

Women and Men 50+ and Extending Working Life

September 5, 2018, Prague | *On Thursday, October 4, the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, along with the Mendel University in Brno, organized a meeting of key actors in the field of labor market, public administration, scientific research institutions and non-profits addressing the status of individuals over 50 in the labour market. The discussion-based meeting mainly focused on how to keep workers 50+ actively engaged in working life activities, and at the same time what the consequences (both positive and negative) are of extending working careers for all involved. It was organized as part of the international project DAISIE, funded by the NORFACE programme, dealing with inequalities in the employment of older men and women.*



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The Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Jana Maláčová, attended the meeting to deliver the introductory speech. She highlighted the priorities of the ministry concerning the labour market and, in general, the social status of older men and women. These include, namely, the facilitation of the reconciliation of work and private life which will also help people of the so-called sandwich generation, taking care at once of their parents and children, institutional support for part-time work, particularly in the form of a shared job arrangement so as not to increase fixed costs for businesses, as well as the leveling of inequalities in the pensions of men and women (on average, women have lower pensions than men by 20 %, in 2017, their pensions were lower by CZK 2,880, on average).

Next, the members of the project team presented the latest analyses. Radka Dudová (SOÚ AV ČR) showed, on the basis of 2017 Labour Force Survey data set, that currently, persons aged 51-60 account for a quarter of all employed persons but also for a third of all unemployed ones. Retirement rate is relatively abrupt (for women aged 58-62 and men aged 60-66, economic activity drops by 57 percentage points) and corresponds with the statutory age for entitlement to a retirement pension. The higher the age, the bigger the ratio of part-time workers, the bigger the ratio of self-employed and the ratio of people working on fixed-term contracts. The fact of prevailing in the labour market after 60 is affected primarily by gender and education – while men tend to work longer than women, university degree holders work longer than those with lower education. It is the unskilled and auxiliary production workers and people working in the commercial sector and services who face the biggest unemployment rate and exit from economic activity in their fifties. Based on her analysis of the 2015 EU-SILC database, Martina Rašticová (MENDELU) showed a link between economic activity in the fifties and health status. Surprisingly, economically active people describe their health status as subjectively worse than non-active people do. This may be due to the lack of work arrangement flexibility and measures that would make it easier for older people to work, as well as high work-related stress. Relying on the SHARE 2015 database, Aneta Krejčová (MENDELU) analyzed the reasons why people retire. The overriding reason is the simple fact of becoming entitled to a retirement pension. This indicates that in the eyes of Czech men and women the moment of attaining the formal retirement age is also a signal to leave the labour market. The question is to what extent this is a matter of personal choice or to what extent they simply tend to meet the expectations on the part of the employer or fulfil the social norm.

In the course of ensuing discussion, possible approaches and measures were proposed in order to facilitate the employment of persons 50+: 1) Informative consultation for employees during which these might become clearer with regard to their options and preferences, and employer's expectations. Workers might thus find out that a complete withdrawal to inactivity on the pure grounds of attainment of a formal age limit is not necessary and desirable for them. 2) Gradual retirement through part-time work. 3) Offering alternative work positions, such as less physically demanding jobs that older workers could manage, including retraining and further education, regardless of stereotypes about the "suitability" of particular jobs for older women and men.

The participants of the meeting agreed that cessation of economic activity should not be the result of attaining the formal age, which happens to be the same for all people, but instead it should be more individualized and gradual. With the aging of the strong age cohorts born in the 1970s, the need for individualized measures allowing for extended working life is likely to grow.

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