisis, even those with a permanent contract do not feel very comfortable announcing their pregnancy to their employer:

Before the economic crisis, it was easier for young women to tell their employer that they were pregnant. Today they are more cautious, especially if they are still on probation. Although firing women for pregnancy

is legally prohibited, they still fear being fired. Even if you have a steady job, no one feels safe, whether in the private sector or in associations. We have always feared this vulnerability. (BE-YW3)

This is also the case in Poland, where it was said that pregnancy and childbirth are viewed as major problems – especially since there are many cases in which a pregnant woman is unable to return to her position after childbirth.

In Italy, precarious employment and retirement reforms have produced the prolongation of working activity for women over 55, thus reducing the possibility for younger female workers with dependent relatives to count on the free assistance coming from parental network. For younger female workers without care, work discontinuity, instead, is postponing the reaching of a stabilized income, which is functional for emancipation from bondages with the family of origin and therefore for carrying out autonomous lifelong projects.

### 2.2 Older Women and Work: an Inadapted Environment

Concerning older women, they face more problems than the group of older workers in general. A study has shown that when exploring the concept ‘older’, the organisations perceive women to be older at an earlier age than men. There was evidence that the double jeopardy of age and gender combine to create a distinct form of prejudice against women (Grant et al. 2006).

More concretely, older women may have a greater need to adapt their schedules and working conditions, and the difficulties in achieving such an adaptation may result in an early exit from the labour market. In the 55-64 age group, 40.6 per cent of men and 57.4 per cent of women are inactive. Retirement is the main reason for the inactivity of men and women (28.2 per cent). But the inactivity of women is also due to personal or family responsibilities (7.7 per cent) as they are often responsible for children and the older members of their family. In the UK, one older interviewee spoke of ‘the sandwich generation’; the generation of women who have responsibility for looking after ageing parents and their own children and even grandchildren:

We are like a sandwich generation if you like, which will be looking after parents who are 90 or 100 years old and children and grandchildren, and those people are going to be trapped in the middle. If they are working they will be pulled in two directions and if they’re not it will be a double whammy. (UK-OW9)

At the European level, this issue is taken seriously. Several EU non-discrimination and equality networks emphasise the need to take into account the increasing number of people in the EU who are facing multiple discrimination in groups of older people as well as younger age groups. As a result, cooperation between European anti-discrimination lobbies has increased.

Concerning the issue of age related to gender, the European AGE Platform<sup>1</sup> and the European Women's Lobby (EWL) have been working together mainly on the issue of older female workers.<sup>2</sup> The two European NGOs consider the need for change in societal perception of age and of women in order to challenge gender stereotypes that place family care largely on the shoulders of women, and to eradicate ageism which presents older people as a burden on society rather than highlighting their valuable contribution to society and the communities in which they live.

The European Age Platform points out that little attention is paid to the huge amount of care provided to elderly dependents in the debate on older workers, which lies mostly on the shoulders of women aged 45 plus. The reconciliation of work and family life is addressed mainly as an issue relevant to parents of young children. The needs of older workers who care for their elderly parents and small grandchildren are often ignored. It is therefore important to develop a broader concept of care leave and to draw inspiration from the existing examples of grandparents' leave in Italy and Portugal. As a result, the Age Platform and the European Women's Lobby consider that policy measures to enhance equality between women and men, as well as the opportunities posed by demographic change, must promote an active life for older women, inside and outside the workplace. In order to help workers to balance professional and family life, the two European NGOs call for care days to be available to all workers who look after dependent relatives.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, in some sectors and occupational categories, painfulness

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1 AGE Platform Europe is a European network of around 165 organisations of and for people aged 50+ representing directly over 30 million older people in Europe. Its work focuses on a wide range of policy areas that impact on older and retired people, such as anti-discrimination, employment of older workers and active ageing, social protection, pension reforms, social inclusion, health, elder abuse, intergenerational solidarity, research, accessibility of public transport and of the built environment, and new technologies (ICT).

2 The European Women's Lobby (EWL) is the largest umbrella organisation of women's associations in the European Union (EU), working to promote women's rights and equality between women and men. EWL membership extends to organisations in all 28 EU member states and the three candidate countries, as well as to 20 European-wide bodies, representing a total of more than 2000 organisations.

3 See Joint AGE-EWL position on Improving the situation of older women in the European Union, [http://www.age-platform.eu/images/.../doc\\_6-3\\_-\\_Joint\\_position\\_AGE\\_EWL\\_draft\\_5-10-09.doc](http://www.age-platform.eu/images/.../doc_6-3_-_Joint_position_AGE_EWL_draft_5-10-09.doc)

and difficult conditions and their impact on older workers have been recognised and working time arrangements and better working conditions have been negotiated. However, it appears that these provisions relate mainly to areas where men are present, such as construction or metalwork. In more feminised occupations, little has been done in the way of working towards an improvement of working conditions according to age, even in sectors where the difficulties of working conditions are well known such as domestic work. However, several good practices can be identified, such as working time arrangements implemented for nurses over 45 in Belgium. Nurses can choose between having an additional day off per month or receive a bonus if they choose to work full-time.

Another pressing issue concerning older women is the question of the level of the state pension and the raising of the state retirement age. In the UK, the raising of the state pension age will have a harsher impact on women than men, because the different pension claiming ages will be equalised. This is also the case in Belgium. Coupled with the fact that women have less advantageous occupational pension status than men, this may remove the choice about when to retire for some women. Combined with the particular difficulties women experience in juggling work and caring responsibilities and employers' apparent unpreparedness for dealing with these issues, this may also mean a much worse later life employment experience for older women. This is why the European Age Platform advocates the introduction of a gender perspective within debates on pension reform as well.

However, concerning the issue of age and gender, in some cases there may be a problem of reconciling equality and differences. Enforcement of equal treatment mechanisms can lead to discrimination against women. This is particularly the case with pension reform. In Belgium, for instance, this reform is based on setting the same retirement age for women and men. As a result, women will now have to contribute for many years to qualify for the maximum pension. Women who have interrupted their career or worked part-time may therefore be at risk of poverty. However, the fact that the measures envisaged are more discriminatory against women is not easily recognised and heightened gender inequalities are not seriously considered (Bousquet 2010).

To sum up, women face a dual problem when it comes to discrimination based on age and gender. On the one hand, employers have difficulty putting women and men on an equal footing throughout their career. Young women, for example, have difficulty entering the labour market and obtaining long-term employment because employers fear pregnancy. On the other hand, employers also have difficulty understanding the problems of reconciling work and family life that women may face at different stages of their lives. Childcare problems are now well known for young women and sometimes lead to working time arrangements. The same cannot be said

for women over 50 who often have elderly dependent parents and would like to obtain specific arrangements as well. That is why their participation to unions is of particularly importance in order to bring their own claims.

### **3 Young and Older Women: an Active Participation In the Life of Unions?**

#### **3.1 Increasing Unionisation of Women but Without Clear Information About Their Age**

In the countries investigated in the LinkAge study, no information was given on the participation of younger and older women in the life of unions, and official data on gender and age is not available in most cases. However, the general figures show that the number of women trade union members has increased in parallel with entry into the labour market. The European Trade Union Confederation estimates the proportion of female members in Europe at around 43 per cent, but with considerable differences between countries, based on several factors, including the overall rate of unionisation, the rate for women and the introduction of quotas in each country (Silvera 2002).

Several studies have shown that female unionisation has increased in the European Union (Kinton, Healy 2013). However, there is still a persistent discrepancy between the rate of female unionisation and their participation in the unions' life (Silvera 2009).

Women are still under-represented compared with female employment rates. Women's under-representation in trade unions can be explained by certain external structural factors such as the characteristics of female employment (precariousness, flexibility, part-time) and the difficult implantation of trade unions in sectors where women predominate. Unionism is also historically not very open to women, as unions often mirror traditional representations of gender roles. This has had an impact on the role of women in union structures. They have often been directed towards specific groups composed of women, while gender issues have been marginalised instead of being made central to the entire organization.

Women's trade union membership also differs greatly in terms of sectors represented by the respective trade unions. This factor has an impact on participation in trade union activity, e.g. in trade unions representing sectors dominated by male employees, women are less represented in decision-making processes. In contrast, in companies or sectors with a high female presence, the major union positions are typically occupied by women.

This is the case in Austria where the proportion of women and men in the youth organisation of the Union of Private Sector Employees in Vienna

is very balanced (ATTUR1). The opposite applies, without any connection with the youth organisations, to the Union for Transport and Services (former union of railway employees) in Lower Austria, traditionally dominated by men (ATTUR3). However, in this country, no interviewee, young or old, male or female, had specific knowledge about how the gender dimension is addressed in union activities, although they knew that the leadership structures of the unions are dominated by older men.

Among the interviewed workers, the perception of female participation in unions is mixed. In the UK, for instance, one active member of a specific trade union, Unite, thought that women accounted for a large proportion of the growing membership:

Well our union makeup [...] figures which have just been released show an increase in membership firstly, and the increase is coming from women. They are probably significant factors in that. I would suggest that women have been discriminated against for centuries, still face having to make a choice between having a career and having a child, whereas men don't necessarily. They're with respect to equal pay and glass ceilings in many companies. (UKYW3)

In Poland, young women interviewed say the unions lack programmes aimed at supporting young workers, especially against the problems stemming from motherhood. Nevertheless they claim that unions should be more active in regard to youth membership and develop more activities on their behalf.

It is difficult to assess women's participation in trade unions' activities in relation to their age. It seems however that in some countries, young women are very present and actively participate to the life of unions, especially in trade union youth organisations, as in Austria, where GPA-djp Vienna has a women's representative in the youth structure as well as an executive board for regional women representatives. However, the presence of women within structures does not necessarily mean that women's interests are well represented. In addition, older and younger interviewees have the impression that older persons – and in particular men – are more strongly involved in TU activities than younger people:

If I look at TUs, mostly old men are involved. Older women [are] less [involved] – over-aged structures dominated by men. (AT-OW5)

I don't know if there are many women in executive position within TUs. I think it's mostly dominated by men, isn't it? [...] Honestly, for me TUs have a male predominance and women don't have a say. [...] I don't even know a female works council member. (AT-OW2)

I don't think a lot of young people participate in TUs. I think it's rather older people [who participate] and probably younger people are hardly connected to trade unions. (ATYW4)

I think it's more older people, I think mostly those over 40. (ATYW5)

In Belgium, where the unions have made efforts to place gender on their agenda, including in their own structures, women are present in specific groups such as groups dedicated to younger and older members. However, it was also pointed out that the issue of gender is not so easy to introduce even if women are well represented within the group. According to BE-TUR 6, this is because young women do not see the need to fight for women's rights any more:

Young women do not really like the word feminist. They are surprised when I tell them, for example, that the right to have a personal bank account is very recent for women.

Several female workers also highlight this discrepancy between perceptions of gender issues at work and the reality of women's situation, especially among the young generation. They said that gender was not much of an issue because equality between women and men is obvious for young people:

I'm not always sure that gender is well integrated. Even in specific age groups, because it seems obvious and because equality between women and men is considered a reality. Many boys believe that a woman who does the same job as a man earns the same. For them, there is no problem anymore. (BE-YW3)

### 3.2 Limited Representation of Women in Trade Union Decision-Making Bodies

As regards female unionisation, it is difficult to evaluate exactly the number of young and older female workers in decision-making bodies because, as stated by experts and national union representatives, there is a clear lack of available data based on gender and age within unions in several countries. To get a real picture of the situation, the position of women in unions in general should first be examined and then the position of female workers assessed according to their age.

Several academic studies, mainly undertaken by feminist researchers (Ledwith, Hansen 2013; Colgan, Ledwith 2002) have shown that women are under-represented within unions' structures, demonstrating a lack of internal equality, despite empowerment strategies developed within un-

ions, as in Great-Britain (Macbride 2001). Since the eighties, British unions have mobilised women in order to develop a strategy of re-unionisation, on the one hand, and promote gender equality within unions, on the other hand (Guillaume et al. 2013). At the European level, the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) is particularly concerned about this issue and has put gender balance in decision making as a priority in its agenda. However, only 30 per cent of women are in decision-making bodies of unions (Silvera 2009).

The scarcity of their presence at the decision-making level could be explained by various factors. Women's participation in decision-making varies widely according to sectors. In Austria, for instance, in trade unions representing sectors dominated by male employees, women are less represented in decision-making:

Vida [Union of Transportation, Trade and Services Workers] tries to reach a quota in decision-making bodies, but this is very difficult to achieve. If you look at trade union CEOs at regional and national level, those are clearly dominated by men. [...] We do not have a strict 50/50 quota in the statutes, but [...] at there must be at least one woman representative or someone from the women's office. (AT-TUR3)

The participation and representation of women in work council is also an issue in many countries. This is the case in Belgium where representation of women in trade unions committees at company level is still problematic despite the fact that women were very active in the last workplace elections and numerous women stood for election and were elected:

The problem is not to motivate young women. They already are motivated and participated actively in the elections, obtaining a large number of votes. The problem comes later, because despite their good scores, union delegations eventually choose men as delegates. And in the end, we get only 10 per cent of women elected. This is especially true for young women. There is a real paradox between what the union promises in terms of equality of opportunity and what is happening at the company level. (BE-TUR9)

The study's results show that some countries have developed specific tools to increase female participation in the decision-making process. This is the case in Italy where the presence of women is guaranteed through the use of quotas while in Spain, the use of quotas only applies to some regional or sectoral federations of certain unions. The three Italian confederal trade unions CGIL, CISL and UIL have put in place a quota mechanism under which women must make up at least 40 per cent of every management body, at any level. Employers' representative organisations have not explic-



itly introduced such a mechanism because they are opposed to imposing female representation by means of internal regulations.

Nevertheless, despite the formal undertaking, practical implementation continues to run up against real-life discrimination against women, starting at the workplace. The greatest difficulties for women who wish to participate actively in the union have to do with the already complex task of balancing work and family commitments. For women who have children or have to care for non-self-sufficient people, it is practically impossible to be active in union leadership given the scarcity of care services. In addition, several female interviewees pointed out that quotas for guaranteed positions for women have not produced results in terms of women's emancipation. In Italy, for instance, the use of quotas has certainly improved women's position within union organisations. It would be too much to claim, however – given the unfavourable living and working conditions of Italian women – that women, as women, in union organisations have effectively produced results worthy of note in terms of bargaining and countering government policies.

A Swiss study has also demonstrated that a quota policy can have unexpected results. While quotas have led to the presence of 25 per cent of women in unions' decision-making bodies, they have had in contrast a poor impact on gender stereotypes. The study concludes quotas are useless if the organisational culture of the unions is not fundamentally transformed (Monney et al. 2013, p. 49).

In conclusion, the unionisation and participation of women including young and older women in unions should be improved. In particular, the presence of unions in services sectors where women are highly represented, has to be strengthened, in order to reach women working part time or undertaking atypical work in this sector (informal jobs, short-term contracts). But the main issue relates to unions' internal organisational rules. Indeed, few women are actively involved because of the absence of adaptation of career management, work organisation and union culture to the needs of women. A requirement for total commitment and the difficulty of combining work with other spheres of life have gendered effects on women's participation in unions' activities. This is why the organisation's rules should change, especially when it comes to young and older women who often carry family responsibilities. Unions should organise childcare to facilitate the participation of women activists – in recognition of the impact that caring responsibilities have on women's ability to become active.

## 4 What Tools to Better Reconcile Family and Working Life Along the Whole Life Cycle?

The union members interviewed in the six countries, when asked to address gender discrimination or vulnerability in the age groups of our study, highlighted the crucial issue of balancing working life and family. This is an issue that has been very important in union culture in recent years and is very much present in union proposals at all levels, although actual achievements still leave much to be desired, especially since the beginning of the economic crisis.

### 4.1 Scarcity of Implemented Measures Especially Since the Economic Crisis

The need for a reconciliation of work and family life, in practice, has encouraged proposals which include: the adaptation of working hours, reduced hours, part-time or non-continuous work, teleworking, etc. Beyond the issue of reconciliation, unions have proposed various initiatives to improve the situation of women, such as promoting their access to positions of responsibility; promoting equal rights when re-entering work after maternity leave; etc. In Poland, the issue of equal treatment at work, as well as that of maintaining proper work-life balance, and of improving the conditions faced by women in the labour market, is a relatively new challenge, stemming largely from Poland's implementation of the European Union's laws and regulations. Some union initiatives are related to internal union work, as unions are also committed to improving the participation of women in their internal management structures.

The problem is that such proposals for reconciliation are being raised exclusively for women, as if only women need to reconcile work and family, and ultimately this involves sacrifices for them. Some interviewees stated that reduced working hours affect promotion opportunities for women and pensions, and may lead to new inequalities among the female workforce.

In Austria, young and older female workers interviewed said that reconciliation is still left to the good will of employers who can decide on the adequacy of working hours to the family situation. In addition, policies implemented to date aiming to improve work-life balance have not been tied to age. As a result, measures to reconcile work and family life (where implemented), have helped keep women on the labour market. But, as such measures are applied only to women, they are also harmful in that they cause women to lose opportunities for promotion in companies and additional contributions to retirement.

Since the beginning of the economic crisis, however, the problem of reconciling work and family life has lost priority status and there has been a very substantial reduction in public investment in the area of care in sev-

eral European countries. It is believed that, due to mass unemployment, a significant number of workers now remain at home and can therefore take over family responsibilities.

While austerity measures are hurting women and men across the EU, women are hit the hardest. Because public sector employment and public services concern women to a far greater extent than men, any change in the public sector will impact on women more. Austerity measures that seek to reduce public deficits by cutting public sector jobs, services and benefits directly impact on women. Cuts in public sector jobs had a drastic effect on women's employment as women constitute on average 69.2 per cent of public sector workers in the EU (European Women Lobby 2012).

As said by BE-TUR 6:

Greek women between 45 and 55 explained that because of cuts in public facilities, women should take care of children and the elderly more [...] Some women are then forced to stop working. In Germany, a female union representative said the planned budgets for nursery care have been cut in order to finance men's unemployment.

The field research reveals that in some countries, unemployment is affecting more men than women, but women are suffering more from increased job insecurity and declining working conditions. There is a higher proportion of women in part-time jobs and temporary employment. Some respondents did also note, however, that in the current context, part-time work is a way to stay in the labour market when there is no option for full-time work. The economic crisis has also had a specific impact on gender equality policies. Several public gender equality institutions have been abolished (Spain, Romania) or their funding cut drastically as in the UK and Greece (European Women Lobby 2012).

In addition, the results of the LinkAge investigations show that the economic crisis and recent reforms have had specific effects on female workers belonging to the sandwich generation, but these seem to vary in each national context.

In the Spanish context, social pressure for reconciling working and family life has reduced because of the incidence of unemployment in households, which has 'freed' some family members, allowing them to fully assume care-giving responsibilities (SP-ER1). On the other hand, employers' 'responsiveness' to this type of issue and social responsibility have declined in recent years following the reduction of public support. New Conservative governments at national and regional level have abolished most of the bodies in charge of managing public subsidies for such programmes. As a result, the current economic recession is undermining the social basis of so-called 'familist' welfare regimes.

In the UK, women experience greater pressure than men to resign from

work, especially when they have family members who require care. This seems particularly relevant for women between the ages of 45 and 65, who may have care responsibilities for grandchildren and older parents. They may not be labelled as ‘carers’ as such and their needs are therefore often hidden. Older workers in general are thought to be more reluctant than younger workers to open dialogue on flexible or part-time work if they are struggling, which makes them particularly susceptible to leaving the workforce altogether when caring and family pressures build up. With the crisis, these problems have been accentuated. As one interviewee put it:

That culmination of pressures on people [...], not enough in their own right to stop the person working but enough to make the individual struggle more and more and that’s where we have the greater risk of the person dropping out of employment altogether, taking the early retirement package as quick as they can or [...] the voluntary redundancy, as soon as they can get their hands on the private pension. (UK-PO4)

Another interviewee commented that the particular pressures that older women workers are under are well known by academics, but not well understood by employers. Certain large companies (British Telecom was cited here) have a whole raft of policies for dealing with this, but for smaller companies there is very little by way of awareness or policies (UK-ER2).

In conclusion, organisations and unions in particular are very concerned about the effects of the crisis on gender equality policies, which are the first to be undermined in this economic context, a common trend across Europe. As a result, younger and older female workers, already listed as belonging to the most vulnerable age groups, are seeing their condition deteriorate further.

### 4.2 A Difficult Understanding and Acknowledgment of Older Female Workers’ Needs

Among workers interviewed, there is a clear generational discrepancy between the young and older female workers on the issue of work-life balance in some countries. As a general trend, the gender dimension is more valued by older respondents, especially women, than by young workers. The young women hardly detect discrimination and some even claim that gender equality is a fact. For interviewees under 25, the reconciling family and working life is not seen as a very pressing or important issue.

This is the case in Italy. For interviewees aged under 25 the subject never came up for discussion and in most cases their answers were very sketchy. Among the over 55s, in contrast, the subject aroused considerable interest, above all in relation to their own work and life histories. None of the female

interviewees said that they shared or had ever shared the housework or care duties with their partner, even in the presence of a high workload, sometimes connected with caring for a parent or parents-in-law.

In Belgium, when it comes to the work done by specific groups working with young people within unions, several interviewees said that gender was not much of an issue because equality between women and men is obvious for young people:

I'm not always sure that gender is well integrated. Even in specific age groups, because it seems obvious and because equality between women and men is considered a reality. Many boys believe that a woman who does the same job as a man earns the same. For them, there is no problem. (BE-YW3)

The older women interviewed refer to their own experience and are aware that they belong to a generation that entered the labour market while still performing reproductive tasks. In Italy, women interviewed pointed out that throughout their work career the question of reconciling life and work commitments had always been experienced as a personal, completely individual issue, disconnected from the logic of collective action based on demands. This is also the case in Belgium where older female workers described how they organised their lives when they had young children:

I had three children. My youngest daughter was three years old when I returned to work, it was my mother who took care of her. I had to learn to balance work with my personal life. First, I drove the kids to school and then I went to get mom to take care of the youngest child at home, then I went to work. (BE-OP5)

I adopted two girls, but I was single. My grandmother looked after the children. It was not easy but I could not do otherwise. I did not ask many questions (BE-OW7).

Childcare family responsibilities in Spain have always been left with very little support from public institutions. Traditionally, the only alternatives for working women have been the market (for those who can afford it) and extended family solidarity (grandmothers, when they are available):

In this regard [childcare and conciliation of working and family life] I was very lucky because I am a single child and I always could rely on my mother. Moreover, I used to work on intensive schedule from 7:30 to 15:00, this was perfect for me. About that thing of conciliation, I think everyone should manage themselves. We can't expect to be provided everything we need, and if you have a good job you can always get

somebody to help you, I don't think that matters so much. [...] I think that currently the real problem is the frequency at which many couples separate. Being a couple has always been very helpful because you may share the workload with your partner or get a babysitter... No, at that time nobody talked of conciliation. (SP-OW8)

However, for younger and older women workers, it is clear that nowadays it is easier for women with young children who have a long-term contract to organise their work situation. They can take parental leave and use working-time arrangements such as teleworking to reconcile work and personal life. In many sectors, it is not very problematic for young women with children to negotiate their working conditions. The situation is different for young women who have precarious jobs where schedules are often difficult to reconcile with family life. This is the case for example in the areas of cleaning or catering where it is often very difficult to negotiate working-time arrangements.

In Spain, the adoption of gender equality measures in 2007 establish for the first time that companies with more than 250 employees must negotiate equality plans, so unions are required to draw up an analysis of the employment conditions for women in the company, the wage gap and their promotion prospects, and to include strategies for achieving equal treatment and opportunities for both sexes. However, the real impact of gender equality plans is low as they do not address the most controversial issues. These include the worker's right to adapt the duration and distribution of working time and questions relative to access to promotion depending on full-time work, which undermines the career prospects of many working women.

It shows clearly that women still appear to adapt their careers to family responsibilities, which sometimes includes a reduction of working hours when they have small children. This solution seems to be appreciated differently depending on the social background of those concerned. Women may also have different views on the best way to organize their working time depending on their social background. For instance, women belonging to the middle or upper class may ask for easier access to part-time jobs to take care of the children, while women with a lower socioeconomic standing may press for full-time work, as seen in Belgium.

In Italy, in the context of the economic crisis, policy makers highlighted the need to appeal to the use of part-time contracts so as to increase female employment. However, if part-time employment is not the result of an 'autonomous choice' matured by the female worker and, instead, it is functional to the sole reduction of labour costs for employers, it risks to produce new poverties among the female workforce (Toffanin 2011).

In addition, certain statements by interviewees with regard to employed women who care for relatives gave the impression that the compatibility of work and care largely depends on the good will of employers:

I think if you are employed in a smaller company and if you do a good job, the employer will support you. [...] It always depends on the company and its attitude towards employees. (AT-OW6)

As a teacher you can [care for relatives] [...] but in the private economy, I think you would be dismissed quite fast if you say you can work less because you have to care for your mother. I don't think there would be much support (AT-OW5).'

Women over 55 interviewed in the UK, Belgium, Italy and Spain highlighted difficulties in employment because of the dual responsibility of caring for dependent family members in different generations. They look after their children while simultaneously caring for their parents because of the increased longevity of the older generation. However, a recent study shows that there is no major rearranging of work and family constraints during the second half of the career. For the majority of older workers, paid work is part-time (Rosende, Schoeni 2012, p. 143). The reasons underlying part-time employment are mainly family-related for women, while for men in the same age group, it is because of not having found a full-time position (Strub 2003). Women age 50 and older therefore occupy a central position in the intergenerational solidarity process. They support elderly parents, children and even sometimes grandchildren.

This is why it seems necessary, as suggested by the European Age Platform, to ask employers to develop measures such as working-time adjustments and specific initiatives such as job sharing, part-time work, carer's leave and flexible working hours. These would help older workers reconcile the needs of their dependent relatives with their work. As said by EU-PO1:

We also have to encourage employers to allow flexibility and to better manage human resources in order to give the right answer to women's needs. But it is very difficult because the main objective is still profit. Our role is to value older workers, showing that they have many capacities, competences, more life experience than younger workers. We try to do our best to convince employers at the EU level through the social dialogue.

However, in some countries the issue of working-time arrangements was not clearly raised for older women. In Belgium, when speaking about work-life balance, interviewees made a clear link with young workers but did not see the point for older workers. This suggests that the issue has not been discussed in unions and companies.

In Italy, the subject of reconciling life and work commitments, according to the interviewees, is almost completely absent not only from company bargaining activities but also from national employment contracts. Fur-

thermore, in the most unionised firms the issue of work-life balance was not debated during assemblies, nor was it the subject of any package of requests developed with the unions' support. From the answers provided by the female interviewees it emerges that the same women have never posed the question of placing this issue on an equal footing with other issues dealt with in company or national collective bargaining processes. The reason can be traced to the internalisation by women of the gender-based division of labour. None of the female interviewees said that they shared or had ever shared housework or care duties with their partner, despite a heavy workload, sometimes connected with caring for a parent or parents-in-law.

In conclusion, it seems that the majority of the member states recognise that despite the increase in older women who work and care for their dependants, the question of work-life balance is still addressed mainly as one relevant to parents of young children. The needs of older female workers are still often ignored.

## **5 Conclusion**

The results of the study show clearly that both young and older women are confronted with specific problems related to age. Young women are rejected by employers fearing maternity leave. For under-25 women, the issue is more pervasive since the beginning of the economic crisis, as employers do not want to take any risk and avoid long-term contracts for young women. Older women have problems to adapt their schedules and working conditions even if they are still responsible for family care.

As a result, reconciling work and family life is difficult for women whatever their age. However, the reconciliation of work and family life is addressed mainly as an issue relevant to parents of young children. The needs of older workers which care for their elderly parents and small grandchildren are often ignored. It is therefore important to reflect on care leave in a broader sense, including older workers. Interviewees generally attach importance to such measures though some of them note that, either with or without reconciliation measures, women are always responsible for caring tasks. Reconciliation measures will reduce the burden but are still a long way from achieving a balanced gender division of reproductive tasks.

However, many national union representatives pointed to the lack of available data on gender and age. The question of gender does not always spawn a great deal of action and the issue of younger and older women appears to be neglected.

However, there is a need to formulate policies to effectively deal with issues of gender and age as part of a comprehensive strategy addressing demographic change. The great diversity in the group of young as well as older women and the different problems they face suggests the need for



specific measures taking into account their different situations and tackling the discrimination from which they suffer daily.

Increasing the visibility of the issue of age related to gender is necessary at the organisational level and in the activities of unions. It would also be necessary to encourage the presence of younger and older women within unions' structures. To increase women's participation in union activities, organisational rules have to be changed, especially when it comes to younger and older women who often carry family responsibilities. Unions should organise childcare to facilitate the participation of women activists - in recognition of the impact that caring responsibilities have on women's ability to become active.

All gender inequalities, including the inequalities starting at the beginning of the career, which impact on the final pension level, should be adequately addressed in the framework of the social dialogue, with the active support of all the social actors.

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

## **Inclusion of Vulnerable Age Groups through Membership and Participation**

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**Abstract** This chapter examines to what extent social partners are able to successfully identify issues concerning the vulnerable age groups of workers, to represent the interests of those groups, and to introduce those issues into the negotiation system constituting the framework of social dialogue institutions in different countries. Of particular emphasis within the chapter is the subject of the role of representatives of vulnerable groups present within social organisations, including the topic of special structures created to strengthen the position of those groups.

**Summary** 1. Introduction. – 2. Union Membership in Vulnerable Age Groups. – 3. Obstacles to Unionisation of Employees. – 3.1. The Trade Unions' Point of View. – 3.2. The Employees' Perspective. – 4. Supporting Factors in Unionisation of Vulnerable Age Groups. – 5. Participation of Vulnerable Age Groups within Social Dialogue Actors. – 5.1. Special Structures Uniting Vulnerable Age Groups. – 5.2. Actual Influence of Representatives of Vulnerable Age Groups on Trade Union Activities. – 5.3. Participation of Representatives of Vulnerable Age Groups in Negotiations. – 5.4. Actions Aimed at Vulnerable Age Groups. – 6. Conclusions.

### **1 Introduction**

For many years Europe has been undergoing the expansion of the importance of social dialogue as a means of forming positive relations between social partners, and achieving various agreements on social and economic matters.

The dialogue, established and conducted on many levels – from the European, to the national level, to the regional and company level – has been meant to achieve stability and to profit all sides interested in the proper functioning of the labour market and the development of economy. The effectiveness and the importance of the dialogue were further guaranteed by the participation of appropriately-placed delegates of governments, trade unions and employers' organizations – with all sides being properly represented.

In recent years, however, most European countries have been experiencing a crisis of this public institution, which has been chastised by al-

most all of its actors. Schnabel (2012) points out that one of the key topics to have perturbed the participants is the question of the representativeness of social partners.

Research into the condition of employees from the two vulnerable age groups prompts a specific means of analysing the way in which they are being represented by trade unions. In most countries, the level of unionisation has been gradually dropping, as a result of economic changes. The changes in the sizes of most companies, with the increasing participation of small companies and the growing importance of the service sector affects the potential unionisation process adversely as well. The growing percentage of individual contracts at the expense of group agreements acts as a detriment as well. Yet the trade unions have remained - in accordance with legal regulations - the only representatives of employees during negotiations at the national, regional and company level. The coalescence of these phenomena leads to a question about the extent to which trade unions are able to represent the vulnerable age groups in the labour market, as well as the issue of whether or not the unions have worked out appropriate strategies and proposals to let them encourage employees to join unions and put their trust in them. The matter of obstacles encountered when organizing and representing the interests of vulnerable age groups by the unions is of high importance as well, particularly concerning the awareness and recognition of those hindrances. The means of recognizing the needs and expectations of the vulnerable groups, the effectiveness thereof, as well as the matter of including those wants into the negotiations is of no lesser importance, as is the question of active participation of representatives of these groups.

The aforementioned subjects - described in this introduction only in a very cursory manner - were the subject of a series of interviews with representatives of a number of trade unions, employers' organizations, and labour market institutions. Their views were confronted with the opinions of young (25 or younger) and older (55+) employees.

## **2 Union Membership in Vulnerable Age Groups**

Pedersini (2010) states that the primary issue concerning the integration of employees in the labour market by social dialogue actors is the question about the actual share (membership and participation) of those groups in the daily activities of trade unions and employers.

In recent years, most European countries have been witnessing a constant decrease in the number of members. The phenomenon has been the subject of numerous analyses, yet, from the perspective of this research, they are not particularly relevant, though it is worth mentioning that out of the six countries where the research was conducted, four have experi-

enced a drop in the number of union members, while only two (Belgium and Italy) have experienced a slight increase.<sup>1</sup>

Table 1. Net union membership as a proportion of wage and salary earners in employment

Country	1990	1995	2000	2005	2011
Austria	46,9%	41,1%	36,6 %	33,3%	27,8%
Belgium	53,9%	55,7%	49,5%	52,9%	50,4%
Italy	38,8%	38,1%	34,8%	33,6%	35,2%
Poland	36,5%	20,2%	17,2%	21,5%	14,1 (2010)
Spain	12,5%	16,3%	16,7%	14,7%	15,6% (2010)
United Kingdom	39,7%	34,4%	30,1%	27,1%	27,1 % (2010)

Source [online]: <http://www.uva-aias.net/208>

This general data does not reflect the processes occurring in trade unions regarding particular age groups – especially concerning their participation in trade unions. Based on the available data, as well as estimates provided by trade unions, an attempt at such analysis has been made, and even though it should not be treated as a certainty, the results have revealed considerable differences.

Table 2. Union membership in vulnerable age groups

	Austria	Belgium	Italy	Poland	Spain	UK
Young workers	no data available	45 % (< 30 years)	10 % (<25 years)	5% (<30 years)	7 % (16-24 years)	8% (16-24 years)
Older workers	no data available	43 % (> 50 years)	80 % (>55 years)	40% (>55 years)	20 % (> 55 years)	27% (> 50 years)

Sources: Belgium: van Guys 2010; Italy, Poland and UK: Estimates indicated by unionists interviewed 2012; Spain: National Institute of Statistics, 2010.

The statistics based on the interviews conducted as part of the LinkAge project allow for an additional insight as well (Table 3).

<sup>1</sup> Union density rate (net union membership as a proportion of wage and salary earners in employment <http://www.uva-aias.net/208>) has been taken into account.

## Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations

Table 3. Union membership among vulnerable age groups representatives interviewed during the LinkAge project

Country	Austria	Belgium	Italy	Poland	Spain	United Kingdom
	Total	TU members	Total	TU member	Total	TU members
Younger workers	8	0	9	5	10	1
Men	3	0	4	2	5	1
Women	5	0	5	3	5	0
Older workers	8	4	10	10	10	8
Men	4	2	5	5	6	4
Women	4	2	5	5	4	4

Source: LinkAge project

Although the sample available to the researchers was limited, the data - incomplete as it may be - collected during the research has matched the tendencies regarding the membership in trade unions.

In the majority of the countries - with the exception of Belgium - trade unions have a far greater percentage of older members than younger ones. The estimated number of young people who belong to trade unions is ca. 5% to 10%.<sup>2</sup> The sole exception is Belgium, with its exceptionally high unionisation level - 45% of employees younger than 30 years are members of trade unions. Furthermore, the union density rates among young workers is usually much lesser than the average for the total workforce. Only in the case of Spain do the experts on the dynamics of Spanish unionisation hold that unions not only have increased their membership figures but also its composition has become more representative of the evolution of the total workforce (ES-EXP1. See also: Beneyto 2012; Alós et al. 2011).

The union participation levels differ considerably between younger and older employees. In Spain and the United Kingdom (Table 2), union density among the older employees is three times higher than among the younger ones. Even greater differences can be observed in Poland, and, particularly, in Italy. Only in Belgium are both age groups represented more or less similarly in trade unions.

<sup>2</sup> In the case of Austria, official data of unionisation of vulnerable age groups was not available, but out of the total of 1.2 million ÖGB members, 154 000 members are younger than 30 years and 43,000 members are 19 or younger. In total about 30% of the active population is unionised (AT-TUR4).

### 3 Obstacles to Unionisation of Employees

The results of the research conducted during the project have made it possible to attempt to describe the key obstacles in the unionisation of employees from the vulnerable age groups.

#### 3.1 The Trade Unions' Point of View

From the trade unions' point of view, the key obstacle is the weakening position of the employees in the labour market, the result of which is their decaying attachment to the work place, and the individualization of labour relations.

The unions admit that fewer and fewer employees at the company level ever come in touch with any trade union. The Development Department of the NSZZ Solidarność has pointed out that in Poland, only every fourth employee works for a company in which there is a trade union. The low union density rates are directly associated with the recent evolution of the labour market and the occupational segregation of young workers. Youth employment in every country covered by our investigation is concentrated in less unionised sectors, such as the wholesale sector, the retail trade, hotels, restaurants, or services. The same can be observed among workers who find employment via employment agencies. A Spanish trade union representative made the following observation on the subject:

Young workers in those Federations with greater influence in the Union were the first to be expelled from the labour market. At present moment, those few who are still working, they do so mainly in service sectors such as retail distribution. Those working in the industry were the first to be fired because they were mostly employed in outsourced companies. [...] This is the main difficulty: The thing is that young workers have been massively expelled from those economic sectors with the strongest union organization. [...] It is very difficult to be taken into consideration [refers to youth demands] in a bargaining process where you are not even present. (ES-TUR3)

Another important factor is the fact that labour relations in these sectors are characterized by a high degree of individualisation of labour relations, which have considerably affected the current labour market. On the substantive level, employment contracts have become more diverse e.g. in terms of hours worked, job descriptions and contractual status. On a procedural level, contracts are now less determined by collective bargaining and are negotiated on a more individual basis, which frequently involves the imposition of terms without prior negotiation (a phenomenon



occurring particularly often in Poland [Gliksman 2008]). In the context of the current recession, these processes have given rise to an apparent willingness of employees to accept changes in their terms and conditions of employment in order to retain their jobs. Brown & Marsden (2011) point out that, given this context, it would not be unreasonable to assume that, on the one hand, the lower levels of trade union participation among younger employees have also undermined the power of social dialogue in addressing the very significant problem of youth unemployment and the casualisation of youth employment – and, on the other, that the relatively higher levels of unionisation among older workers would render the issue of extending working lives a salient issue for social dialogue agents.

Additionally, in almost every case, the unions have admitted that the lack of employment stability – as well as the nature of the short-term contracts that are so easy to annul – discourage the employees, both those younger and older, from joining unions. In Poland, the unions find their activity considerably more difficult, as until only a very recent time, they had only been allowed to grant memberships to employees with regular contracts; the possibility to recruit workers with civil-law contracts or mandate contracts has only been given recently, while the possibility to recruit the self-employed is still being blocked due to legal loopholes. The matter should be stressed, as those three forms of employment concern the vast majority of young people in this country.

The limited success rate of the unions in recruiting young people may stem from the fact that the unions find it difficult to name the benefits of unionising. The representatives of trade unions stress the fact that, considering the current condition of the economy and social dialogue, they are unable to match the expectations that, in their opinion, young people have when it comes to trade unions – that is, ensuring the stability of employment (open-ended contracts), appropriate wages, and protection from termination.

The unionists have pointed out that – particularly in Belgium and Poland – younger workers join unions only when they have particular needs, e.g. before getting an open-ended contract or when they need protection by unions (Kubisa; Ostrowski; 2014). Once they get a long-term contract, they leave the unions. The unions are aware of the problem, and have experienced their frustration over the issue. As a Belgian union representative put it:

It is a real challenge to keep our young members. They join the union to be protected, particularly in times of crisis, but they do not stay. (BE-TUR5)

It is also due to those concerns that trade unions are less willing to create long-term strategies regarding the recruitment of new members – while the negative examples of quick abandonment of membership are a convenient excuse to ignore this particular area of union activity at the company level.

The unionists have also pointed out that younger employees more and more often are indifferent to any attempts by the unions to assist them. Another Belgian union activist has stated:

We organize free training, even paying the cost of their transport, and they do not come! They do not see the point. (BE-TUR4)

Trade unions have also pointed out that, concerning young employees, the regulations pertaining to the negotiation system are highly unfavourable to their activities as well. In Spain and Poland trade unionist underlined, that the provisions of collective agreements or other agreements are automatically applicable to all workers within the level defined by the agreement, regardless of whether they are union members. So, workers may find no reasons to join unions.

In Spain's case, the unionists have also mentioned that in some companies the trade unions (known as the 'yellow' unions) are usually set up with the employers' support, as a means of obstructing the implementation of class trade unionism. This is particularly evident in the service sector, such as the retail and hospitality industries, which employ the majority of working young people.

### 3.2 The Employees' Perspective

In all countries, except Belgium, the young people interviewed expressed little interest in the work of trade unions or total lack of it. Young people think that unions only represent workers on regular contracts, which, moreover, are often those with higher seniority. Besides ignoring what the unions do, many young people interviewed have said they rely more on other types of organizations, even when it comes to the defence of their working conditions.

Older workers have expressed a stronger commitment with the unions and a greater knowledge of their activity, however, they do not recognize unions as effective agents in the fight against age discrimination.

## 4 Supporting Factors in Unionisation of Vulnerable Age Groups

In spite of the aforementioned difficulties in unionising employees from vulnerable age groups, the research conducted as part of the project has made it possible to recognize certain factors which – the negative tendencies notwithstanding – allow for effective solutions and action in this regard.

There is no doubt that young people pay considerable attention to the social view of trade unions. This involves union traditions, which, in most

countries (with the exception of Poland), are remarkably rich. The role and position of trade unions in the workplace is of high importance as well, as is their participation in activities aimed at helping or training the unemployed (for instance in Belgium).

Regarding the young people, it is furthermore of particular importance to the unions to reach those who have not entered the labour market yet, or who have only just begun their careers. No doubt, national regulations on helping and representing employees is of high influence there. Such is the case with the Chamber of Labour (AK) in Austria, which has a compulsory membership for all employees, who automatically become union members as soon as their employment begins; the same goes for the Austrian Economic Chambers (WKÖ), for all employers.

In contrast to the unions' concerns, young people do not always treat memberships in unions as temporary tools, and are aware of the fact that the unions' capabilities are often limited. Still, it appears that reaching employees or prospective employees at an early stage is the key; young people do know that there is a great potential within the unions, which allows them to conduct training, run seminars, or engage in debates regarding the labour market, the labour law, etc. Most trade unions from most countries researched do indeed engage in such practices.

A representative of the Democratic Students' Alliance, working together with the NSZZ Solidarność on a campaign to increase the awareness of young people and to unionise them, has said:

Today's labour market is significantly different, particularly for the young people, who more and more often lack any rights. Trade unions must run information campaigns to show that young employees have rights as well, that they may join unions and profit from doing so. (PL-PO-1)

Young people have stated that they would expect assistance from trade unions should they find themselves unemployed; being helped in securing employment is a priority to the young. The young employees believe that trade unions should approach them more actively in the workplace. Even though they might prove unable to provide actual help concerning wages, the unions can still work to integrate employees from the vulnerable age groups in the workplace.

Unions can also use the fact that in spite of the increasing amount of problems to face, young people can still remain united and are willing to manifest their dissatisfaction together - including their disappointment in the current economy or labour conditions.

A representative of a British trade union has stated:

Young people join all kinds of organisations, in fact young people are by nature very collective, they like being with their own peers they like

doing things in groups, they join all kinds of like protest organisations, they're much more minded to get involved in collective organisations. (UK-TUR1)

In practice, this poses a major challenge to the unions – the question is how to convince young people that when it comes to addressing the issues related to labour conditions, they can and should join trade unions.

## 5 Participation of Vulnerable Age Groups within Social Dialogue Actors

### 5.1 Special Structures Uniting Vulnerable Age Groups

One of the activities aimed at the inclusion of vulnerable age groups in the social dialogue is the strengthening of their position within the organisation, via the creation of structures for the representatives of particular groups.

Out of the six countries researched for the project, the trade unions in five have had such structures. Interestingly, these have been created primarily for young employees.– however, most trade unions have been found to have special sections for pensioners and retirees, which actively participate in the activities of the respective union (Austria, Belgium and Poland).

The Belgian trade unions appear to pay special attention to the matter of creating structures for people from various age groups – the situation concerning the issue of union density in Belgium seems considerably better than in the other countries.

The unions in Belgium have created age-related working groups to better address the needs of all of their members, from the moment in which they enter the workforce, to the time when they leave it.

In the case of the CSC, which has developed specific structures for young people, the youth group is usually divided into three sub-groups: students, unemployed young people, and young employees. They work together on selected subjects, with the aim of establishing inter-group reflections. The FGTB has had two specific youth organisations for a number of years: the FGTB Students (students, apprentices, interns) and the FGTB Trade Union Youth (young employees and welfare recipients aged under 35). The two groups have recently merged in order to reinforce each other. Similar actions have been taken by major trade unions in the United Kingdom (UK-TUR1).

Belgium has special structures grouping pre-pensioners, pensioners and older unemployed persons.<sup>3</sup>

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3 This concerns the CSC and the FGTB.

It is a very active group because it is composed of former activists and delegates who now devote themselves to union work. (BE-TUR-1)

In Poland, there are internal union structures that group primarily pensioners and retirees, that is, people who have already exited the labour market, or are about to do so. In Spain, certain changes have occurred in recent years as well. Union members over 55 years were traditionally transferred to Pensioners and Retired Union Federations, when they became unemployed, in order to receive advice on the different paths to inactivity covered by the social protection system. However, a recent agreement of the most representative union at the national level in Catalonia (CC.OO) has established that those older union members who lose their jobs will remain in their Union Federation, until their effective retirement from the labour market.

The structures formed for specific age groups often promote or implement measures and solutions deemed important by their members. For instance, the Youth organisation of the ÖGB (ÖGJ) in Austria supported the implementation of a Youth Guarantee. In addition, the sections plan and conduct special seminars and informational campaigns aimed at vulnerable age groups – particularly younger employees.

The existence of structures dedicated to specific age groups has been subject to debate in the unions themselves, as not all unionists are certain as to the necessity of forming such cells.

A specific positive example is that of the Young Workers Forum created by the TUC in the United Kingdom. Each member union names two delegates under the age of 27 as members of the Forum, which is currently involved in three priority campaigns: the matters of wages and employment, the issue of promoting unions among younger people, and the issue of housing. There is also one seat on the General Council, reserved specifically for a younger member.

In most cases such age-related structures are merely advisory and opinion-giving bodies. In the United Kingdom, the Unite West Midlands has a regional Young Members' Committee, which regularly gives recommendations to the executives on the issues of training and the educational needs of young workers; the regional branch then works on meeting those expectations. Other branches of Unite have younger representatives as well; their tasks involve identifying the issues that specifically affect the younger workers (UKTUR3).

Of particular note are the Italian trade unions, where retirees have long constituted a sizable percentage of union membership, and where the first structure created by a trade union and aimed specifically at retirees can be traced back to 1949 and the CGIL, with major union confederations following within a few years – eventually specifically referencing the need to create such structures in their statutes. Ever since then, the new structures

and newly created affiliate retiree unions have successfully managed to represent the retirees within social dialogue – particularly, at the local level – for several generations. Moreover, the Italian unions have long taken into consideration the fact that, due to their age, their retired members will often welcome assistance related to various aspects of their lives whose importance grows as they themselves age. Therefore, the unions have been actively meeting those needs, providing retirees with respective assistance in a number of matters – from medical and legal, to helping the older people find productive means of entertainment and spending free time.

In Poland, during the last five years, the largest trade unions have managed to create structures aimed at the young people (under 30 years of age) as well – the Youth Section of the NSZZ Solidarność, the Youth Forum of the FZZ, as well as the Youth Committee of the OPZZ. A representative of the NSZZ Solidarność admits, nevertheless, that the role of those structures have not yet been clearly defined, thus leading to disappointment among both the activists involved in their operations, and within the union itself:

No-one described the goals of such structures; were they e.g. supposed to take up the issues of the young and thus exert influence on legal solutions concerning their problems, or were they to participate in negotiations on various levels. There was no plan to be implemented back then, and no specific tasks. If such a structure can create this and is going to represent its members, even internally, then it will attract people. Merely spending time with them is not enough. (PL-TUR1)

Another representative of trade unions doubts the feasibility of creating such structures:

Perhaps their existence is feasible on the national level, since they allow for taking specific positions or methods to organize young workers; however, they are hardly feasible on the company level, as it is better to get young people involved in the already existing structures than it is to create brand new ones for them. (PL-TUR2)

## Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations

Table 4. Structures for younger/older workers within trade unions

	<b>Young workers (&gt;25)</b>	<b>Older workers (55&lt;)</b>
Austria	Youth Organisation of the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGJ) with similar structures in trade unions under the umbrella of Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB)	-
Belgium	CSC: structures for young workers and young unemployed people, FGFB: group for students and structures for young workers recently merged into one structure ETUC Youth Committee	CSC: group composed of early retired, pensioners and older unemployed persons (similar structures as well in FGFB)
Italy	-	-
Poland	Youth Forum of the FZZ, the Youth Section of the NSZZ Solidarność, the Youth Committee of the OPZZ	-
Spain	Youth organisation of the Workers' Commission in Catalonia(similar youth structures in all Spanish trade unions	-
UK	Young Workers Forum, executive committees of Unite and Unison Trade Union	-

Source: the LinkAge investigation

Many trade unions have also been creating temporary groups devoted to specific subjects, e.g. ones which, at the particular moment, are subject to public debate or negotiations – however, as the unions have admitted, the membership in such groups is not necessarily synonymous with actually representing a particular age group (Austria, Poland).

The employers' organizations have been creating youth sections in recent years as well, in order to promote entrepreneurship among young people, as well as to support the employers. As such, these organizations typically involve themselves in providing training to young people, as well as in running meetings, conferences, and business trips. Occasionally, they attempt to participate in the business matters of their supervisory unions, although – as their representatives are hesitant to admit – their influence on the decision-making process is highly limited, as is their presence in the structures of employers' organizations. However, the act of participation in these groups is often considered a prerequisite step to eventually begin participating in the major structures.

## 5.2 Actual Influence of Representatives of Vulnerable Age Groups on Trade Union Activities

Even though structures that group specific age groups do exist, their members are not always convinced of their actual influence on the activities of the entire union. The representatives of Polish trade unions have pointed to the fact that their structures are of the 'problem-related' nature, rather than 'statute' – as such, they have no direct political influence on the unions' activities. Nevertheless, the situation is considerably better for the vulnerable age groups in some countries, in which their representatives directly participate in the planning and implementation phases of union activities.

Belgium, where the CSC has created an action plan to integrate younger persons in all decisions, structures, communication, etc., has been a good example of the approach. The federal youth coordinator is in charge of monitoring the implementation of the plan. Still, even Belgian unionists from the vulnerable age groups are not fully satisfied with their influence on the activities of their unions: in the CSC, for instance, the seniors are currently exploring the best strategies to secure a real role in the union. They sometimes feel that they are marginalized and that others take the important decisions – including those that directly concern them – within union structures. A Belgian union activist asks thus:

We are very well organised. We have a bureau and different committees, and we meet regularly to define our guidelines and positions. However, one places us in the category of non-active from an economic point of view but also in the organization. Do we still have a place in the unions? (BE-TUR7)

This may be due to the fact that this group includes pre-pensioners, pensioners and the older unemployed, but no older employees. As a result, decisions concerning the working conditions of older employees and pensions are taken mainly by the affiliated unions.

It has been observed as well that some Belgian trade union structures have implemented specific mandates in working groups at different levels of the organisation specifically designed for young people to promote their representation; however, some young people cannot hold the mandates because trade unions way of activity is not suitable for them (daily meetings, additional responsibilities, etc.) (BE-TUR-9).

Direct actions to get young employees involved with elections are not effective enough, either. A representative of a Belgian union has observed:

We organised a campaign for the last workplace elections in 2012 to get young people on the lists and to encourage them to vote. I had to train young people to do their job properly. (BE-TUR2)



As a result, only a few young people stood as candidates and an equally small number of young employees cast their votes. Trade unions have stated that young people are also often employed in precarious jobs and therefore fear losing their positions should they stand for election. According to a Belgian unionist (BE-TUR5), this is also because young employees do not always see the necessity of having union representatives at the company level:

They do not see the point of a union presence at the workplace. At the same time, when we ask why young activists are candidates for union elections, it is precisely because they have witnessed unpleasant events in the company. We must work with them on this paradox.

A good example of genuine inclusion of vulnerable age groups in the labour market comes from Austria, where the representation of the interests of vulnerable age groups and their inclusion in decision making process takes place at different level – e.g. at the company level, the employees elect their work council representatives. At the regional level, the employees elect the AKs (The Chamber of Labour) employees parliament. Within the organisational structure of ÖGB, the youth organisations' inclusion in the decision-making process is highly formalised. That is not the case for the older employees, as there is no specific structure.

At the national level in Austria, the Youth organisation of the ÖGB (ÖGJ) has a vote in the highest decision-making bodies of ÖGB (ATTUR4). Similar rights are reported by a youth representative within the Union of Salaried Employees of the Private Sector and of Printers, Journalists and Press Employees (GPA-djp) (ATTUR1).

At the company level, there are youth representatives<sup>4</sup> (*Jugendvertrauensrat*) within the work councils which are elected by apprentices and young employees (<23 years), and which represent their interests at the company level.

The Chamber of Labour includes young people through more informal processes: The Chamber of Labour for Upper Austria (AK OÖ) includes younger employees through projects (ATTUR6). The Chamber of Labour for Burgenland (AK Burgenland) takes the opinion of student representatives gathered via specific seminars into consideration when dealing to certain subjects (ATTUR2).

Young people are barely represented in the supervisory structures of the organizations – both trade unions and employers' organizations – which stems primarily from the system of election, which rewards people with

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4 About 3 000 youth representatives in Austria (aged <25), compared to 65 000 works council representatives (ATTUR4)

longer work history and greater accumulation of trust. Often, however, older employees are well-represented in the supervisory structures, typically due to their long-time memberships. Trade unions in which elections occur every 4 years have pointed out that the average age of their members has been steadily growing, and have named the lack of future replacements for current members as one of the reasons – this, in turn, causes difficulties in cases when older activists retire, often resulting in the interruption of the respective union’s activities within the company.

Interestingly, even though – as mentioned above – structures that group older employees are a rarity within trade unions, there is nevertheless a prevalent opinion that older people do indeed have real influence on the activities of the unions. The opinions expressed by union representatives from Austria confirm this:

We do not say we need in particular persons aged 55+ in decision making bodies. But they are involved if there are persons [in this age group] in works councils or within the trade union. (AT-TUR5)

Older persons are better included in decision making as they tend work in higher positions within the organisation. There is no special attention paid to the inclusion of certain age-groups in decision making. (AT-TUR6)

The words of a representative of an Italian trade union summarise these observations quite well:

Vulnerable employees occupy a very important role, but the subjects involved in the social dialogue are those who are already in the labour market. Therefore, the youth are out of the picture. Everybody talks about the youth, but nobody does anything for them in practice. We have been working with the aim of increasing apprenticeship contracts in several sectors and promote turnovers in enterprises, with the purpose of increasing youth employment. (IT-TUR2)

### 5.3 Participation of Representatives of Vulnerable Age Groups in Negotiations

During the research, no examples have been found of circumstances in which employees under 25 or above 55 were formally represented during negotiations or consultations. The issues of youth unemployment and of the re-collocation of employees over 55 have been faced by policy makers within the issue of labour policy plans, which has been discussed with the social partners in consultation commissions regulated by the law. However, even the policy makers have stressed the fact that labour policies

have never focused on the issue of age, but rather on issues connected to particular statuses with a standardized outline for the whole population of reference (disabilities, addictions, etc.). This characterization is derived from the presence of a homogeneous employment situation, which has only recently highlighted the greater vulnerability of employees under 25 and over 55. Social partners and policy makers are facing this unprecedented issue, which necessitates a deferred period of time for implementation that poses a danger of degrading the effectiveness of the activated actions and policies.<sup>5</sup>

### 5.4 Actions Aimed at Vulnerable Age Groups

Independently of the aforementioned activities, trade unions have attempted to conduct various actions that have targeted the vulnerable age groups.

In most cases, such actions are part of the programmes financed or co-financed by the administration. A particularly high number of such actions has been observed in Austria, where the projects ‘Youth coaching’<sup>6</sup> and ‘Fit2Work’<sup>7</sup> were implemented by the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (BMASK). The platform ‘Work & Age’ (‘Arbeit und Alter’)<sup>8</sup> was a common project created by social partners to provide entrepreneurs and HR managers with information on subjects related to age and work (intergenerational management). NESTORGOLD<sup>9</sup> is a BMASK initiative – an award for successful age management projects – further supported by social partners (ATER2, ATER1). ‘WAGE: Winning Age, Getting Future’<sup>10</sup> is a social partners’ project in Upper Austria, acting as an inducer of innovation, and a centre of expertise in generation management (ATFUR5, ATFUR6).

The Belgian unions have suggested the development of some new programmes concerning employment as well; for instance, in order to increase the hiring of younger employees in Brussels, the unions have proposed to better match the employers’ needs and the job offers given to younger

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5 With the exception of Austria, where youth representatives may also participate in the collective bargaining processes (AT-TUR1).

6 [http://www.neba.at/jugendcoaching/warum.raw?task=callelement&item\\_id=264&element=f85c494b-2b32-4109-b8c1-083cca2b7db6&method=download&args\[0\]=e4cf2ab9230cfd088ee74aaaa0d5ee07](http://www.neba.at/jugendcoaching/warum.raw?task=callelement&item_id=264&element=f85c494b-2b32-4109-b8c1-083cca2b7db6&method=download&args[0]=e4cf2ab9230cfd088ee74aaaa0d5ee07)

7 <http://www.fit2work.at/home/>

8 <http://www.arbeitundalter.at/>

9 <http://www.nestorgold.at/>

10 <http://www.wage.at/>

employees at the local level, since, in some areas, the unemployment rates of younger people remain very high, even though the local companies are looking for applicants. The idea is to develop training within the company. The employers hire a young person for one year on an employment contract. They train the individual, and then decide whether or not to keep the young employee at the end of the training year, after assessing motivation and the skills acquired.

The second initiative concerns the issue of the employment of younger employees living in Brussels. The main problem is that over 50% of jobs in the city are held by people who live outside Brussels. It should therefore be possible to improve the hiring of unemployed young people who live in the poorest neighbourhoods by giving them priority when being hired. One possibility would be to require companies to establish quotas in favour of the employees who live in Brussels.

The Experience Fund is another federal initiative designed to increase the employment rate of older people in Belgium, by encouraging employers to adapt and improve employment opportunities, working conditions and work organization. Projects to improve the working conditions of employees over the age of 45 can receive a grant from the Experience Fund.

According to a Belgian public officer (BE-PO2), the objective of the funds is to give experienced employees the opportunity to stay on the job longer by adapting their working conditions, taking into account the specific initiatives that form part of careful age-related human resource management, and the direct or indirect improvements which come as a result of those. This could include, for example, physically reducing the workload by offering new working tools and equipment or improving skills through training. This initiative has been in effect for ten years. The attitude of social actors towards the fund has evolved over the years. According to an interviewee, this initiative is now better known and more welcomed by employers. Initially, employers were confused about the objectives of the Experience Fund:

At first they confused it with the labour inspectorate and were suspicious. Then confidence was built and they understood that our function is simply to improve the working conditions of older employees. (BE-PO2)

The trade unions' attitudes have evolved as well. At first, they were very hostile towards this measure:

In the beginning, we were perceived as simply trying to keep employees in employment as long as possible. Today the unions have changed their view of us and even come to see us. (BE-PO2)

The employers' associations have been getting involved in activities aimed

at assisting the vulnerable age groups as well - mostly by implementing certain training projects, or promoting the concept of active age management among the employers. For instance, the Austrian Economic Chambers WKÖ strongly focuses on the awareness rising in companies. Through cooperation with the Austrian Public Employment Service (AMS), the WKÖ also influences the development of programmes and projects for unemployed persons, the inclusion of older employees in the work life, work organisation, qualification and health promotion (AT-ER2). WKÖ also participates in the above mentioned social partners' activities.

In Spain, the employers' associations deal with the problems of specific age groups as a part of the promotion of Social Corporate Responsibility among their affiliates. As such, specific employment programs for young people and other vulnerable groups in the labour market are carried out by Foundations linked to the Employers' Associations, and partly financed by public institutions (ES-ER1, ES-ER2).

Active Labour Market Policies in Spain have been more focused on specific age groups of employees, especially the younger ones. Within this age group, the ones which have traditionally deserved more attention from the public policy are those young people who remain unemployed after dropping out of school, and who are addressed through different programmes that combine training and employment, such as Workshop Schools. However, the current supply of these types of employment programmes is said to be completely insufficient, given the size of the problem (ES-TUR4). These types of active labour market policies combining training, guidance and employment are very expensive in terms of financial resources, and have been affected by drastic budget cuts implemented in the last two years by the austerity plans. Public spending in active labour market policies (in Catalonia) has been reduced by 56% in the last two budgetary years (ES-PO2).

Other employment policies related to the matter of the inclusion of vulnerable age groups are those mentioned earlier, concerning the implementation of the dual system of vocational training. Although the regulation of the system is set by the government at the national level, its actual implementation and development is in the hands of the regional governments.<sup>11</sup> Union proposals with regard to the future development of the dual system of vocational training focus on the recruitment conditions of trainees in the companies (ES-TUR4). According to unions, a dual system alternating between practical training in the company and theoretical training should be linked to the conclusion of a labour contract. However, current attempts on the development of a dual system in some large companies are implemented through grants and non-labour practices, which offer the

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11 Therefore, the following comments only apply to the situation in Catalonia.

possibility of incorporating trained people without any cost to the company. The employers' associations argue that smaller companies cannot afford the trainees' wages. On the other hand, the unions argue that companies may set up a pool of resources devoted to the recruitment of trainees on a labour contract basis. Without such investments, the efforts carried out by the companies, there is no incentive to retain the young trainee. Otherwise, companies may be using these training schemes as a way of replacing employees – the older ones – with labour contracts, and better working conditions, regulated by collective agreements.

In Poland, the NSZZ Solidarność has been conducting an informational campaign for years, targeting both the younger and the older employees. One of the attempts is the unions' participation in training young people in the matters of labour law, the Act on Trade Unions, etc., which were for example organized for students in the biggest universities in Krakow (PL-TUR-6, PL-PO-1). Solidarność was also the initiator of the large-scale social campaign «Sisyphus. I Don't Want To Start From Scratch», whose aim was to educate society about the social effects that the so-called 'junk contracts' have on employees (Stachowski 2014).

The overview of the initiatives undertaken by trade unions leads to one conclusion: the majority of the unions are well aware of the need to assist and organize the disadvantaged groups within the labour market. The relatively weak effectiveness of the initiatives (taking the increase of the representativeness of young and old workers within unions as a point of comparison) is a confirmation of the unions' limited resources, knowledge and experience regarding the means of assisting members and prospective members outside their own territories. The unions find it difficult to name specific goals of their activities concerning the organizing, as well as – and above all – the proper evaluation of the results (Simms, Holgate, Heery 2014). The unions have been unable to seize the opportunity offered as a result of their campaigns, to truly extend their influence and to attract groups of employees located outside the scope of their usual activities. Even when the attempts at organizing are successful, those successes are often short-termed, since the addressees of the unions' activities may actually join unions, yet they eventually find themselves unable to integrate and do not get involved in their activities, thereby remaining barely noticeable within the unions.

## **6 Conclusions**

The collected information allows for a conclusion that the issue of inclusion of vulnerable age groups constitutes a major challenge for social partners, particularly for trade unions – a challenge bound to grow, considering the current economy and the tendencies within the labour market.

In spite of numerous declarations being made regarding the representation of vulnerable age groups, the data is evident. While many older employees still are members of trade unions, younger employees are overwhelmingly absent from unions. What's more, most young people not only have no contact with unions, but they lack even the basic knowledge of their role and tasks. The sectoral and occupational segregation of young people in the labour market is the main factor that reduces the contact between employees and trade unions.

While unions have attempted to reach young people, by means of various actions - from informational campaigns, to trainings, to representing vulnerable groups in various institutions of social dialogue - there is no complex interest in the subject as such. Of all the countries researched, none has provided the researchers with an example of a strategic approach to the issue whose aim should be an effective way to organize younger employees and to protect their interests together. The youth structures created by trade unions are often little more than façades, and their results are disappointing. The real representation of interests of vulnerable age-groups and the inclusion in the decision-making process takes place at a different level - the national, the regional and the company level - but its efficiency is doubtful. In the majority of investigated countries, there is no special attention paid to the inclusion of certain age groups in the decision-making process of the unions' structures.

Even though people from the vulnerable age groups are disappointed by the conditions in which they find themselves, they rarely see the unions as a means of improvement. The younger workers can hardly see any potentials or benefits in joining trade unions. In most of the countries researched, the work of the unions is very often associated with such terms as 'historical' and 'outdated', rather than with 'modern reality' - as such, it is of little interest to most young workers.

It is therefore hardly an exaggeration to state that the future of European trade unions depends on the extent to which the unions are able to locate themselves in the new conditions, and to reach more employees - primarily, the younger employees.

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

## **Emerging Intergenerational Dynamics between Cooperation and Competition**

Olga Jubany, Juan Arasanz (Universitat de Barcelona, Espanya)

**Abstract** Stemming from the understanding that heterogeneity and dynamism are both inherent in our current societies, as reflected within the internal diversity of workers' age groups, this chapter argues for the significance of the rich intersectional diversity of the workers that compose the constructed collectives such as those of younger or older workers. To this aim it proposes an exploration of workers interaction beyond constructed age group to unravel the richness –and potential, of intergenerational dynamics. The chapter reveals how current debates on intergenerational synergies are masking the increase in social inequalities on the basis of socioeconomic status within each generation. It exposes how policies aimed at balancing contributions and benefits in line with life expectancy incite the risk of increasing inequalities among future retirees. This, in turn, questions the extent to which social dialogue anticipates the impact of policy changes on the traditional age management practices and intergenerational labour market imbalances. Based on qualitative empirical results the chapter exposes the damage that the construction of collective workers as a group outside the ideal type worker infers. This is recognised by the lack of awareness and the absence innovative approaches to age diversity management in collective bargaining, which contrasts with shared expectations of increased future competition between age groups for scarce employment opportunities.

**Summary** 1. Introduction: Main Questions Raised. – 2. Active Ageing as a Frame for National Policy. – 2.1. Expected Effects of Pension Reform Processes. – 3. Unions' Perceptions of Intergenerational Dynamics and Anticipation to Policy Changes. – 3.1. The Prevalence of Established Patterns: Path-Dependent and Defensive Priorities in Bargaining Strategies. – 3.2. Labour Market Segmentation Dynamics as Determinants of Age-Related Labour Market Inequalities. – 3.3. Traditional Intergenerational Solidarities Under Question. – 4. Conclusions.

The ideal-typical employee is a high-performer between 28 and 40 years old... And this is the reference which all other workers are measured against (AT-OW4)

### **1 Introduction: Main Questions Raised**

Ageing and longevity raise profound questions about the distribution of work and welfare over the life-course and across generations. The emergence of the issue of intergenerational dynamics, however, both in terms

of solidarity and competition in the context of ageing societies, has been framed by the debate on the sustainability of pension systems in the context of the current economic recession. Public discourses on the social and economic implications of population ageing tend to be narrowly focused on the distributive issues related to sustainability of public pension systems and the need to balance the cost allocation between generations. As public pension systems are the main institution regulating transfers between retired and working generations across Europe, their reform becomes one of the key challenges for social policies in the context of demographic change. The core issue is the worsening of the 'dependency ratio', as fewer working adults will be supporting an increasing share of elderly people who will also be spending longer time in retirement. This is why public pension systems are no longer affordable and it seems unfair to expect the current contributing generation to be burdened with the costs of financing the pensions of the retired. Hence, there is a further trend to re-write the 'intergenerational contract' in the search of a better equity between generations (Attias-Donfut, Arber 2000).

Besides demography, there is another factor which has been raising the retirement costs in the last decades, namely the falling age of retirement across European countries. This raises the paradox of increased life expectancy and the shortening of working years. Though this mainly applies to men's pattern of labour participation, this trend has been partially reversed since the late nineties for some countries, yet important differences persist by gender and socioeconomic status (Anxo et al. 2012; Hoffacker et al. 2006). A significant share of the decline in labour participation rates of older workers has been induced by social dialogue institutions and collective bargaining practices. Both employers and trade unions benefited from early retirement schemes as a means of easing workforce adjustments in declining sectors and supporting generational turnover in restructuring companies. In countries with traditionally high youth unemployment rates, such as Italy and Spain, in the last three decades collective bargaining has been focused on providing different ways of easing the exit of older workers, through a redistribution of employment policy between generations.

Most European governments have become aware of the social costs of these bargaining strategies in the context of the current crisis. In the last years, the questioning of the ability of social protection systems to cope with the issues of population ageing has been exacerbated by the ongoing recession of most European economies. In February 2012, the European Commission launched the White Paper on Adequate, Safe and Sustainable Pensions, setting the principles of pension reform across Europe. These are basically aimed at supporting the extension of working life of older workers as a means of balancing the dependency ratio between working and retired generations. This fitted with broader attempts to deal with intergenerational issues in terms of cooperation and solidarity in a more inclusive

way from the start of the European year dedicated to Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations. There is a clear view that changes in the age structure of the European working population will have a significant impact on the dynamic between the generations in the workplace. Intergenerational solidarity and cooperation in the workplace will need to be rethought and sustained by appropriate employment policies, in order to be based on mutual support counting on the transfer of skills and experience.

This chapter argues that current discourses and policies on behalf of intergenerational solidarity are ignoring other crucial redistributive issues and specifically, the increasing inequalities within each generation in the course of the last decades. The current problematisation of population ageing often assumes demographic shifts as the main driver for policy change and tends to represent the intergenerational relationships in terms of competition between future retirees and working-age population. It gives the rather stereotyped impression that there are distinctive and identifiable winners and losers in this new social settlement. However, discussions on intergenerational equity must acknowledge the fact that existing inequalities within generations or cohorts overflow differences between generations with respect to the distribution of 'winners' and 'losers' that can result from population ageing (Myles 2001; Walker 2009). It will be argued that the set of measures aimed at fostering working life extension of older workers may generate increasing intragenerational inequalities in the access to adequate retirement pensions. This is especially true for those groups of workers most affected by unemployment and employment insecurity at their later stages of their working lives who may find it increasingly difficult to meet eligibility criteria for pension benefits. An increased statutory retirement age may be necessary but not a sufficient condition to improve the employment rates of older workers, even more in a context of deep economic recession.

Furthermore, this chapter reviews and analyses the European Institutions' understandings of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity as a policy framework for national social dialogue institutions. The main questions addressed in this regard are, firstly, to what extent social partners perceive that these policy targets are compatible and how they incorporate them into their bargaining strategies. Secondly, we assess how both groups of young and older workers and their representatives perceive intergenerational dynamics in the workplaces. This is particularly in relation to how these actors anticipate the impact of policy changes on the intergenerational imbalances in the labour market. We focus on the main measures with greatest impact on the vulnerability risks of both young and older age groups of workers.

In shrinking labour markets such as we are currently experiencing, policies on behalf of one particular age group need to be considered against the opportunities for the rest of the groups of workers. In this regard, it

will be argued that current attempts aimed at extending the working life of older workers and the concurrent increase in unemployment rates among younger generations risk further entrenching historical generational imbalances in the labour market. The analysis of early retirement as a policy instrument set in accordance with the employment redistribution between young and older generations does not support the hypothesis of a trade-off between the employment levels of older workers and the unemployment of the youth (Anon. 2013; Kalwij et al. 2009). On the contrary, it is the core-age group of workers who have best stood against growing employment difficulties whereas new risks have emerged at the beginning and the end of working lives. But the assessment of the intergenerational equity resulting from the new pattern of allocation of increasing retirement costs advanced by pension reforms is far more complex than often assumed in public discourses of winners and losers (Guillemard 1999). The raising of the statutory retirement age along with the extension of the reference period of contributions to calculate pension benefits will generate more uncertain retirement prospects for middle-aged workers. Furthermore, the traditional employment security awarded to senior workers in more stable positions has been undermined by changes in employment protection institutions. Trade unions are becoming increasingly concerned with the risk of substitution of senior workers for new (younger) entries with degraded employment conditions in certain sectors and occupations, at the same time as they have been drawing attention to the gaps in social protection and the lack of job opportunities for many older workers not in employment, but still not eligible for access to an adequate retirement pension.

The chapter concludes by stressing the need for social partners to adopt more comprehensive strategies to the management of age-diversity and intergenerational dynamics in the labour market. Firstly, by adopting a life-course approach which accounts for the new risks affecting age-specific transitions in the labour market and the increasing diversification of working trajectories in the context of current restructuring processes. The assessment of these emerging risks also call for a re-examination of the ways in which distinct employment protection systems provide adequate coverage. From a policy perspective, the focus is placed in 'making transitions pay' through institutional arrangements supporting the employability of workers through risky transitions over the life-course (Grazier 2007).

## **2 Active Ageing as a Frame for National Policy**

The view of EU Institutions tends to be that the policy focus of the intergenerational approach in the labour market should be on ensuring equal access and opportunities for workers of all ages throughout the lifecycle. European reform guidelines claim for the design and implementation of

measures to prevent the early exit of older workers together with measures targeting the entry into the labour market of the youth. This challenge for pension reform assumes that both goals can be reached simultaneously, that is, that there is no trade-off between the aim of raising the employment of older workers and containing youth unemployment (Anon. 2013; Kalwij et al. 2009). However, the extent to which social partners understand that these two policy targets are compatible may vary across countries and also across different levels of collective bargaining.

Social partners may hold different perceptions on intergenerational dynamics and how to balance the competition between different generations in the labour market, especially in the context of shrinking labour markets such as those we are currently experiencing. Specifically, many trade unions understand that there is a conflict between the delaying of retirement and the employment chances of young people in the context of high unemployment rates. Not only does social partners' involvement in the design and implementation of active ageing policies vary across countries, but they may also be pursuing ambivalent or conflicting strategies through different levels of bargaining (EC 2006). Even in those cases where national unions agreed, though reluctantly, with the increase of the statutory retirement age, they may still be opting for early retirement schemes in company restructuring processes at lower levels of bargaining. As discussed in the next section, these differences may account for the lack of strategies to address the impact of policy changes which are currently implemented on behalf of active ageing and the prevalence of the traditional age management practices in the governance of economic restructuring (Radl 2012).

Policy interventions on behalf of active ageing and intergenerational solidarity in the six countries considered may be summarised in a set of different measures aimed at providing financial incentives for working life extension of older workers through pension reform and the 'activation' of unemployment protection systems. Among the measures related to the sustainability of pension reform, the most prominent with regard to active ageing has been the raising of the legal retirement age according to gains in life expectancy. This has come along with the extension of the reference period of contributions to calculate pension benefits.

Looking at the countries included in the study, in the UK the default retirement age was removed in 2011. For many years this was 65 for men and 60 for women. In addition, the state pension age is to be gradually increased from 61 to 68 between the years 2020 and 2046. New legislation also equalises the pensionable age for men and women by year 2018. In the case of Spain, the government reformed the pension system in 2011 following an agreement with social partners. The main elements of the reform that will be gradually in place by 2027 is, first, the increase of the statutory retirement age from 65 to 67 years, while a period of 37 years is

required to be entitled to receive full pension (previously 35). Second, the estimation of the pension amount will be based on the 25 years previous to retirement, instead of the previous 15 years. Furthermore, following the implementation of the 2012 labour market reform, the Spanish government set the prohibition on the introduction of compulsory retirement age clauses in collective bargaining. The use of this type of clauses together with other incentives to retirement as a means for employment restructuring was increasing in the last years because of the recession. In 2011, 45% of workers covered by collective bargaining were under agreements containing such types of clauses.

Also in Austria, Italy and Belgium pension reforms foresee the progressive equalisation of men and women's pensionable age, together with the extension of the minimum period required to get access. In Italy, the Pension Law Reform, in force since 2012, increased women's retirement age from 60 to 62 and it will be further increased to 66 by 2018, in order to be equal to that of men. In addition, the contributory period required to get access to contributory pension has been extended to 42 years. Meanwhile, in Poland, the reference period for the calculation of the pension benefits is the whole working life.

Another line of pension reform pursuing the increase of the effective retirement age has consisted in restricting access to early and partial retirement schemes through tightening criteria and, in some cases, their virtual elimination. Since the 2005 Generation Pact, in Belgium the emphasis has been placed on limiting the access to early retirement by increasing the minimum eligible age together with the extension of contributory periods required to retire before the statutory pensionable age. In the 2011 reform, continuing with this trend, the age threshold was increased from 58 to 60 years, and the number of years required goes from 38 to 40 for men and from 35 to 40 for women. The new regulation also has limited the access to early retirement in collective redundancies to older workers with a greater number of contribution years. The cost of early retirement for employers will also be increased depending on the age at which early retirement is taken. In addition part-time early retirement no longer exists from 2012. Those collective agreements already in force will be progressively adapted to the new regulation between 2012 and 2024.

In Spain, following the pension reform of 2011, the minimum legal age of access to early retirement will be progressively increased from 63 to 65 years by 2027. The reform also establishes an increase of the minimum contributory period (to 35 years) and the application of increased reduction coefficient in the amount of the pension benefits. Partial retirement was also reformed with the aim to prevent it from becoming a privileged access to retirement which mostly benefits senior workers in the largest companies. Almost all workers taking partial retirement do so at the age of 60 and with a high level of contributions, so the amount of their benefit tends to be

higher than that for retired persons over the statutory age of 65.<sup>1</sup> Partial retirement is also linked to the possibility of hiring a replacement worker with a relief contract, but on the basis of new regulation with tighter criteria regarding the age and the contribution required for candidates and tighter conditions on the new contracts of new employees.

Similarly, Austria reformed the most popular form of early retirement scheme known as ‘Hacklerregelung’ to become a part-time work model for older workers. This mainly applies to senior workers with very long contribution careers, meaning that the minimum age to get access to this type of pension benefit is being increased with two years, from 60 to 62 years in the case of men, and from 55 to 57 for women. It also abolished the obligation to hire a new worker to compensate for the early exit of an older one and lowered the eligibility threshold from 80% to 60% of regular working time.

### 2.1 Expected Effects of Pension Reform Processes

Although effective implementation of most of the changes concerning the pension reform process is extended over long periods of time in order to preserve the acquired pension rights of senior workers, the foreseen impact of recent pension reforms will translate into increasing inequalities in the access to adequate retirement pensions among older workers. Firstly, the extension of contribution periods will affect individuals’ retirement pensions quite differently on the basis of the distribution of risks concerning career progression and employment disruptions along the life-course between genders and distinct socio-economic groups (Anxo et al. 2012). Although most of the pension reforms have introduced some compensating mechanism in the calculation of pension benefits to offset the impact of career interruptions linked to parenting and childcare periods, these may be insufficient where women are not continuous employees and the childcare credits are limited. On the other hand, one may recognise the concern with intra-generational justice in these reforms, since the previous system based on the latest working years clearly favoured people with later integration into the labour market and mainly those qualified workers with upward age-earning profiles. However, the current extension of employment precariousness and unemployment at the later stages of many workers’ careers and the stronger link between pension entitlements and contribution history will result in reduced future pension benefits.

In those countries where the unemployment rates of older workers has increased the most because of the current crisis, such as Italy and espe-

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1 Around 35% higher than the average pension according to official estimates.



cially in Spain, trade unions are becoming increasingly concerned with the employment prospects and the 'gaps' in social protection of older workers not in employment but still not eligible for access to an adequate retirement pension. Older workers in these countries with historically highly segmented labour markets are becoming more vulnerable in the context of the current economic recession in two ways. First, because the employment protection of those workers with open-ended contracts and higher seniority has been reduced with regard to those with other types of contracts. Thus, there is a risk of substitution of senior workers with new entries and lower employment conditions in certain sectors and occupations. Secondly, because of the removal of most of the social protection schemes which were previously in place to ease the transitions to inactivity for this age group of workers, such as unemployment subsidies and early retirement schemes which in previous recession episodes acted as a buffer of the social impact of unemployment in this age group.

In Italy, these concerns are personified by the workers known as '*esodati*'. This term refers to the thousands of older workers who have lost or left their employment as a consequence of corporate restructuring plans, collective or individual agreements and who are not yet entitled to a pension, due to the increase in retirement age and to the tightening of early retirement requirements provided by the 2012 Law on Pension Reform. Early retirement was encouraged for older workers after collective redundancies procedures. These were allowed to take advantage of 'social shock absorber' until they became eligible for retirement through the accession to long term unemployment benefits ('*mobilità lunga*'). Since the nineties, as a consequence of the reforms regarding retirement eligibility criteria, many unemployed older workers from restructuring companies are exposed to vulnerability due to the lack of both social protection and job opportunities. In Spain, many union representatives in large companies show increased concern about the prospect that companies may choose not to proceed with these less traumatic procedures for workforce restructuring in exchange of a greater use of collective or individual or collective redundancies procedures. As two trade unionists put it:

The staff has realised that those *good deal* pre-retirements have come to an end. (SP-OW1)

The problem of vulnerability is still very focused in young people and its consequences but I think we should pay the same attention to the group of [unemployed] older workers, because there is a feeling that most of them are under pre-retirement schemes, but this only applies to those from big companies, and not for the rest, which are the majority, and there is a growing share of older workers in unemployment with no coverage from the social protection system. (SP-TUR5)

The high prevalence of long-term unemployment together with the household circumstances of this age group accounts for the fact that, in the year 2012, around two thirds of unemployed people over 55 years in Spain have become beneficiaries of unemployment subsidies (means-tested). However, the social protection for the long-term unemployed older workers has been considerably reduced under the current policies of fiscal austerity in different ways. Firstly, the access to unemployment subsidies for 'older' workers has been limited by delaying the minimum age required for eligibility from 52 to 55 years and by means of considering all the household members' incomes (not just those of the recipient) in the means test assessment. Furthermore, since July 2012 the amount of these subsidies has been drastically reduced for those beneficiaries who cease a part-time job, as new benefits are reduced proportionally to the working-time of their last contract. Such measure is said to be acting as a negative incentive for beneficiaries to take part-time job offers with subsequent lower unemployment protection rights.

The reduction in the coverage of the unemployment subsidies is expected to produce future cuts in the pension benefits of the workers concerned. This is because unemployment subsidies help older workers not in employment to complete their contribution careers until they reach the statutory age of retirement. Paradoxically, since May of 2013, Spanish beneficiaries of unemployment subsidies are forced to accept early-retirement once they reach the age of 61. Unions argue that the impact of these measures will contribute to a 20% reduction in the future pension benefits of those beneficiaries of unemployment subsidies and this is clearly perceived by some of the interviewees.

What do we think about all these measures? After contributing for 40 years we'll be getting the minimum retirement pension! Therefore, it is in the interest of whatever government in power that we continue to be paid these unemployment subsidies until we reach the retirement age, because they would save a lot of money on pensions from us! (SP-OW4)

The foreseen impact of the pension reform process is the deepening of the trend towards the de-standardisation and the individualisation of the trajectories of older workers at the end of their working lives (Guille-mard 2005). The search for increased 'contributivity' of pension systems will translate into future pension entitlements the current inequalities in the patterns of labour market participation by gender and socio-economic status. On the other hand, the removal of compulsory retirement ages and the tightening criteria to get access to alternative exit routes through social protection systems (unemployment subsidies, disability pensions and early retirement schemes) will affect the traditional age management practices of both employers and trade unions (Anxo et al. 2012). First,

changing economic incentives to retire have not been accompanied by more comprehensive strategies supporting older workers to remain in employment. There is an obvious risk that large groups of workers will find themselves in increasing strain to match the performance requirements that enable them to compete with younger generations of workers. As one experienced trade unionist put it:

The [senior] staff is seeing this coming: I won't be able to take early retirement, not even through partial retirement or other ways we used to. Then I will have to bear an increased workload and worse employment conditions [...] The company will place a younger worker by my side being paid half [...] Because you could perhaps keep your working conditions but new entries won't... and this is going to generate a very bad working environment. (SP-OW2)

This puts forward the need for adequate active labour market policies sustaining older workers' capacities through the provision of adequate training and changes in the conditions and the organisation of work in order to prevent incapacity and health problems of senior workers at the later stages of their working life. On the employers' side, however, since they are losing the capacity to influence the exit options of their employees, their hiring and retention policies for older workers will be driven by expectations (and prejudices) of how productive they will be. In this regard, most of European employers are expecting a larger gap between wages and productivity associated with an ageing workforce (Conen et al. 2012). This in turn is preventing the adoption of organisational policies addressing the wage-productivity gap and the working life extension of older workers. As two employers' representatives from Belgium and the UK respectively stated.

There was such a widespread culture of early pensions in Belgium that employers do not see the value of keeping them at work. (BE-ER1)

In general employers in the UK are living in a world where they are rather quite fearful of people working longer or as long as they can, and they're worried default retirement age having an adverse effect on productivity. (UK-ER2)

### 3 Unions' Perceptions of Intergenerational Dynamics and Anticipation to Policy Changes

Trade unions tend to perceive intergenerational dynamics in the labour market as a 'zero-sum' game where the employment of one person means the unemployment of another. Unions' involvement in the aforementioned pension reform processes has been limited, at best, to consultation procedures and they tend to argue against raising the retirement age with the negative effects this would have on youth employment:

Because when I work longer, this means a job is longer occupied and young people get no opportunities. (ATTUR1)

From this approach, promoting Active Ageing does not necessarily require raising the statutory retirement age, but implementing more comprehensive strategies that will encourage employers and enable older workers to remain in the labour market until they reach the standard retirement age. However, this means to reverse the widespread 'early exit culture' to which social partners themselves have contributed since the 1970s. Social partners at company and sector levels also have benefited from early retirement provisions as a means of overcoming industrial restructuring over previous decades and balancing the competition between age-groups of workers with quite different levels of educational attainment and productivity imbalances. Although these strategies did not prove effective to reduce youth unemployment, the pervasiveness of these age norms or 'age culture' is still framing social partners' bargaining strategies and explains the lack of development of more comprehensive approaches to age diversity management in social dialogue (Guillemard 2013; Radl 2012).

Altering such patterns takes more than just reducing the financial incentives for early retirement. It also requires creating positive incentives for employers and workers to extend employment beyond the expected retirement age. Pension reform processes are usually narrowly focused on early exit and its institutional determinants. Addressing the issue of active ageing, however, calls for an integrated preventive strategy for maintaining the working capacity of employees in a life-course perspective. This is because most of the factors explaining the differences in the ability of senior workers to remain in employment are to be found in the lack of reskilling and low mobility throughout their working lives. In the absence of such policies, employers tend to anticipate increasing contributions and the costs of adapting work organization to an ageing workforce. This in turn is raising unions' concerns about the substitution risks of older workers for younger ones in a general downward spiral on working conditions.

### 3.1 The Prevalence of Established Patterns: Path-Dependent and Defensive Priorities in Bargaining Strategies

The meaning of intergenerational solidarity for social partners has evolved according to changes in the priorities of employment policies. In the course of the last forty years social dialogue in most European countries has promoted early retirement schemes as an employment redistribution policy between generations. In Southern European countries such as Italy and Spain – those with the highest youth unemployment rates – the main priority of employment policy has been youth unemployment, while at the same time different paths to early retirement were put in place as a way of facilitating employment restructuring and easing the expulsion of older workers towards inactivity. Thus, social policies with regard to unemployed older workers have traditionally been aimed at compensating for the loss of income through unemployment subsidies and other social benefits until they reach the statutory age of retirement. This is instead of setting strategies oriented towards keeping them in employment or to their reintegration into the labour market.

Although the possibility of retiring early has been restrained, early retirement still remains on the bargaining agenda and is the preferred option of many workers' and employers' representatives. Many national trade unions are still in favour of shortening working ages, especially in the current context of high youth unemployment rates. Current bargaining practices and experiences show the prevalence of the age management institutions deployed by social dialogue in the course of the last four decades. In most of the cases, social partners still opt for early retirement schemes as the main instrument of easing workforce adjustment and for the replacement of older workers with obsolete skills and higher wages.

One day, the employer told us that 600 people would have to be fired. The solution was to make workers redundant or to offer early retirement to older workers. Early retirement, which is so criticised today – even by employers – was being used by them 20 years ago! As a result, 600 people between 50 and 65 who would not have adapted to new technologies left the company under very good conditions. They were allowed to keep around 85% of their salary. (BE-OW2)

One of the main measures with regard to intergenerational solidarity in collective bargaining is provided by the use of employment clauses referred to partial retirement, which is the case in Spain. These allow to keep older workers in employment while enabling new (younger) workers to become employed as substitutes for those older workers on part-time basis by means of 'hand-over contracts'. This formula is claimed by a union representative as an appropriate measure of 'active labour market policy'

(SP-TUR1) in cases of restructuring, because it contributes to preventing the extinction of the job post that often entailed the dismissal of an older worker. However, recent reform on partial retirement has tightened the eligibility requirements for access to what is assumed to be a privileged path into retirement which does not contribute to the transfer of knowledge between different age groups in the workplace.

A relevant example of the prevalence of these institutions regulating the intergenerational flows in the labour market is provided by the so-called ‘intergenerational relay’, a project promoted by the Italian Ministry of Labour in 2012. The project is aimed at hiring young people in replacement of older workers that have agreed to work on part-time basis until they reach the statutory age of retirement. In exchange, the government ensures the payment of some of the contributions for the older worker, who would otherwise retire on a lower pension.

Many trade unionists acknowledge the fact that intergenerational dynamics in the current state of the labour market run the risk of a deadlock owing to the difficulty of supporting senior workers into retirement, and at the same time of boosting the employment of young workers. This raises unions’ concerns about the risks of young workers substituting older workers in a general downward spiral of wages and working conditions. These concerns were clearly summarised by one Spanish trade unionist as follows:

Here, there is going to be a change where the son will take the father’s place for half the price. This is where the labour market is going (SP-YW8)

Current attempts aimed at increasing the effective retirement age and the concurrent increase in unemployment levels among the younger generations risk affecting the historical intergenerational imbalances in the labour market. Many European societies may be witnessing increased competition between two generations of workers who find themselves competing for scarce employment opportunities but, in contrast to previous episodes of economic downturn, the older generation is not in retreat. This is different from when the current generation of older workers took over from their predecessors, who accounted for longer careers of contributions – of those that started working very young – and important educational shortcomings. In contrast, young people now pushing to get a job are facing the competition of their parents’ generation, much more consolidated in the labour market – they have longer experience but are not on the point of retirement – and the youth cannot even claim for a big difference in terms of educational credentials on their behalf.

As the option of early and partial retirement will be progressively excluded for many senior workers not meeting tighter eligibility criteria,

they become increasingly exposed to employers' restructuring strategies through collective redundancies. Recent labour market reforms in Italy and Spain have provided a reduction of dismissal costs which mainly threatens the employment status of senior workers with permanent contracts. On the other hand, these substitution dynamics are being prompted by the extension of different forms of precarious labour market insertion among the youth, such as training and apprenticeship contracts, 'zero-hours' contracts in the UK and the so-called 'junk contracts' in Poland.

The company thought that senior workers were too expensive and so it proposed a downward adjustment to the staffing establishment. As the Law [after the 2012 Labour Market Reform] allows to do so, workers were told to work half the daily working time in other establishments in the city... their wages were also brought down in order to encourage them to leave the company by accepting lower severance payments... and so they did! [...] That is the reason why me and other young workers enter the company with part-time contracts of eight to ten weekly hours... and lower wages, for sure! (SP-YW6)

A company made some of the older workers redundant and employed younger people in their place. The latter accepted significantly lower salaries. That resulted in a situation in which identical work duties performed by the younger workers were rewarded with salaries half those paid to older workers. (PL-TUR6)

When facing these substitution risks, trade unions tend to rely on defensive strategies aimed at balancing the interests of both age groups. However, trade unions may find it difficult to address the tension between young and older workers as this usually overlaps with that of defending the interests of current members and potential new ones. The cases of Italy and Spain provide very significant examples of 'zero-sum' games in the management of intergenerational dynamics in the context of shrinking labour markets. While the former defensive agreements provide the reduction of costs of those already employed as means to promote the incorporation of new (younger) workers, in the latter the burden of the cost is totally placed on the new entries in order to preserve the employment conditions of senior workers.

In Italy this sort of intergenerational imbalances in collective bargaining are the result of the widespread use of so-called *ammortizzatori sociali* (social shock absorbers) to ensure that redundancies occur with the lowest possible social costs. Among these, the *contratti di solidarietà espansivi* (expansive solidarity contracts) is a work-sharing formula which allows for the hiring of new workers in exchange of the reduction of wages of those workers already employed in the company, usually with permanent

contracts and high seniority. Employers signing the agreement get public financial subsidies for the social contributions of the new entries.

In Spain, on the other hand, the use of so-called ‘two-tier pay scales’ on the basis of the date of entry has become a widespread practice. In a context of mounting pressures over the bargaining process, many workers’ representatives at company level have agreed on the introduction of these pay scales to generate jobs which may benefit unemployed youth, whereas senior workers may be willing to protect themselves from downward wage pressures even at risk of deepening inequalities within the workforce. Union representatives anticipate greater competition among different groups of workers (not only on age basis) because of the extension of two-tier pay scales and the declining coverage of collective bargaining following the implementation of the 2012 labour market reform.

The fact that some senior workers may be allowed to retain their employment conditions is just temporary, because if there is not a common framework of industrial relations covering the entire sector then they would be *off-market* workers, as companies used to say, and they are doomed to be made redundant or forced to accept future wage cuts. This is what we have to explain but many people do not understand it. (SP-YW8)

[As a consequence of the implementation of double pay scale in the company] [...] After two or three years working in the company, the younger worker will find himself working for a salary lower than their senior colleagues [...] this will become a conflict in the mid-term. The key for the company and the unions is to argue that this is a way of creating employment. (SP-OW1)

The option of solidarity between generations of workers seems to be gaining ground precisely because of threats to the social gains of all workers in the context of the current recession. Union delegates, especially the younger ones, do acknowledge that these and other measures which are being introduced under the pretext of economic crisis will drag down all other wages, creating barriers for wage growth of older workers.

We are aware that current two-tier pay scales are affecting young people but tomorrow these will become a structural wage cut for the whole workforce, because they won’t be young for the rest of their lifetime, and when they’re aged 55 they will be paid 5% less. (SP-YW2)

The goal of union work remains to ensure consistency to help pull up the most vulnerable persons, knowing that the context is not conducive to that. That is why specific groups try to work together on the basis of solidarity. (BE-TUR1)



**3.2 Labour Market Segmentation Dynamics as Determinants of Age-Related Labour Market Inequalities**

Trade unions and workers' representatives share the need to adopt more inclusive bargaining strategies to prevent age groups from being played against each other in a general downward spiral. However, young and older age groups of workers often enjoy different degrees of protection against labour market risks. This is not only because of the actions of employment protection institutions, but also because these age groups are mainly employed in different sectors and occupations. Thus, one of the factors that may be hindering the development of a solidary intergenerational approach in collective bargaining is linked to distinct patterns of labour market segmentation and occupational segregation on age basis. The weak position of young people in the labour market is translated into less unionisation and commitment with union activities and their specific needs and demands tend to be left aside of the bargaining agenda. Therefore, the form taken by labour market programs targeting this age group often varies according to priorities given to various groups competing for scarce employment opportunities. On the other hand, union bargaining strategies adopting a defensive stance do contribute to reinforcing this segmentation of employment conditions on age and seniority basis, as pointed out in the previous section.

Social partners and collective bargaining institutions have contributed to the distribution of employment risks and opportunities across different generations of workers through the regulation of age-specific transitions in the labour market. Changes in institutional settings, such as contractual arrangements or employment protection legislation, account for long-term effects on the labour market trajectories of different cohorts of workers. The introduction of non-standard forms of employment, such as fixed-term and part-time contracts targeting the inclusion of mainly young people and women in the labour market have long-standing effects on their career prospects, extending employment precariousness to later stages of their working life. A Polish worker states:

One could say that today, we have two labour markets in Poland; one, stemming from the 1990s, with indefinite-term contracts and social security, and the other, from the beginning of the 21st century, with high flexibility and uncertainty. Young people enter the second kind, and find it extremely difficult to move to the first. (PL-OW8)

These differences in employment status usually tend to be represented in public discourse by the opposition between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', where the better employment protection awarded to senior (older) workers is at the expense of greater employment instability and precarious-

ness among the youngest cohorts in the labour market. Differences in the employment protection between fixed-term and open-ended contracts have been usually highlighted as one of the main factors behind the high prevalence of youth unemployment (García-Serrano; Malo 2013). In countries with highly segmented labour markets, such Italy and Spain, young workers tend to be perceived as the natural buffer when companies face demand fall because they can easily be made redundant, as most of them are employed on temporary basis or on apprenticeships schemes with lower dismissal costs ('last in first out'). The consequence of these differences in employment protection standards is that the impacts of economic shocks are concentrated on those workers with temporary contracts and this allows the insiders to retain their 'privileges'. Trade union strategies tend to be simplistically assimilated to the defence of the insiders of the labour market, male-breadwinners and senior workers holding greater levels of employment stability.

However, the employment protection traditionally awarded to senior workers has been undermined in recent years. The issue of dualism in the labour market has been a crucial driver for the labour market reform in countries such as Italy and Spain in the context of the current economic recession. Unlike previous reform processes of the last three decades, the foreseen impact of the measures addressing the issue of duality undertaken in the last labour market reforms is focused on the core age of workers, those holding greater degrees of employment stability. The reduction of dismissal costs for open ended contracts set in the labour market reforms of 2010 and 2012 was followed by two calls to a general strike by main Spanish union confederations because this measure threatened the core of their constituency, but they were also trying to prevent a downward spiral in employment protection rights which affects the whole workforce. Since the mid-nineties, however, the main priority of Spanish unions has been addressed towards improving the stability of the new entrants into the labour market. Therefore, they accepted more flexible conditions for stable employees (through financial subsidies and lower dismissal costs) in exchange for less instability for temporary (mainly young) workers. However, the impact of such measures had a very limited impact on the employers' incentives to use temporary contracts instead of permanent ones.

Polish trade unions have been regularly bringing public attention to the steadily deteriorating conditions of young workers due to the growing use of temporary and civil contracts. Together with Spain, Poland accounts for one of the highest share of these so-called 'junk contracts' in the European Union. Civil law contracts are not covered by labour law and not always subject to social contributions. Major trade unions in Poland have campaigned for limiting the abuse of junk contracts through the introduction of the same social contributions which apply to normal employment contracts. However, many employers' associations oppose to such restric-

tions as these will increase the ‘rigidity’ of the Polish labour market, as these types of contractual arrangements allow companies to adapt quickly to demand shifts.

When confronted with the insider-outsider discourse, trade unionists tend to highlight the role of employers’ segmentation strategies and the composition effects stemming from structural changes of economic growth as the main determinants for the inequalities between generations in the labour market. Employment instability and other employment conditions such as wages are not only dependent on the type of contract but also affected by variables such as the size of the company and the characteristics of the job, which vary across different occupations and sectors of activity.

Young and older workers may perceive themselves to be facing different sorts of obstacles in the labour market. Both age groups acknowledge each other’s problems and there is no evidence of major conflicts between the groups. This is because age is often linked to other individual and occupational variables which are more determinant of workers’ positions on the labour market, such as the type of occupation and the activity sector. Large firms and those in the industrial and the public sector tend to offer more employment security and opportunities for career advancement than those in the service sector. The collective regulation of employment relationships also varies across these variables.

You are not discriminated because of your age, but because you are an apprentice. You are in a certain hierarchy within the company, you have a clear position within the company [...] it is not related to age, but to the position. (ATTUR4)

There are many sectors, such as the service sector, that employ only younger people who never even get to meet any older ones; it’s difficult to even discuss any relations there. Of course, as a union, we’ve tried to act harmoniously and to protect the interests of all the employees. (PL-TUR1)

Indeed, young and older groups of workers do not tend to be employed in the same sectors of activity and occupations. As shown in Tables 7.1 and 7.2, on average, more than a third of total youth employment is concentrated in the service sectors and occupations with high levels of employment instability and turnover, such as retail and hospitality. On the other hand, more than a third of workers aged over 55 years is employed in the public administrations and public services such as health and education.

In countries such as the UK and Spain, half of the young people in employment are in low-qualified occupations such as service and sales work-

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ers and elementary occupations (54,7% and 45,2 respectively). That is, young people in these countries are mainly employed in ‘pass-through’ jobs with no prospects for training and career progression. This contrast with the situation of Austria, where about half the young people in employment (by 46%) are qualified occupations as technical staff and craft-related positions.

Table 1. Distribution (%) of young (<25) and older (>55) employees by country and types of occupation (ISCO), 2012

	15-24							55-74						
	UE 27	BE	ES	IT	AT	POL	UK	UE 27	BE	ES	IT	AT	POL	UK
Managers	1.0	1.6	0.2	_	0.6	1.1	2.2	6.2	8.4	3.6	3.5	6.2	7.6	11.6
Professionals	6.7	12.8	8.7	1.9	5.8	6.1	9.1	18.8	18.8	18.9	21.7	17.6	18.6	20.4
Technicians and associate prof.	13.4	11.3	8.7	10.1	18.5	8.4	9.4	16.4	17.5	10.8	15.0	17.8	14.7	13.9
Clerical support workers	11.8	10.3	8.1	11.9	12.5	11.8	13.7	11.9	16.6	11.3	16.9	10.4	7.5	12.3
Service and sales workers	30.9	25.4	37.7	34.1	27.5	26.8	39.4	14.8	12.0	19.0	10.2	15.7	12.0	17.7
Skilled agricultural and fishery workers	1.3	0.8	1.3	0.7	1.3	0.0	0.4	0.9	0.5	1.2	0.8	0.0	0.5	0.5
Craft and related trades workers	14.8	17.4	10.8	20.9	25.2	19.4	8.0	10.3	8.1	10.4	9.4	11.5	16.5	6.8
Plant and machine operators	5.6	7.8	5.3	6.4	3.1	12.9	1.9	8.4	5.7	8.1	7.1	7.8	10.6	7.0
Elementary occupations	13.4	12.0	17.5	12.3	5.4	12.2	15.3	12.0	12.2	16.4	15.2	12.2	11.9	9.8
ISCO Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Eurostat

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Table 2. Distribution (%) of young (<25) and older (>55) workers by countries and sector of activity, 2012

	15-24							55-74						
	EU 27	BE	SP	IT	AT	PL	UK	EU 27	BE	SP	IT	AT	PL	UK
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.8	--	4.5	2.7	1.1	1.7	0.7	1.7	--	2.2	2.7	--	2.7	0.7
Mining and quarrying	0.3	--	0.2	--	--	1.8	0.2	0.4	--	0.3	0.2	--	1.4	0.5
Manufacturing	15	14.8	10	19.5	19.3	23.9	6.9	16.1	11.7	13.4	14.1	14	20.7	11.8
Electricity, gas supply	0.6	--	0.6	0.6	0.7	--	0.4	1	0.8	0.5	0.9	0.9	2.2	0.6
Water supply, waste management	0.5	--	0.5	0.6	--	0.9	0.5	1	0.8	0.9	1.4	--	2	0.9
Construction	7.5	10.9	4.7	10.3	13.8	10.7	5.5	5.5	4.2	4.6	4.4	9.2	7.5	5.4
Wholesale and retail trade	22.3	20.9	23.3	21.2	20.6	24	26.5	9.9	10.1	8.8	6.4	11.8	7.9	13
Transportation and storage	3.5	4	2.4	3.1	3.6	4.7	2.6	5.9	7.8	4.5	5.5	5.4	6.2	5.9
Accommodation and food service activities	10.9	7.5	15.6	15.7	9.6	7	15	2.7	1.9	4.9	3.1	4.6	1.6	2.9
Information and communication	2.5	2.4	2.9	1.3	2	3.1	2.2	1.9	2	1	1.3	1.9	1.2	2.1
Financial and insurance activities	2.2	1.6	0.9	1.1	2.3	2.3	3.4	2.8	4.2	2.7	3.1	4	1.6	2.4
Real estate activities	0.5	--	0.3	0.3	--	0.6	0.7	1.1	0.7	0.4	0.6	1.1	2.2	1.3
Professional and technical activities	3.6	3.5	2.9	3.1	4.8	2.4	4.1	3.3	2.8	1.9	1.9	4.3	2.7	4.9
Administrative and support service	4.3	4.8	4.4	4	2.8	3.1	4.7	4.4	4.7	5.8	3.8	4.3	6.7	4.5
Public administration	3.9	4.8	3.8	2.3	3	4.1	2.3	10.4	14.7	13.5	12.5	10.9	8.8	7.4
Education	4	5.5	5.4	1	3.2	2.2	5.3	11.8	11.8	11.9	17.8	12	11.8	13.6
Human health and social work	9.5	12.7	6.3	4.1	7	2.6	9.5	13.8	15.7	13.8	12	9.3	9	16.9
Arts, entertainment	2.7	1.8	4.6	1.9	1.6	1.6	4.7	1.6	2.1	1.3	1	1.4	2.3	2.2
Other service activities	2.8	2.5	3.4	5.1	3.5	2.7	3	2.3	1.7	1.5	2.1	2.6	1.2	2.4
Activities of households	0.7		3.4	2	--	--	0.1	2	--	6.2	5.2	--	--	0.2
NACE Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Eurostat

In sum, these differences in the patterns of labour market segmentation of young people explain the extent to which effective intergenerational cooperation practices are adopted in the workplaces. One of the most relevant examples of well established practices of cooperation and knowledge transfer between different age groups is provided by the dual system of vocational training in Austria (*duales Berufsausbildungssystem*). In companies participating in the dual system of vocational training, employers are responsible for ensuring that an apprentice receives appropriate practical training in the apprenticed occupation concerned, either from themselves or from other suitable persons in the company. An employer refers to the use of the young apprentices as ‘icebreakers’ for the introduction of new technologies (AT-ER<sub>3</sub>): they assume certain tasks and afterwards they are encouraged to pass their experience on to the rest of the staff. Another worker in a manufacturing company mentioned the organisation of mixed work teams where young and older workers shared competences in the management of the new technologies:

My slogan was: The younger worker is faster and stronger, but the older worker knows the shortcuts. (ATTUR<sub>5</sub>)

Many stress the need for increasing the cooperation between generations based on knowledge transfer in the workplaces, specifically in the field of training in new information and communication technologies. However, this increased potential for cooperation often clashes with selective training strategies in the companies, which tend to focus on young workers who are already well-trained. Thus, the career prospects of senior workers are also becoming uncertain and they have no further hope of benefiting from training since this cannot be capitalised during their working lives. As a young Belgian worker puts it:

Several older workers have been maintained at work after a company closure and placed in new structures. They have not been trained in new technologies and new ways of working. These people are paid but it is not possible to assign them any work. It is not because people get older that they do not have the right to work with modern tools! There is a need for exchange between young people who have little experience but are sometimes very good at new technologies and older workers who have experience to pass on. (BE-YW<sub>4</sub>)

On the other hand, senior workers may feel threatened by new entries and may not feel confident to share their experience with younger workers with higher qualifications and lower employment standards. In some cases, the outsourcing of certain tasks and activities is found to be contributing to the further de-professionalization of senior workers. Older workers in large

companies referred to these practices as the main threat to their employment status in restructuring processes as it tends to increase diversity and fragmentation of the staff working conditions.

Then you're being left aside in a job post with no commitments. I always fought against that in the company. We cannot allow a manager to have four workers in a corner with nothing to do only because he has decided to outsource the service while those colleagues are being cornered! It is demeaning to workers but also for the economy of the company, because they are paid for doing nothing but still too young to retire. (SP-OW2)

### 3.3 Traditional Intergenerational Solidarities Under Question

Young and older workers may be segregated in the labour market and in terms of employment conditions, but they obviously meet in the domestic sphere. The household circumstances of young and older workers clearly affect their vulnerability to the crisis. This in turn may be acting to the detriment of the development of an intergenerational approach in social dialogue and collective bargaining.

Distinct patterns of co-residence of youngsters and their parents are assumed to differ between countries and these may be still playing a key role in offsetting the intergenerational imbalances in the labour market (Albertini et al. 2007). In southern countries such as Italy and Spain, where younger people constitute a much larger proportion of the unemployed than in the rest of the countries, family ties provide an important element of protection against unemployment and low earnings. In these countries, the uneven distribution of the social costs of labour market flexibility among different cohorts of workers has been interpreted as the result of an 'implicit intergenerational agreement' (Garrido 1996) under which the social costs and conflicts of unemployment and precariousness become internalized in the households. The wider impact of the current recession, however, is questioning the future viability of this intergenerational agreement, where the employment of the household reference was supposed to act as a guarantee against the unemployment risks of the rest of the household members.

Most of the youth unemployment increase in these countries has been absorbed through greater inflows into inactivity, which means that most vulnerable situations are being protected by family solidarity networks. On the other hand, labour market participation rates of older workers have increased in the last decades and even in the context of the current recession. This positive balance is mainly due to the advancement of women's employment rates, which is preventing further increases of the unemployment rates in this age group of workers. In many cases, women

are acting as a buffer against household joblessness. However, this may not be enough guarantee against poverty risks, as many of them become unemployed or employed on low-wage jobs.

As a consequence, there is a growing share of young people living in households where the rest of the members cannot provide these guarantees. The share of young from 16 to 29 living in households with very low work intensity amounted to 12.4% and 13% in 2011 in Italy and Spain, respectively, almost twice than those in Austria (6.5%) or Poland (5.1%) and significantly higher than in Belgium and the UK (around 9%) (Table 3). Spain reports the highest increase in this group of vulnerable young people with regard to the situation previous to the crisis. Spanish youngsters under 25 have become the age group with the highest prevalence of poverty risk in the last years. This age group has replaced older people aged over 65, mostly retired or dependent on social protection schemes, as the most vulnerable to poverty.

Table 3. Share of young people (16-29) living in households with very low work intensity by country

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Belgium	9.1	8	8.1	8.6	9.4
Spain	6.5	6.4	7.3	9.7	13.1
Italy	10.8	10.8	10.1	11.3	12.4
Austria	5.2	4.4	5.2	6.7	6.5
Poland	7.8	5.5	5	5.9	5.1
United Kingdom	8.3	9.2	10.3	10.8	9.3
EU 27	8.5	7.8	7.9	9	9.3

Source: Eurostat

Although family arrangements are still playing an important role in alleviating the impact of unemployment and precarious employment among the young, this source of intergenerational solidarity is showing signs of exhaustion. The length and depth of the impact of the current recession has reached the core age workers which in previous episodes of economic crises acted as a buffer against the loss of the employment of other (younger) households members. Such a trend is likely to result in additional pressures on the intergenerational solidarity in family networks. Due to the extension of joblessness, in most cases, the pensions of the elderly tend to become the sole income of the household. To what extent this path of unemployment distribution between (and within) households is affecting the future prospects of the so-called ‘intergenerational pact’ is an issue to be dealt with not only in all Southern Europe but across the EU (Klose, Moreno 2013).

The impact of the current recession has contributed to raising awareness on the growing share of jobless households, to the extent that the EU has



included them as one of the targets in framing the poverty reduction target of the 2020 strategy for growth and jobs (Cantó et al. 2012). Notwithstanding, empirical studies have highlighted a growing risk of polarization of the distribution of unemployment across households in the course of the last decades, which is exacerbated in periods of recession like the current one (Greg; Scutella 2010). The spread of joblessness has to do with the dynamics of labour markets and specifically with the concentration of unemployment in households with low educational credentials. This logic may be tempered by social arrangements regarding the distribution of employment risks and opportunities across different generations of workers according to different institutional patterns and welfare regimes. Family networks are still playing a key role in offsetting the intergenerational imbalances in the labour market but their traditional capacity for acting as the last safety network in southern countries is being undermined by the increasing polarization in the distribution of unemployment across households.

## 4 Conclusions

This chapter has emphasized the need to take into account the internal diversity of age groups when dealing with the complex issue of intergenerational equity. More importantly, current debates on the issue of intergenerational fairness are actually masking the increase in social inequalities on the basis of class and socioeconomic status within each generation.

Current ‘intergenerational solidarity’ policies aimed at balancing the share of contributions and benefits in line with life expectancy increases are consequently at risk of increasing inequalities among future retirees. Pension reform processes are promoting an increase in the number of working years without acknowledging the different needs and situations of workers placed in different positions of the occupational structure, especially those whose trajectories are most affected by employment instability. To achieve longer working lives major reforms are needed for supporting the employability of older workers in long-term unemployment and those in declining industries and low qualified jobs at both the demand and supply side of the labour market. Otherwise, we may be witnessing a ‘lost generation’ for whom the notion of working longer has come too late. Activation – both in terms of improving the employability of older workers and providing financial incentives to work longer – when there are no jobs to be offered may help many older workers to stay in the labour market, but with little prospect of quality job opportunities. Here it should be pointed out that one of the guidelines for active inclusion in the EU is the provision of adequate income support together with job searching activities.

Another question dealt with in this chapter is how social partners antici-

pate the impact of these policy changes on the traditional age management practices and intergenerational imbalances in the labour market. In this regard we found a general lack of awareness and innovative approaches to the issues involved with active ageing and age diversity management in collective bargaining, though with some exceptions. This lack of anticipation from social partners contrasts with shared expectations of an increased competition between different age groups of workers for scarce employment opportunities in the forthcoming future scenario of 'jobless recovery' and under the additional pressure of austerity. Increased competition, however, does not necessarily mean an intergenerational conflict is in the making. Intergenerational relations are better described in terms of ambivalence, that is, by the simultaneous coexistence of those experiences that represent solidarity and conflict (Lüscher, Hoff 2013). One of the factors which may be preventing the emergence of conflicts between generations and the further institutionalisation of intergenerational cooperation are related to distinct paths of labour market segmentation on age basis. In other cases, however, unions' defensive strategies in restructuring processes may be underpinning the existing paths of labour market segregation and contributing to a certain extent to the unequal distribution of its impact between different age groups. The current crisis of the labour market is putting forward the need to avoid zero-sum games when managing company restructuring processes.

On the whole, 2012 as the year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations has highlighted the need for the building of intergenerational solidarity on a new basis. One of the main challenges facing social dialogue is to be able to adopt more inclusive arrangements in the management of age diversity in the labour market. Population ageing and changing patterns of labour market participation are often associated with a threat to the intergenerational contract upon which the welfare and social stability of industrial societies are built. The redefinition of this contract, which used to underlie pension systems, demands the renegotiation of the distribution of employment and non-employment along the life-course for all generations. The challenge is to adopt an integrated approach to the management of age diversity and synergy of all age groups. In this sense, the focus should be on supporting (risky) transitions in the labour market and ensuring equal opportunities of all workers throughout the life cycle, regardless of their age. Age-segmented measures such as subsidized employment contracts for young people and early retirement schemes for older workers has resulted in different forms of age-related inequalities in the labour market and raised concerns on substitution risks of older workers for younger ones in the context of current recession. Transitional labour markets provide for a dynamic approach to flexicurity and its implementation through institutional arrangements which enhance employability and flexibility along the life course through a differentiated set of mobility

options, entitlements and income insurance related to risky transitions in the labour market (Grazier 2007). This may act as an adequate policy framework for the collective regulation of transitions and contribute to the distribution of employment opportunities between generations in a more equitable way.

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## **Vulnerable Workers in Times of Social Transformations**

Discrimination and Participation of Young and Older Workers,  
and Social Dialogue Stances

edited by Olga Jubany, Fabio Perocco

## **Innovative Approaches to Age Diversity Management through Social Dialogue** An Immersion through Case Studies

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**Abstract** This chapter aims at presenting the analysis of programs and innovative practices in the six national contexts examined, focusing on support to younger and older workers at risk of labour market exclusion. Along these lines, the chapter highlights some innovative practices implemented through social dialogue in the six national contexts, addressed to young people, older workers and both target groups.

**Summary** 1. Social Dialogue and Age Diversity Management. – 2. Social Dialogue and Good Practices at European Level. – 3. Innovative Practices from the Ground and Proposals for the Future. – 3.1. The Issue of Youth People. – 3.2. The Issue of Older Workers. – 3.3. Best Practices Involving Younger and Older People. – 4. Social Dialogue as a Tool for Inclusion of Vulnerable Age Groups: Some Suggestion from Research. – 4.1. Suggestion for Trade Unions. – 4.2. Suggestion for Employers and Employers' Associations. – 4.3. Suggestion for Policy Makers.

### **1 Social Dialogue and Age Diversity Management**

Social dialogue is the main tool by which trade union and employers' representatives contribute to the definition of most European social regulations: working conditions, setting wage standards, continuous training, new technologies, work organization and working hours are some examples of specific issues to which European social partners are committed.

The latest report on Industrial Relations in Europe (European Commission 2013) shows how the current economic crisis is seriously affecting social dialogue (at European and national level) between trade unions, employers' representatives and governments.

The Commission's report does not hide the most critical aspects of austerity policies introduced after the economic recession. The report, in fact, shows how reforms adopted in recent years by governments have not always been accompanied by open and effective social dialogue, with the

result that industrial relations have become weaker and more conflictual.

In many countries, during the crisis, there have been fundamental changes through reforms which have affected labour law. According to the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI), looking at developments in the various countries, four main areas of labour law changes or reforms can be identified. Fundamental changes are being made to working time (1) and atypical employment (2), mainly in response to the economic and financial crisis, although such reforms tend to be temporary. There are also reforms of and changes to rules on redundancy (for business reasons) (3) and industrial relations structures and processes (4), which affects social dialogue and collective bargaining. These reforms tend to be (more) permanent. But whether such changes consist of the overhaul of whole labour codes or piecemeal changes to specific aspects and rules, they undermine the protective role of both individual and collective labour law, thus putting workers (young and old) in a more precarious and unprotected situation both in general and in the workplace. In several countries reforms were introduced without employing democratic and participatory (legislative) procedures, but rather using emergency procedures, bypassing parliaments or the social partners (Clauwaert, Schömann 2012).

The LinkAge research has focused, among other things, on the measures and strategies undertaken by trade unions and employer's representatives to strengthen the integration of vulnerable age groups and their families into the labour market. Social dialogue is, in fact, defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as all forms of negotiation, consultation and exchange of information between representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest.

The analysis contained in the previous chapters provides a complex and diverse framework of age diversity management in the six national contexts studied. In this chapter, we shall try to gain a better understanding of the characteristics and the roles played held by different social dialogue actors – especially trade unions, employers and non-governmental organizations – to support the inclusion of vulnerable age groups into labour market.

For this purpose, through the analysis of programs and innovative practices in the six national contexts studied, the LinkAge project has deepened knowledge of actions, tools and strategies fielded by stakeholders to address the interests and needs of younger and older workers, trying to change the dynamics in the labour market.

The chapter is divided into three sections. The first analyses some practices implemented at European level by stakeholders who are involved in different ways in the issue of age diversity management. Information on good practices has been collected mainly in structured seminars, 'Information Exchanges', aimed at sharing information and best practices across the range of identified trade unions, experts and policy makers within the

established partnership/member states and networks.<sup>1</sup> In this way, the project promoted the exchange of knowledge between those actively involved in working with vulnerable age groups and trade unions from different fields and perspectives, reconciling an in-depth conceptual debate with a pragmatic evaluative framework. The main objective of these exchanges were the sharing of information, findings, best practices and the collection of reviews and comments from experts identified within the networks of the partnership. The second paragraph is dedicated to an analysis of innovative practices implemented through social dialogue in the six national contexts addressing young people, older workers and both target groups.

The LinkAge investigation has collected actions and measures addressing the needs and demands of young and older workers in relation to their active inclusion in the labour market. Interviews with workers' representatives and experts have highlighted a heterogeneous but exhaustive framework on several best practices in the countries analysed. Those practices have been classified on the basis of the three different levels of design and implementation: national (macro); regional (meso); factory-level/town (micro) both for younger and older workers.

As a matter of fact, the issues of integration, protection and promotion of older and younger workers, at national and European level, concerns the need to tackle both increasing youth unemployment and the structure of the pension system. On the one hand, the lack of jobs, and often low job demand quality, have hugely increased youth unemployment in all European countries, with many differences among countries, due to existing and deep-rooted structural and cultural reasons. On the other hand, the restructuring processes associated with the destandardization of employment relationships and the permanent reshaping of the pension systems have made the position of older workers very vulnerable.

Along these lines, the governments of the six countries analysed have to address these two issues at the same time with different resources (especially in terms of financing) and different social dialogue traditions.

Finally, the third section contains some suggestions from the main research findings addressed to social dialogue actors, in particular policy makers, trade unions, employers and employers' associations to enhance Labour Market Integration of Vulnerable Age Groups.

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<sup>1</sup> The European stakeholders who attended the information exchange were policymakers, policy advisors, trade unions, representatives of NGOs as well as employers', workers and academics. At the European level, as regards trade unions, the experts involved are representatives of: ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation - Yough Committee), EESC (European Economic and Social Committee), ETUI (European Trade Union Institute). As regards the associations and non-governmental organizations, representatives from AGE Platform Europe, of EQUINET (European Network of Equal Bodies) and EWL (European Women's Lobby) participated in the project.



## 2 Social Dialogue and Good Practices at European Level

The economic and financial crisis has weakened the system of protection and social security for workers (young and old), and this has had a negative impact on social dialogue. In particular, in Europe and elsewhere, the power of trade unions has weakened. This is due to several factors such as: 1) employment grew particularly in the services sector (characterized by low union presence) at the expense of industry or manufacturing, where unions have historically been the most active; 2) the emergence and proliferation of different types of contract: the rise in part-time employment, diversification of employment contracts, the growth of job insecurity and expansion of hidden economy, especially in some countries of the Mediterranean; 3) changes in the labour market in recent decades have led to a decline in the importance of collective bargaining, and the continued loss of union strength.

In more recent years, after several European initiatives such as European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity (2012), there have been some steps forward that have contributed to a revival of social dialogue, which is one of the pillars of the European social model. In particular, among the issues analysed by LinkAge research we highlight the central role of negotiation and bargaining and the need to focus the attention of policy on dialogue between generations and on overcoming age discrimination in and out of the labour market .

The role of negotiation and collective bargaining, involving front-line unions and employers both at European and national level. Bargaining should ensure an adequate level of social security for all workers and should ensure the quality of work. Austerity policies, implemented by many European countries to tackle the economic crisis, hit the vulnerable groups in the labour market: women, youth, immigrants and the elderly. Among these, young people seem to be those who do not feel represented by the unions. The difficulties young people feel towards trade union are mainly due to the fact that young people are often employed in precarious jobs and it's hard to get in touch with a union. On these issues, an innovative instrument was the *Framework of actions on youth employment*.<sup>2</sup> This document is the first priority of the Work Programme on Social Dialogue for 2012-2014. The European social partners undertake to combat youth unemployment and invite the national social partners, public authorities and other stakeholders to work together and achieve concrete results through policies targeted at specific areas of policy such as: learning, transition

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2 The document was elaborated by ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation), BUSINESSEUROPE (represents all-size enterprises at european level), EEAPME (European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-size Enterprises) and CEEP (European Centre of Employers and Enterprises providing Public services).

into and within the labour market with efficient unemployment insurance and social safety nets which are financially sustainable in the longer term, employment, entrepreneurship.

The improvement in working conditions through collective bargaining should take into account an approach based not on differences between young workers (precarious conditions but educationally advantaged) and older workers (more stable but more fragile in cases of restructuring due to deskilling) but on the entire life cycle. Some studies conducted in Europe<sup>3</sup> have shown that there is not a young-elderly trade-off in the labour market and in the workplace there is lack of attention to age: these main factors lead to tension and or solidarity across and within generations. One of the challenges for the future of these issues concerns industrial relations systems.

Collective bargaining should pay attention to age management in the workplace. This also requires a cultural change in the trade unions, which should reinforce their commitment to the implementation of strategic actions aimed not only at the defence of passive labour policies but also active labour policies, such lifelong learning, reconciliation of life and work. Even the commitment and effort of employers should focus on proactively managing age diversity.

The other issue analysed as an example of European innovative practices was on intergenerational dynamics and the role of social dialogue. According to European institutions, political attention to ‘intergenerational solidarity’ should be focused to ensure access to the labour market and equal opportunities for workers of all ages during the entire life cycle and to develop measures to prevent early exit of older workers together with measures to facilitate the entry of young people into the labour market. It is necessary to promote and strengthen dialogue between generations through the exchange of practices and experiences in and out of the labour market between younger and older workers. An example in this area is the strategy promoted by AGE Platform Europe Age friendly in Europe within the European Year for Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity (2012). AGE platform analysed, in collaboration with the European Union, the impact of legislation against discrimination in the labour market for older workers, this analysis focused in particular on the transposition of EU directives implemented at national level by Member States. A positive element to note is that employers seem more ‘aware’ of discrimination in employment based on age and in many cases eliminated age limits have been from the process of worker recruitment. It becomes necessary to tackle age discrimination and enhance the experience and the diversity of people

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3 This studies was conducted by ETUI (European Trade Union Institute); for more details see <http://www.etui.org>

(both young and old) in and out of the labour market. The prohibition of any kind of discrimination is stated in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union under Article 21: «Any discrimination based on any grounds such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited». In this sector, strategic information and awareness action was implemented by EQUINET, the European network of equality bodies, which conducted a survey at the European level, the results being published in *Tackling Ageism and Discrimination*.<sup>4</sup> It is important to plan and implement policy actions to remove barriers and to promote active aging: an important role can be played by European Institutions, Member States and Equality Bodies.

### 3 Innovative Practices from the Ground and Proposals for the Future

#### 3.1 The Issue of Young People

In Austria there are some innovative practices for young people, such the projects: coordination units (Tyrol, Vienna, Salzburg, Vorarlberg and Styria) aimed at implementing different initiatives at the intersection between school and the labour market; production schools (Styria, Vorarlberg, Tyrol) aimed at giving youth at risk of exclusion (young migrants are a special target group) the opportunity to gain work experience in different sectors; BFB Migration (Styria region) aimed at supporting young migrants (1st and 2nd generation) in the transition from school to work through counselling services and school workshops.

At local level, some of the best practices in Vienna include: C'mon 14, a project focused on young people aged between 14 and 17 at risk of marginalization and school drop-outs in order to (re)integrate them into the labour market; JAWANext - labour market integration for young asylum seekers; JE\_TZT, coaching and apprenticeship positions for young people (who received social benefits) then supported in job placement; job-TransFair aimed at integrating young people receiving social benefits into the labour market by combining activation, qualification and on the job trainings/internships; space!lab - I pimp my future, focused on offering qualification and training services to young people at risk of marginalization. In Bregenz: the project Integra focused on NEETs and young people who drop out of school, who are offered paid work on an hourly basis combined with counselling and coaching.

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<sup>4</sup> For more details please visit <http://www.equineteurope.org>.

In Belgium, the promotion of youth employment has focused on support given by senior consultants to young people on the development of business projects and skills required for entrepreneurship, such as the Partnership between Belgian Senior Consultants and Le mouvement des jeunes entreprises. Then the Belgian federal Government has also promoted programmes targeted at the inclusion of young workers such as the First Job Programme for workers under 25 excluded from compulsory education. This program aims at including them into the labour market through a quota system to encourage employers to hire young people through financial incentives for hiring young workers. Then mention should be made of the project of the Belgian organization 'Duo for a job', carrying out intergenerational mentoring by matching young people residing in Brussels who are experiencing difficulties entering the labour market because of their ethnicity and/or geographical origins, with experienced senior professionals who can support and assist them in their professional projects (education, training, employment). This initiative aims to reduce inequities faced by young immigrants in accessing the labour market by highlighting the value of seniors, eradicating age segregation, reinforcing ethnic diversity, encouraging intergenerational actions and combating stereotypes and xenophobia by recreating social bonds.

In Italy, the main best practices are at the regional level. In this regard, mention should be made of the following examples: Tuscany region has financed the project *Giovani Si* with the aim of ensuring incentives, grants and financial support to young people wishing to carry out training courses, buy a house or start a business activity. Lombardy region has financed *Dote formazione e lavoro* for young people aged between 18 and 29 years. In 2012, Veneto Region conceived specific financing for young people aged between 15 and 35 years called *Crea Lavoro*. The call has a budget of 50,000 euros, which will be assigned to the best business ideas. Then at local level, some provinces, such as Cremona, Lecco and Milan, have financed several fellowships to support young people wanting to start a traineeship in local firms. In terms of involving workers, a further enriching experience, in this case addressed to young people, is to be found in Italy. This relates to the opening of specific social spaces to promote participation of young people, promoted by the CGIL, located in Bergamo as Toolbox; in Padua, Reset; in Lecce, Spazio Sociale del lavoro and in Florence, Plas. These local spaces are devoted to the encouragement of young people to get involved in social bargaining, as a means to claim their rights and needs, providing guidance to access training and paid work and awareness about social security and other rights.

In Poland, for the promotion of youth employment in 2012, the National Committee of the NSZZ Solidarność, in cooperation with the CSRInfo, has launched the programme Generations within the Workplace. Good Practices in the of Use and Expansion of the Potential Offered by Young and

Mature Employees aimed at: increasing youth employment; professional development of young people; shaping solutions allowing employees to combine work and family obligations; skill-development programmes.

In Spain, measures to tackle youth unemployment have been implemented addressing the issue of NEET youngsters. In this regard, the Initial Vocational Qualification Programme (PQPI) is aimed at young unemployed workers under 25 years who have not obtained the graduation certificate from compulsory secondary education, in order to provide them with vocational training adapted to the qualifications requirements of the local labour market. Basic Vocational Training (included in the compulsory secondary education curricula and in the 'Bachilleratos') has two primary aims: to familiarize young people with the importance of technological issues and to ensure that they are fully aware about occupations, professions and the labour market. Then the Specific Vocational Training aims at providing on-the-job training through: middle-level vocational schooling, for which a certificate of compulsory education is required or approval in an admission test; Higher-level Specific Vocational Schooling - the successful completion of the 'Bachillerato' and, in some cases, the study of certain subjects is required for admission.

In United Kingdom, youth unemployment has only recently been recognized by unions as a main political concern, which has pushed them to implement campaigns against public spending cuts and 'zero-hour contracts'. Job search is managed mainly through the services available at the Jobcentre Plus offices spread all over the country, which provide a wide range of information and services, like benefits, loans and grants and help with finding a job, applying for an apprenticeship and improving career skills and training.

### 3.2 The Issue of Older Workers

In Austria, especially at regional and local level, there are several projects set up and supported by regional governments and local public employment services (AMS, Arbeitsmarktservice) using special financial programs to cope with the issue of older workers. Among them, the most innovative are: at national level, the project Fit für die Zukunft: Arbeitsfähigkeit erhalten, Personal-förderprogramm in Zeiten des demografischen Wandels, an individual programme ensuring healthy working conditions for construction workers and employees in 20 Austrian organizations (representing 13,000 employees), promoting and maintaining work ability in the company and the project TEP EQUAL Elderly which provides 'elderly plans' to facilitate and enhance the required changes, based on the needs of individuals, enterprises and different actors in labour market policy; identification of adequate instruments and methods for older workers; in

Carinthia, the project Cont@ct.top – Förderprogramm für Arbeitssuchende Aktivierung zukünftiger Arbeitgeber, a tailor-made project providing qualification and training, including health supporting activities, for workers over 45, in order to be re-integrated in the labour market; the project Impulse – Zweirad, dealing with the transition from long-term unemployment to employment in bicycle repair, maintenance and bicycle renting; graduated pathways to integration; personal support in finding jobs and the project Learn Forever, ensuring equal access to lifelong learning for underprivileged women (poorly skilled and older women); know-how development of actors in adult education in the form of in-house seminars; workshops; transfer of learning from other educational institutions to learn forever; in Upper Austria, the programme Winning Age. Getting Future!, providing expertise in generation management, a platform for information and knowledge transfer in order to contribute to the better handling of demographic changes in the business world.

In Belgium, an innovative instrument was also recently adopted with the aim of keeping older workers in their jobs. To this end, the National Labour Council agreement implemented a plan for the employment of older workers in companies, which requires private companies with more than 20 employees to have an annual or perennial plan with at least one employment measure regarding skills development through access to training, career opportunities, flexibility of working hours and conditions, recognition of acquired skills.

In Italy, the government provided financial incentives aimed at the re-entry of older workers into the labour market. To this end, the Italian Ministry of Labour and Social Policy recently financed a project focused on the outplacement of unemployed executives over 50 years of age, with the goal of promoting the implementation of actions for re-employment through the activation of specific financing for companies. Then the Confindustria employers' association of Veneto Region implemented the project Sam (Senior Age Management) and the Ifoa institution in the Emilia-Romagna Region launched the project Active ageing, competencies and training, both aimed at supporting enterprises in the implementation of new patterns of work organization in order to prevent the early exit of the over 50s.

In Poland a positive example of best practice was the training offered by the management of a hospital to the employees of a laundry which was about to be shut down. The employees underwent a training course which allowed them to gain new skills. Subsequently, as the laundry was closed, the employees were transferred to the Hygiene Department and re-employed there.

In Spain, recent measures at national level have addressed the issue of age discrimination by increasing the costs for companies for lay-offs, where older workers might be disproportionately affected. The Spanish Government has attempted to reverse the trend towards the early exit of

older workers in the framework of the pension system reform process set in 2011, especially through the Law on Measures to foster the continuity of working life for Older Workers and to promote Active Ageing, which was approved on March 2013.

In the United Kingdom, among the best practices, the following should be mentioned: The New Challenge (Employment and Training Specialists) 50+ Programme: Experience Counts, a scheme, co-funded by London Councils and the European Social Fund, for people over the age of 50 who are unemployed or economically inactive. It offers individuals one-to-one support in helping to explore their backgrounds and prior experience. In parallel, the organisation also works to build links with employers in the community and to place older workers within their organisations. It also offers IT courses to learn or upgrade IT skills; The Business Factory in North Tyneside, an initiative to support older people to develop new business ideas, with a specific focus on one-to-one support to older people in order to make them discover the skills they have acquired through life and work and to help them build the confidence to take forward new business ideas; the project Age UK - New Jobs for Old, which in 2012 helped 929 people aged 50-78 boost their job prospects on employability. and skills programmes combines a 12-week pre-employment programme to help each person become job-ready and includes updating IT skills. In London, mention should be made of the experience of the London based Older Peoples' Forum, set up and run by retired workers from ethnic minorities. This is a voluntary community venture aimed at assisting vulnerable people in their own homes and creating communal spaces for these people to come together in a London Borough. This forum uses networks within the local authority to ensure resources to provide for the services, and also involves younger people in providing awareness about the service and IT support, as well as providing regular interaction with all members. This initiative also provides for the exchange of skills and experience between older people who were active in organising the service, and younger people who have joined in to get experience.

### 3.3 Best Practices Involving Younger and Older People

In Spain, the competences on active labour market policies are decentralised at regional level. Thus, the Catalan Public Employment Services have shaped specific programmes focused on improving the employment prospects of young and older unemployed persons. Along these lines, the project Reinicia't launched in 2011 combines different employment guidance and training activities addressed to unemployed people over 50 years of age.

In Belgium, in the Flemish region, the government and social partners signed a new employment agreement in 2012 entitled *Career Agreement*.

This agreement addresses two groups of workers at risk of exclusion: young people leaving school without any qualifications and older workers. This agreement provides financial incentives for employers recruiting young and/or older workers and includes measures such as career guidance and training for workers.

Scheme. National 'best practices': main contents

<b>Countries</b>	<b>Vulnerable age groups</b>
	Youth
Austria	different territorial initiatives addressed to promote the transition from school to labour market
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promotion of youth employment through the development of projects aimed at providing the necessary skills for entrepreneurship</li> <li>• promotion of government programs targeted to the inclusion of young workers (under 25 years) excluded from the compulsory education</li> <li>• projects aimed at intergenerational mentoring</li> </ul>
Italy	Projects realized at regional level aimed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guarantee incentives, grants and financial support to young people wishing to carry out training courses, buy a house or start a business activity;</li> <li>• finance several fellowships to support young people wanting to start a traineeship into local firms;</li> <li>• open specific social spaces to promote participation of young people.</li> </ul>
Poland	promotion of specific projects on Generations in the workplace.
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Initial vocational qualification programs for young people NEET.</li> </ul>
UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• wide range of information and services, like benefits, loans and grants and help in the job search, applying for an apprenticeship and improving career skills and training</li> </ul>

#### **4 Social Dialogue as a Tool for Inclusion of Vulnerable Age Groups: Some Suggestion from Research**

The results of the LinkAge fieldwork have highlighted a set of broad suggestions and specific proposals by different project actors and stakeholders involved in the research.

One of the main issues and proposals for change revealed by the LinkAge findings regards unions roles, and specifically the need for unions and social dialogue to prevent generational conflicts, due, on the one hand, to older workers believing that they are being made redundant so that young people may be hired, since they are cheaper to employ for companies, whereas young people may consider that the restrictions on early retirement of older workers are limiting their access to a stable position in the labour market.

According to data on labour market composition in the six countries analysed, even with relevant differences, the permanent precarization of the



work force is damaging both younger and older workers. For this reason, it is crucial that intergenerational dynamics should be incorporated within social dialogue to ensure promotion of intergenerational understanding and awareness of the vulnerability of both age groups, while it is also necessary to increase union membership among young workers.

People interviewed suggested expanding what unions have to offer with activities related to consulting, training, instructional meetings, providing advice or assisting prospective employees in finding employment to enlarge the spectrum of union members and enforce the unions' power. The need emerged to differentiate the negotiation system to provide better answers to the different needs of employees on the basis of their age, gender, nationality and educational level.

People interviewed suggested also that NGOs and policy makers should develop and support programmes for vulnerable age workers across Europe.

One of the most relevant issues to emerge was the need to develop training policies and prevent long-term unemployment of each age group, as well as the need to focus more attention on early school leavers, and offer programmes and schemes that combine training and employment in one 'package'. Another was the role of social dialogue in allowing unions and employers to deal effectively with the representation of all vulnerable workers.

### 4.1 Suggestions for Trade Unions

Considering the fall in union membership due to several reasons, mainly related to the precarization of employment in terms both of reduced rights and wage cuts, it is clear that union engagement should tackle the reduction of the present precarization via the mobilization of workers involved in vulnerable employment positions.

Along these lines, the destandardization of the employment relationship casts a shadow over the future of collective bargaining and union representativeness of all workers, not only of most vulnerable ones.

In this regard, unions should:

- a) increase their activity in sectors where young people are more employed, such as retail and other services activities, also in the IT sector;
- b) target vulnerable age groups in union strategies in order to direct activities to inactive people or the unemployed;
- c) direct schools to work and working transitions so as to strengthen the representation of workers during their lives;
- d) focus activities on younger generations and non-members so as to expand representativeness;

- e) focus attention on greater unionising of women workers belonging to vulnerable age groups and increasing their visibility within union structures;
- f) rethink and reshape the internal structure of unions on the basis of different needs expressed by workers.

#### 4.2 Suggestions for Employers and Employers' Associations

Experts and workers interviewed highlighted the need to acknowledge the value of keeping older workers in employment against widespread prejudices. The promotion of older workers in workplaces should be encouraged as a means to improve intergenerational dialogue and the transmissions of knowledge between young and older workers.

In this regard, employers and employers' associations should:

- a) promote lifelong learning as a structural policy and means of promoting employment stability and productivity across different age groups of workers;
- b) increase investment on measures that address work-life balance, with a specific focus on older workers;
- c) reshape working time with the introduction of flexible working time arrangements for older workers in all sectors and job positions.
- d) formulate a more articulated system of care days availability to allow employees to look after dependent relatives, also including male older workers.

#### 4.3 Suggestions for Policy Makers

The precarization of the labour market is not only increasing the current vulnerability of some groups of workers but it is also damaging the future position of workers involved in present processes, due to the increased weakness of the public pension system. For that reason both long-term unemployment and work discontinuities, affecting especially younger workers, should be considered particularly in a long-term view so to avoid increasing the vulnerability of a larger amount of people in next few decades. It has also been proved that another relevant issue is employment quality, which involves: work and income stability and permanent training to facilitate working transitions. In the six countries analysed, the issue related both to youth unemployment and older workers has been ignored for a long time. The analysis of public policies reveals that most youth employment programmes are focusing on cost-reduction strategies in order to encourage hiring by employers, without any consequent thought for the stabilization of the workers hired. The people interviewed made the

following suggestions for policy officers:

- a) labour market reforms should be more targeted to the younger generations most affected by unemployment (especially long-term unemployment) and employment instability;
- b) more attention should be paid to NEETs: the increasing number of people not employed either in education or training leads to an increase in vulnerable positions in the society as a whole;
- c) low-skilled workers, especially older workers, require particular attention: they are too young to get social security retirement benefits but too old to have access to a wide range of positions in the labour market. They are also extremely disadvantaged because of the care work burdens they usually have.
- d) programmes should take into account the employment prospects of older workers, focusing on activation measures and encompassing the provision of adequate income support together with job searching activities.

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Current intersections of economic and demographic transformations across Europe have produced major patterns of inequality with an uneven impact on vulnerable age workers. The dismissal of older workers and the blockage on work integration of youngsters have led to a downfall participation at both ends of the age spectrum; leaving unions as their shielding tool. Grounded on ethnographic insights from workers, unions and employers, this book explores discrimination of vulnerable workers and unions' approach to it through questions like: how are welfare retrenchment policies confronted? Is a zero-sum approach a cost-distribution strategy? Does social dialogue integrate the age/gender intersection? To expose the way social and work transformations are impinging on vulnerable age workers, and on society as a whole.



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