

SASSI – WORKING ON: Comparing Partnering Countries

Differences and similarities concerning the key research questions – a short summary

RQ1: How is Careers Guidance and Advice for Adults provided in your country?

Across the board there appears to be a mix of state and private organizations whom provide careers guidance and advice for adults. So there are not any major discrepancies concerning overall provision of these services. However, when we zoom in on advice / coaching specifically aimed at older people, things start to drift apart.

Most countries in the SASSI partnership do not offer a specific advisory or counseling program for older people. So workers older than 50 are forced to use the systems implemented for adults in general. The shortcomings herein lie in the fact that those systems often focus on either a very broadly defined adult population or a slightly too narrow group such as, for example, low-skilled unemployed adults. Thus, they do not meet the specific requirements of older people looking for careers guidance or advice. Only countries such as Austria and the UK seem to provide very specific programs aimed at older people (45+, 50, or 55+, depending on the program). Although in the case of the UK it are mainly non-profit and privately owned business who provide these services, not governmental institutions.

RQ2: Are there any policies emerging in your country that support longer working lives (other than just raising the State Pension Age)?

With the exception of Portugal, every other (partnership) country has policies in place which aim to support longer working lives. Portugal does have a set of guidelines in place since 2006, but these have not yet been translated into concrete, mandatory policies by the government.

There exists a wide range of concrete measures among the countries whose governments do have policies in place. These range from financial incentives, such as an increased pension for Austrians who chose to work longer and the possibility for old age pensioners in Belgium to have flexi-jobs on top of their pension, to counseling and consultancy programs aimed at companies or different branches of government, such as the Age Management Program in Slovakia. Some countries also provide hiring subsidies to companies who chose to hire older workers (50+, 55+).

In addition to these direct measures, more indirect approaches also exist. In Austria for example, the social partners created the NESTOR GOLD awards. An initiative aimed at raising employers' awareness regarding the unique value older workers provide. This initiative hands out seals of approval on a biannual basis to employers who show(ed) a strong commitment to older workers aged 45 and over.

RQ3: Can you identify any new age-sensitive methodologies, approaches and techniques to the provision of career review, management and revitalization in organizations or C-VET – that we could use as examples of a good practice?

While initiatives and techniques differ in their concrete manifestations, the general idea is the same for every country involved. The central idea in each approach brought forward by the partners, is the (re-)orientation of older workers. This generally means that a company or public institute will provide guidance and / or training to older workers. This is always done on a very personal level and can range from offering a helping hand in the job search, to everything from counseling, training and subsequent placement in a fitting position in a company or organization. Employee placement can be either in the form of short, interim assignments, flexi-job work or full time contracts.

RQ4: Does the phenomenon of ‘unretirees’ exist in your country.

Only in Belgium, the UK and Germany does this phenomenon exist in a clear cut way. This means that pensioners explicitly chose to work after reaching the state pension age, be it due to personal or financial reasons. They often work in so called minijobs or flexi-jobs, while others are self-employed.

However, there might be some confusion among partners in regards to the wording of this question. Some appear to have interpreted this question in a more literal sense (i.e. explicitly looking for the term ‘unretirees’), instead of a more descriptive sense (i.e. ‘unretirees’ just being ascribed to the phenomenon of older people working past their pension age).

On a side note: this phenomenon seems to be on the rise in the last few years. The amount retirees working during their retirement is steadily increasing in, for example, Germany and The UK.

RQ5: Who is offering ‘later life’ career guidance services in your country?

A mix of both public institutions and private organizations provide these services in all the involved countries. With the exception of Portugal, where there are no systemic programs related to this issue.

While the bulk of the organizations dealing with this subject are of a public nature, there is a growing interest from the private sector. In some countries, such as Belgium, these have to be officially recognized by the relevant Public Employment Agency. In others no such thing is required. But in contrast to this sometimes required recognition of the organizations themselves, there are no mandatory competences or skills a career adviser must possess.

No country involved in this project imposes concrete demands in regards to skills and competences upon anyone who works as a career adviser, professional,... There are, of course, specific educational tracks which form people into career advisers, recruitment professionals and guidance workers. These result in a general higher education degree (bachelor or master) relating to the field of HR in general. Thus, people with a wide variety of skillsets, approaches and competences end up providing ‘later life’ career guidance.

RQ6: Are secondments/sabbaticals/volunteering work experiences used in career development strategies in your country? And is there any evidence of them being used for older people?

Although sabbaticals and volunteering work is prevalent in all of the partnering countries, they are seldom used as a career development strategy. While older people also use these services, it is usually centered around personal growth, gratifying interests,... and not necessarily around concrete career development.

Such a system only appears to exist in the UK, where record numbers of older workers are making use of dedicated programs aimed at them. For example: more than 10.000 people aged over 50 have found work through apprenticeships offered by companies, often in healthcare and the public services industry.

On a smaller scale, initiatives like Time4YourTalent in Belgium offer a talent sharing service in which working people over 50 can rediscover their talents by enabling them to get a taste of a different type of work. But overall the use of volunteering work experiences as a career development strategy seems to be heavily underused.

RQ7: How are employers responding to the increase in retirement age?



It seems clear to companies that the increasing retirement age is no longer something which can be ignored. All kinds of different programs are being implemented to retain and retrain the older workforce already present in most companies, especially larger ones. Some countries, such as the UK, Belgium and Austria (among others) have guidelines and initiatives in place to incentivize and / or convince companies to retain or hire older workers. Some of these are explicitly governmental, others came forth from the social partners, labor councils,...

All in all the importance of the increasing retirement age does not go unnoticed. Companies that do not yet perceive this issue as important undoubtedly will in the near future.