

AGE Platform Europe – Position paper

Council recommendation on the integration of long-term unemployed

Brussels, 03/12/2015

AGE Platform Europe, Europe's largest network of organisations of and for older persons, welcomes the European Commission's initiative on long-term unemployment. **Older persons are predominantly affected by long-term unemployment.** The proportion of long-term unemployed among all unemployed over 50 years old has **grown from 52% in 2010 to 61% in 2014.** Only about **half of workers over 55 are in employment.** These numbers are accompanied by very **strong divergences between member states and between men and women**, older women being systematically more at risk of being unemployed or inactive. These numbers are strong calls to action to improve the provision of support services to these older workers.

Older workers are currently victims of several disadvantages:

- **Age discrimination and age bias** lead to a lack of investments into life-long learning especially of older workers from both private companies public and providers of education;
- **Older workers are more vulnerable to early dismissal** as many companies make use of still existing pre-retirement systems to adjust their workforce;
- Many older workers are victims of the **restructuring of European industries**: their hard skills are no longer needed and their formal qualifications outdated. **Informal and non-formal learning is not recognised** and they are left alone without adequate offers to retrain, update and upgrade their skills;
- **New forms of age bias mask old-age discrimination** in job recruitment: 'digital natives' are now more often listed among minimum requirements in job adverts;
- Figures show that after the age of 50, **only a very small proportion of job-seekers is actually recruited.**

This situation is **detrimental to the fulfilment of older person's right to work** as recognised in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the European Social Charter. It also represents an enormous loss of experience and transferrable skills, undermines social integration and can eventually deteriorate individual health and well-being. Barriers to quality employment and inclusive labour markets hamper older person's active ageing – policy officially promoted by all national governments. **Active older workers can contribute their knowledge and experience, train younger workers and therefore contribute to competitiveness and job creation.** The losses in income due to long-term unemployment also put at risk older person's old-age income, as recognised by the Council's recent Pension Adequacy Report. The loss in contributions and taxes from older workers pose serious challenges to public budgets.



AGE Platform therefore would like member states to build on the concrete initiatives put forward by the Commission, which feature:

- **Increasing registration** of long-term unemployed with employment support services and **creating a single point of contact** to deal with their requests instead of transferring them from social protection agencies to social assistance agencies;
- Have an **assessment of individual needs and situation** at a maximum after 18 months of unemployment;
- Create **individualised integration plans** outlining rights and obligations of job-seekers including for older workers whose situation may require specific measures.

At the same time, AGE Platform is concerned that the proposed actions are insufficient in the face of the gravity of the employment crisis that older workers face:

- The **draft recommendation does not sufficiently focus on the provision of training and life-long learning**, both for workers in employment and for unemployed throughout their lives. Challenges remain for job-seekers to engage in training, as some member states apply strict conditions for the access to training to be combined with unemployment benefits. The availability, relevance and quality of life-long learning and vocational training institutions should be increased and also oriented towards the needs of older workers. **Offers for older women** who have to reconnect with the labour market after having worked informally as a carer for children, grandchildren and older family members are often inexistent.
- Stronger exchanges among existing pilot projects that test with **apprenticeships for older job-seekers** can be beneficial in orienting member state's efforts.
- **Individual assessments should be carried out much earlier than after 18 months** of unemployment. Already after 12 months, the chances to find a new job significantly decline. Job-seekers should have access to an individual assessment and offers for training as soon as possible. **Otherwise, the risk is high that job-seekers will 'sit out' the time that is needed to open their right to an assessment**, training and requalification.
- **The quality of first assessments** at the moment of registering as a job-seeker should be part of the recommendation as well, as a well-designed advising and orientation process can prevent long-term unemployment. **In many member states, the first assessment is done online and/or very briefly**, in a procedure where individual training and qualification needs are not covered.
- The recommendation **does not outline possible instruments of activation** besides from the conditionality of benefits. These should be spelled out more explicitly **activation means investment into trainings, coaching, networking activities etc. that may be far more fruitful than conditioning benefits on availability and active job-searching behaviour**.
- The recommendation should **put more emphasis on the importance of reaching out to those who have already given up on finding a job**. The high inactivity rate among workers between 55 and 65 represents a huge potential pool of candidates – some of them may be able to find employment, provided the right training and opportunities to change sector and/or work design.

AGE Platform Europe calls upon the Council to consider these points and to use them when implementing them at national level. **The almost 3 million long-term unemployed between 50 and 64 should not become the next lost generation.**

